

Affect, History, and Race and Ellison's Invisible Man

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Alan Bourassa,
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Abstract: In his article "Affect, History, and Race and Ellison's *Invisible Man*" Alan Bourassa explores the implications of the Deleuze and Guattarian concept of "affect" for a reading of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. In the novel's most problematic relationship -- that between race and history -- there is a third term that transforms the problematic. *Invisible Man* is simultaneously a conventional novel that establishes emotional individuality as the third term between history and race, and an "underground" novel that sets up "affect" as the third term. If *Invisible Man* is only about the emotional movements of the individual, race becomes merely an ineffective personal response to an inadequate conceptualization of history. But if "affect" is the third term of the problematic, then history and race are transformed. History becomes a set of unrealized possibilities that can be activated by the narrator. Affect opens up the revolutionary potential of an historical situation by transforming it into sets of embryonic forces that resist mechanization. And, in conjunction with affect, race is transformed into a series of a-personal movements and relationships of force that operate effectively in this embryonic world. *Invisible Man* is the chronicle of the narrator's affective evolution, his history of invisibility.

Alan BOURASSA

Affect, History, and Race and Ellison's *Invisible Man*

It is a truism -- or nearly so -- to say that literature is about problems. Happy lives are the fodder of fantasy, not fiction. So it is not difficult to point out the myriad problems faced by the nameless narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: the cruel disillusionments he undergoes with Dr. Bledsoe, Mr. Norton, the Brotherhood, his loss of home, of ambition, of hope, of friends. Like the majority of his fictional brethren, Ellison's invisible man struggles from crisis to crisis. But this definition of a problem is the least interesting we can put forward. It misses the real workings of the problematics that we always encounter in reading. It is too bound by the personal. The character's problems are always problems of personality, emotion, identity, experience. And as true as this is for the general run of novelistic character it is a fortiori true of the narrator of *Invisible Man*, whose renamings, forgettings, erasures form the whole set of crises that structures the novel. But there is another kind of problem, another kind of problematic that faces the reader in the act of reading. And it can only be described as tactile, a feeling in the skin as one reads, a feeling of a certain heaviness, an unnamable set of turning points, of bottlenecks, of thresholds that cannot be directly articulated in the content of the story. It is only when these singular points begin to resonate together that a problematic is about to be articulated, and only when this problematic is articulated that theory has a ground upon which to work. A theory, in other words, addresses itself to the unspeakability of the problematic. So what is the problematic of *Invisible Man*, the set of points that resonate in the novel but cannot be spoken by the narrator? From my own experience of the novel I would call it "heaviness." Not "weight," mind you, because the concept of weight designates a kind of extended, measurable quality of an object (whether we are using weight in its literal sense or in the sense of gravitas or seriousness). Heaviness, rather denotes an intensive quality that has no units of measurement, that does not exist along a continuum. The problem is this: that there are certain moments of *Invisible Man* where one suddenly feels oneself in the presence of heaviness, a heaviness in comparison to which other moments -- however serious or tragic -- seem light, perhaps with the lightness that so much personal experience seems plagued by. The moments of heaviness are several: the Prologue and Epilogue that frame the story, the Battle Royal that opens the first chapter, Trueblood's story of incest with his daughter that holds Mr. Norton in such rapt fascination and Norton's subsequent retreat to the Golden Day, the accident in the Paint Factory and the narrator's hospitalization in the factory clinic, the narrator's subsumption of Rinehart's identity, and the final apocalyptic riot in Harlem where the narrator confronts Ras, now Ras the destroyer, and literally stumbles upon the new retreat underground where we find him at the story's opening. What is it that gives these scenes their heaviness? And why is it that these scenes form a kind of frame for the novel, enclosing on either side the narrator's work as a spokesman for the brotherhood? It is as if, reading *Invisible Man*, one is in the presence of two novels, one recognizably about a character with a psychology, with emotions, with relationships, with -- however tenuous -- an identity (one that is more solidly affirmed in the constant lament at the losing of it), and another novel, an underground novel, an invisible novel that has little to do with the narrator's own account of his life. The narrator is so often wrong when he tries to articulate a plan, a program, but it is in the texture of the voice, the perceptions and affections that give the voice its possibility that we will find our problem.

To articulate this problem further we must ask what -- for our purposes -- a "problem" is. In *The Logic of Sense*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, discussing Lewis Carroll, a writer with as great a sense of the absurd as Ellison himself, position that the "mode of the event is the problematic. One must not say that there are problematic events, but that events bear exclusively upon problems and define their conditions.... The event by itself is problematic and problematizing. A problem is determined only by the singular points which express its conditions ... We must then break with the long habit of thought which forces us to consider the problematic as a subjective category of our knowledge or as an empirical moment which would indicate only the imperfection of our method and the unhappy necessity for us not to know ahead of time -- a necessity which would disappear as we acquire knowledge. Even if the problem is concealed by its solution, it subsists nonetheless in the idea which relates it to its conditions and organizes the genesis of the solutions. Without this idea, the solutions would have no *sense*" (54). And if we fear that Deleuze and Guattari's definition seems a little too mathematical, or a little too much like the ridiculously mechanistic objectivity of the Brotherhood's ideology, Deleuze and Guattari go on to explain: "The relation between mathematics and man may thus be conceived in a new way: the question is not that of quantifying or measuring human properties, but rather, on the one hand, that of problematizing human events, and, on the other, that of developing as various human events the conditions

of a problem... When Carroll speaks of a parallelogram which longs for exterior angles and complains at not being able to be inscribed in a circle, or of a curve which suffers from "sections and ablations" that it has been forced to undergo, one must remember that psychological and moral characters are also made of pre-personal singularities, and that their feelings or their paths are constituted in the vicinity of these singularities: crisis points, turning points, knots and foyers" (55). The problematic, then, can be described as a set of relationships of singular points. And, as in mathematical problems, the issue of these singular points is the issue of difference. We encounter, in reading, not just one moment, one event of heaviness, one singularity, but rather a set of events, or singularities that unfold themselves along the line of the reading. In order to articulate a problem, we must be able to articulate, not just the points and events, but the relations of difference that obtain between them. We have already seen one aspect of the problematic of *Invisible Man* -- the points of heaviness that seem to frame the narrative. We must now add another element to the problem. If we are to conceive of the problematic, the singular, points of *Invisible Man* unfolding along a line of differentiation, we can ask what the termini of this line are. Between what two points do the points of heaviness lay themselves out? We would not be too far wrong to name them as "history" and "race," the two great forces whose constant clash propels the narrator from identity to identity, from white to black, from loyalty to betrayal, from recognition to invisibility. These forces are the final great irreconcilables of the novel. But we cannot know that they are irreconcilable unless there is a third term, some idea, some belief, some law that has tried to hold them together. And it is here that I want to speak -- before addressing the question of the problematic -- of a kind of false problem, a kind of trap that Ellison sets and that is too easy to fall into. Why do writers set traps? Do they expect us to fall into these traps, or --deftly avoiding them -- are we more likely to come to some insight? It seems to me that the issue of the problematic sheds light on the question: writers set traps only for themselves. It is in the setting of the trap -- the articulation of the central crises of the narrative -- and in the working out of it -- breaking through the trap he has set for himself -- that the writer can manage to articulate the other problematic, the problematic of singularity, of events, of affects. We might call the false problem the problem of the personal, or of emotion. The novel itself gives us ample evidence that the link between race and history is the personal, the individual. In his essay "The Ending of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*" Per Winther says "In the Epilogue the hero is rewarded for his labors; he has achieved that freedom which comes with the ability to give form to one's ideas, feelings, and experiences" (284). To the Brotherhood's brand of science the narrator opposes a deeply felt personal experience. We are exposed countless times throughout the novel to a kind of emotional self-revelation; we follow the drift from anger to optimism to despair to elation to terror with a kind of microscopic exactitude. In remembering Clifton's death the narrator says, "And suddenly it occurred to me that he might have been angry before he resisted, before he's even seen the cop. My breath became short: I felt myself go weak. What if he believed I'd sold out. It was a sickening thought. I sat holding myself as if I might break. For a moment I weighed the idea but it was too big for me. My mind backed away from the notion" (447).

In arguing with Brother Jack after Clifton's funeral, the narrator -- and thus the reader -- is acutely aware of every emotion: "But are you sure you're not their great white father?" I said, watching him closely, aware of the hot silence and feeling tension race from my toes to my legs as I drew my feet quickly beneath me. "Wouldn't it be better if they called you Marse Jack?" (473). It is in the conflict between race and history, the ideology of history that the narrator dismisses as "a machine," that the emotion, the individuality, of the narrator takes form. We see the dawning of awareness and of disillusionment: "Suddenly I couldn't stand it. 'Look at me! Look at me!' I said. 'Everywhere I've turned somebody has wanted to sacrifice me for my good -- only they were the ones who benefited. And now we start on the old sacrificial merry-go-round. At what point do we stop? Is this the new true definition, is Brotherhood a matter of sacrificing the weak? If so, at what point do we stop? Hambro looked at me as though I were not there'" (505). It is in terms of the self, the person, that he makes his decision to follow his grandfather's cryptic advice and "damn them with yeses": "My God, what possibilities existed! And that spiral business, that progress goo! Who knew all the secrets; hadn't I changed my name and never been challenged even once? And that lie that success was a rising upward. What a crummy lie they kept us dominated by. Not only could you travel upward toward success but you could travel downward as well; up and down, in retreat as well as in advance, crabways and crossways and around in a circle, meeting your old selves coming and going and perhaps all at the same time" (510). And it is with the same kind of awareness of his race and himself that he opens his eyes to the Brotherhood's final plan: "'They want this to happen,' I said. 'They planned it. They want the mobs to come uptown with machine guns and rifles. They want the streets to flow with blood; your blood, black blood and white blood, so that they can turn your death and sorrow and defeat into propaganda. It's simple, you've known it a long time. It goes, 'Use a nigger to catch a nigger.' Well, they used me to catch you and now they're using Ras to do away with me and to prepare your sacrifice. Don't you see? Isn't

it clear...?" (558). Every problem, it is said, has the answer that it deserves. The problem whose three points are history, race, and emotion (or individuality) certainly receives the answer that it deserves, which is no answer at all. In this -- what I have called false -- problematic, "history" is represented by the worst kind of vulgar Marxist ideology, a kind of nineteenth century mechanistic smugness that blinds itself to the complexities of community life, the reality of racial difference, and the subtle movements of a culture. It paints itself as scientific, but its science is nothing but a kind of stupid faith in a simple set of laws. To this kind of ideology the novel seems to oppose the personal experience of race. And in this context the racial and the personal become one and the same. It is not simply a matter of race, nor simply a matter of character, but in the intertwining of the two, we see the narrator working out a position in the world: "Nor is my invisibility exactly a matter of a biochemical accident to my epidermis. That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eye, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality. ... It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves. Then too, you're constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision. Or again, you often doubt if you really exist" (4).

In doubting his own existence, the invisible man is staking a claim to personality, to character, to being the center of an experience, however invisible it may be to others (the invisible man, we must note, is never invisible to himself). It is this claim to being a character that allows the narrator to resist the blinkered ideology of the Brotherhood. But why is this, then, a false problem? It is false because emotion, character, race do not resist the history to which the narrator stands opposed. To weigh in on the side of the personal is not at all to reject or escape the mechanistic ideology of history, but simply to become its pawn. Even the narrator's return to his grandfather's deathbed advice to "overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open" (16) plays into the hands of the Brotherhood, to whom the riot in Harlem poses no threat. But it is in the narrator's grandfather that we see most purely the workings of the personal, the deep secret inner life that lives "in the lion's mouth" and that never reveals itself except at the moment when death grants it a final reprieve. But even the grandfather's personal wisdom does not allow the narrator to undermine the Brotherhood's ideology. The individual, the deeply felt inner being, does not challenge ideology because it is itself ideology's proudest achievement. To the false problem of history-emotion-race, then, we must posit a more workable problem, a problem whose solution is not foreshortened by the limitations of the problem itself. The problem will be named history-affect-race, and will take us beyond the boundaries of the personal, the inward, the emotional. "Affect" is a concept with a history both in psychoanalysis (Freud) and in philosophy (Spinoza). In fact, Freud gives us a picture of affect that follows Spinoza's on several important points and seems to move the personal beyond itself into the world of energies and experiences. And what is an affect in the dynamic sense? It is in any case something highly composite. An affect includes in the first place particular motor innervations or discharges and secondly certain feelings; the latter are of two kinds -- perceptions of the motor actions that have occurred and the direct feelings of pleasure and unpleasure which, as we say, give the affect its keynote. But I do not think that with this enumeration we have arrived at the essence of an affect. We seem to see deeper in the case of some affects and to recognize that the core which holds the combination we have described together is the repetition of some particular significant experience. (Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams* 491-92). For Freud, as we see, affect is not to be simply equated with feeling. It is rather a wider category in which feeling is to be included. It is "highly composite," made up of discharges, innervations, perceptions of actions, and feelings of pleasure or pain, but also of repetition and -- most importantly -- of the impingement upon the body and mind of some particular experience. A particular affect is close to what Deleuze has called an "assemblage," in that it can combine many elements both concrete and abstract, both natural and artificial. Freud and Spinoza agree on a number of points: for Spinoza, "if the human body is affected in a way (*modo*) that involves the nature of some external body, the human mind will regard that same external body as actually existing or as present to itself, until the human body undergoes a further modification which excludes the existence or presence of the said body" (77). He goes on in the Scholium to say that "although the external bodies by which the human body has once been affected may no longer exist, the mind will regard them as present whenever this activity of the body is repeated" (78). Spinoza also allows that, in these affections, there is a movement towards greater or lesser perfection: "by emotion (*affectus*) I understand the affections of the body by which the body's power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections" (103). As does Freud's, Spinoza's "affect" involves a movement that can be pleasurable (happy) or painful (sad): "We see then that the mind can undergo considerable changes, and can pass now to a state of greater perfection, now to one of less perfection, and it is these passive transitions (*passiones*) that explicate for us the emotions of Pleasure (*laetitia*) and Pain (*tristitia*)" (110).

But Spinoza complicates the picture considerably by postulating a dynamic force -- Nature, God, Substance (the name matters little) -- that is the source of all affects: "Particular things are nothing but affections of the attributes of God; that is, modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way" (49). It is precisely with this idea that Spinoza comes crashing into the twentieth century. Affects are not simply the preserve of the human, the personal, but tie the human to the much more dynamic set of forces -- relations, perceptions, impingements of force on force. Substance or Nature is nothing more than this relation of forces. They are, as Deleuze and Guattari have said, the non-human becomings of the human, and what we might call the making invisible of things. Clearly, in dealing with "affect" we are dealing with something far more complex than merely "feeling." We find it in the realm of thinghood and action, actuality and virtuality, activity and passivity, but it is far from general. In fact, Freud and Spinoza would also be in agreement on the complexity and specificity of the affective. For Freud the affective is the realm of the psychological "complex" that must involve psychic, somatic, social and natural elements. For Spinoza, "from the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinite things in infinite ways (*modis*)" (43) -- bespeaks the complexity and richness of nature's affections. And because Spinoza so fiercely rejects the reality of intellectual categories -- good, evil, beauty, ugliness, human, inhuman -- it follows that each mode must be radically singular (though also highly composite: singularities are not "pure" but always highly complex). Whether we are confronted with the complexities of the Freudian unconscious or the radical power of Spinoza's Substance, we are faced with the same conclusion: we have created terms to deal with the intricacies of the world -- self, personality, emotion -- and while those terms are useful, they name only a narrow range of the affects that create the world. Literature and art are two of the places we allow those other affects, those other complexes that we name with difficulty, to show themselves. "Affect" allows us to think of the personality in terms of what surpasses it, undermines it, fragments it, but also in terms of what simultaneously supports it, energizes it and holds it together. And although "affect" is often used interchangeably with "emotion, affect goes beyond the realm of emotion. It is more accurate to say that emotion is a branch of affect. "Emotion" is only one way of marking an impingement of one force upon another -- the potentiality of human judgment brought together with a particular experience, leading to a particular feeling. But an action is also an affect, a perception is an affect, a composite of perception, feeling, movement can be an affect. Affects are far too varied and complex to be named as emotions. They happen between the human and something else. They place the human into a composite with the nonhuman, and each element of the composite participates in the affect as much as any other. We are no longer in the realm of personal individuality, but of individuation, of an assemblage of elements that stands on its own and may be recognized. Deleuze grants a particular name to such an assemblage: "There is a mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, thing, or substance. We reserve the name *haecceity* for it. A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or a subject. They are *haecceities* in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and to be affected ... Tales must contain *haecceities* that are not simply emplacements, but concrete individuations that have a status of their own and direct the metamorphosis of things and subjects ... A degree of heat, an intensity of white are perfect individualities" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus* 261).

If the problem of Ellison's *Invisible Man* is the conjunction of history-affect-race, we must ask first what those affects are, where they can be found, what impersonal individualities they possess, and second, how these affects (or these *haecceities*) run through the terminal points of history and race. We cannot be satisfied with a history that is only mechanistic and a race which is only personal. It would be the work of a book-length study to map out all of the affective movements of *Invisible Man*, so I restrict myself to three: 1) what I call the affective movement of sensation and energy, 2) the history of invisibility, and 3) the transformation of class to mass. The narrator undergoes moments of sensation that, while they contain an emotional element cannot be reduced to that emotional element. The two most important such moments happen just before he goes to college and just after he arrives in Harlem. In other words, just before and after he crosses well demarcated personal thresholds. The first is the Battle Royal of chapter one; the second is the factory-hospital scene in chapter eleven, both demarcated by his encounter with electricity. In both scenes the narrator is thrust into sensation at the very moment he is hoping to attain to normalcy, to give a speech, to take on a job. Mixed in with the quite understandable emotion of such events, fear and panic, there is nonetheless a kind of molecular perception, an awareness of sensation and energy: "Everyone fought hysterically. It was complete anarchy. Everybody fought everybody else. No group fought together for long. Two, three, four fought one, then turned to fight each other, were themselves attacked ... The boys groped about like blind cautious crabs, crouching to protect their midsections, their heads pulled in short against their shoulders, their arms stretched nervously before them, with their fists testing the smoke-filled air like the knobbed

feelers of hypersensitive snails" (23). When the Battle Royal ends with the knockout of the narrator he has one more indignity to endure, scrambling for coins on an electrified mat with the other fighters: "I crawled rapidly around the floor, picking up the coins, trying to avoid the coppers and to get greenbacks and the gold. Ignoring the shock by laughing, as I brushed the coins off quickly, I discovered I could contain the electricity -- a contradiction, but it works" (27). He endures the final indignity when, still battered and spitting blood, he makes his speech to the unhearing crowd and receives his prize, a college scholarship. So far, the sensations he has undergone do not seem to have coalesced, do not stand up on their own, but he is on his way to forming a history, an affective history that will run parallel to his personal history and the abstract history of the Brotherhood. In the factory hospital, where he is taken after being caught in a boiler explosion, he undergoes another affective encounter with electricity when the factory doctors experiment on him with electrical shock therapy: "A whirring began that snapped and crackled with static, and suddenly I seemed to be crushed between the floor and ceiling. Two forces tore savagely at my stomach and back. A flash of cold-edged heat enclosed me ... I tried to remember how I'd gotten there, but nothing came. My mind was blank, as though I had just begun to live. When the next face appeared, I saw the eyes behind the thick glasses blinking as though noticing me for the first time" (232-33). After he has been discharged he leaves the factory and as he walks out he has one of the first experiences of himself as a stranger: "Leaving him and going out into the paint-fuming air I had the feeling that I had been talking beyond myself, had used words and expressed attitudes not my own, that I was in the grip of some alien personality lodged deep within me ... Things whirled too fast around me. My mind went alternately bright and blank in slowrolling waves. We, he, him -- my mind and I -- were no longer getting around in the same circles. Nor my body either. Across the aisle a young platinum blonde nibbled at a red Delicious apple as station lights rippled past behind her. The train plunged. I dropped through the roar, giddy and vacuum-minded, sucked under and out into late afternoon Harlem" (249-50).

In both cases the narrator's perception is a matter of undergoing an assault, so it is still not clear that a new kind of perception, an affective perception is awakening, the awareness of energies, of flows, of sensations, of affects. We do know that the narrator's identity, his wish to conform to what has been expected of him is being jarred loose. But this weakening of identity is only a kind of negative afterimage of the new -- and truly materialistic -- perception that is only in the embryonic stages at this point. It is here too that we see the second of the workings of affect -- the narrator's history of invisibility -- come into play. "Invisibility" we should note, is not a matter of emotion. One does not just have an emotional sense of invisibility; one does not simply feel disrespected, overlooked. The feelings themselves are only offshoots of a larger affective condition, and because the condition is affective rather than emotional, it pre-exists the evaluations we or the narrator might place upon it, and so mutates as it undergoes its own history. It is not bound to any emotional or moral evaluation, so invisibility, as affect, can migrate from ethical situation to ethical situation. Invisibility begins as a condition imposed upon the narrator by others. In the Golden Day the mad vet berates Mr. Norton and the narrator for their mutual blindness and invisibility: "You cannot see or hear or smell the truth of what you see -- and you, looking for destiny! It's classic! And this boy, this automaton, he was made of the very mud of the region and he sees far less than you. Poor stumblers, neither of you can see the other. To you he is a mark on the scorecard of your achievement, a thing and not a man; a child, or even less -- a black amorphous thing" (95). To be Black here is to be amorphous, but to have that condition foisted onto you. The narrator stumbles through the novel, never seen, never heard; to the Brotherhood he is a mouthpiece who is not paid to think; to Mary he is a potential community leader, to the women of the Brotherhood he is an image of fantasy. But his invisibility is separate from the moral valuation the narrator places upon it. It is a potential, a force, an affect, and is taken up as such as the narrator's illusions fall away. When he takes his invisibility upon himself, it becomes a matter, not of feeling, but of movement, of relation, and it is this movement that he finds not only a world he has never seen, not only the meaning of race, but the history that has evaded him even in his greatest commitment to the Brotherhood. The figure of this change is the always unseen, but always present figure of Rinehart. After he accidentally -- and it is in the accident that we see the greatest workings of affect, in the chance encounter, the fall one takes into one's future -- assumes Rinehart's identity, he begins to see what he has missed: "Perhaps I'm out of his territory at last, I thought and began trying to place Rinehart in the scheme of things. He's been around all the while, but I have been looking in another direction ... What on earth was hiding behind the face of things?" (493). And later as he begins to see Rinehart's great powers of transformation, he undergoes his own transformation in which the boundaries of the world are laid bare to him: "Still, could he be all of them: Rine the runner and Rine the gambler and Rine the briber and Rine the lover and Rinehart the Reverend? Could he be both rind and heart? What is real anyway? But how could I doubt it? He was a broad man, a man of parts who got around. Rinehart the rounder. It was true as I was true. His world was possibility and he knew it. He was years ahead of me and I was a fool.

I must have been crazy and blind. The world in which he lived was without boundaries. A vast seething, hot world of fluidity, and Rine the rascal was at home" (498).

The narrator gradually awakens to this seething world of possibility, and although every plan he formulates fails (for in his formulations, he is still within the mechanistic ideology of the brotherhood) he has been taken up by a pure affective movement, and it is in this movement that he is able to see and smell and feel the difference between a class and a mass, a crowd, a community: "I went into the crowd, walking slowly, smoothly into the dark crowd, the whole surface of my skin alert, my back chilled, looking, listening to those moving with a heaving and sweating and a burr of talk around me and aware that now that I wanted to see them, needed to see them, I could not; feeling them, a dark mass in motion on a dark night, a black river ripping through a black land ... I was one with the mass moving down the littered street over the puddles of oil and milk, my personality blasted" (550). It is but a short step -- literally -- before the narrator will fall into his new awareness, his warm hole from which he is prepared to emerge in the Epilogue. We have now seen enough of the movement by which he comes to his awareness to articulate the problem of history-affect-race more completely. In the false problem of history-emotion-race, we have seen that the third term -- in this case emotion -- not only places itself between the two termini of history and race, but that it transforms them. Adding any new element to the problematic changes the problematic entire. The problem is a continuous multiplicity which depends upon the relationship, the differential relationship, of all of its terms. Emotion, as a conjunction between race and history transforms history into nothing more than a set of blind mechanisms and race into nothing more than personal feeling, an individuality that cannot resist the machine of the Brotherhood's ideology but is manipulated and dominated by it. The new term -- affect -- then, changes all of the terms of the problematic. The relationship between race and history becomes clearer. History is no longer the realm of mechanical laws but of possibilities, of embryonic forces that make themselves available for transformation. We are reminded here of Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History": "Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins" (255). The narrator rereads his own history in light of his newly awakened awareness of the affective world: "How could I have missed it for so long? Hadn't I grown up around gambler-politicians, bootlegger-judges and sheriffs who were burglars; yes, and Klansmen who were preachers and members of humanitarian societies. Hell, and hadn't Bledsoe tried to tell me what it was all about?" (510).

The narrator does not condemn these figures of his past, but sees them rather as border figures, affective assemblages that break apart the very ideology to which he has been in thrall all these years. To these figures we may add the figures of the father-lover (Trueblood), the doctor-madman (in the Golden Day) and the humanitarian dictator (Bledsoe). Benjamin reminds us again and again that the past itself must and can be redeemed because it is still a pool of unrealized possibilities. The revolutions that have been crushed, the movements that have died, the communities that have never crystallized, the hopes that have never been realized, all form a kind of vast embryonic set of forces that will not respond to personality, nor to mechanistic laws, but will only be mastered by the one, the historian, the revolutionary who can meet them on their own terms, who can perceive them although they lie, for the victor's history, below the threshold of perception. Before there is ideology, before there is ethics, before there is a plan of action, there must be a kind of pre-personal, even a-historical movement of forces, of perceptions, of relationships. The invisible man's history is a history without boundaries. And it can be so precisely because affect has transformed race into a kind of catalyst of perception, of sensation, so that, coming into contact with history, race does not crumble into some passive personal inwardness, but transforms history into a material flow that can be worked, directed, plunged into. And it is important to note here that affect is precisely what keeps race from falling into a kind of essentialist stasis. Race is not a thing, not a hypostatized object, but is rather a matter of a-personal movements, relations, impingements of body-on-body, idea-on-body, sensation-on-body, sensation-on-idea. The narrator moves through crowds, he takes the texture of the world around him. His projects fall away in a movement of relation, to his world, his streets, his history. The invisibility that has kept him under lock and key for so long has become the very affect that has allowed him to see, not only himself, not only his place, but all of the fissures and cracks that run through the world. When he emerges from his hole he will know where the fault lines are, what voices he may speak for and who speak for him, what transformations are just below the threshold of being. And he will know where to strike.

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