

A large, stylized letter 'R' in a light blue color, set against a purple background. The 'R' has a thick, rounded top and a vertical stem on the left. The right side of the 'R' is filled with a purple gradient, and there is a thin orange vertical line on the far right edge of the letter's shape.

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# Inscribing Inequality Beyond Colonialism

SENAYON OLAOLUWA

Warwick Research Collective. *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*. Liverpool University Press, 2015. 196 pp.

The book, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* is yet another effort in seminal literary scholarship. It aims to assess the state of literature as a distinct discipline and make projections about its likely value in the future as that which consciously addresses itself to the predominant dynamics of the “world-system” anchored by the dictates of capital, especially in the past 200 years. This materialist-theoretical proposition is made by the Warwick Research Collective (WReC), constituted by Sharae Deckard, Nicholas Lawrence, Neil Lazarus, Graeme Macdonald Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, Benita Parry, and Stephen Shapiro. The six-chapter collaborative work begins by reviewing extant terminologies that resonate with the notion of “world-literature.” Perhaps most instructive is the authors’ painstaking effort to offer a sophisticated discussion on how their understanding of a “world-literature” (with a hyphen) is different from other such terms as “global literature,” and “world literature” (without a hyphen). In their view, global literature designates postcolonial literature as an analytical category weaned on the dynamics of globalization, and “world literature” emerges as a consequence of the triumph of the multicultural discourse that espouses the expansion of literature’s inventory beyond the essentialist suggestion of “Eurocentricism.”

This book is the 17<sup>th</sup> in a series titled “Postcolonialism across the Disciplines.” The authors acknowledge the key figures associated with previous attempts at investing postcolonial critique with relevance in terms of its critique of western imperialism. By subordinating the idea of global literature to world literature, the authors make clear the inadequacy of the existing terms in the sense that they fail to account for the “singularity” of modernity as a deterministic category in which the world is trapped and divided at the same time. The idea of global literature, may, for instance, reflect the contemporary restless movement of people across spaces, but it remains inadequate. They equally reject Spivak’s optimism about comparative literature’s capacity to open up literary scholarship to “a level playing field (22), because as they explain, “comparative literature -- in the Euro-American academy, at least -- has pretty much always commenced from an unalloyed and irrevocable Eurocentric particularism” (23).

The inadequacy of the previous terminologies, they contend, stems from the tendency to undermine how “modernity” as a driving force in the world-system. They argue further that the ascription of agency to capital has created a sort of social, temporal, and spatial contradiction, accounting for why it is possible to talk about “uneven and combined development (10). In this case, the variables for development in one region simultaneously result in underdevelopment in another. As expected, theorists like Edward Said and Fredric Jameson, among others, are acknowledged for their interventions in the understanding of postcolonial theory. The authors however, underscore the flipside of these postcolonial theorists’ work in terms of its failure to account for how world-literature should reflect the uneven development that capitalism as a global phenomenon engenders beyond colonialism.

The aim of the text finds crystallization in the second chapter when the authors aver that the circulation of literary texts from different parts of the world, especially those considered to have been canonized, is not enough. Not only are these texts going to be unequally received, whether as originals or translations, they are also not likely to be equally evaluated precisely because the question of capital and unequal development in present market economy will affect these conditions of circulation, which are driven primarily by the forces of commodification. In clearer terms, difference and inequality in circulation are underscored by what the authors refer to as the “*dialectics of core and periphery* that underpin all cultural production in the modern era” (italics in the original; 51). While they provide a critical prolepsis about the texts selected for analysis in their subsequent chapters, the overall justification for the selection consists in what they term the “shock” of an uneven world-economy that strips certain spaces of agency while subjecting them to the whims and caprices of commodification. In their conclusion to the chapter, they illustrate the commodification of Latin America with the transition from realist writing to “irrealism” to reflect the compromise of the political dispensation. But the magical realism that resulted from the 1960s in the world literary market would later yield to a form of commodification that “has led to a stripping away of its original radical politics and emergence of reactionary forms consonant with the tastes of metropolitan cultural elites” (80).

The third chapter, “Irrealism in Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*,” presents the first textual analysis illustrating the logic of the authors’ “world-literature” theory. It provides a concise yet rigorous introduction that locates *Season of Migration to the North* as a novel alive to the specific dimensions of what they term “peripheral modernism.” The impact of modernity on nations that have suffered colonialism demands that their response in textual terms take into account how “a world system [is] driven to expand into the non-capitalist worlds.” In the case of the Sudanese world captured in the novel, the internal contradictions created by capitalist modernity in the name of colonialism are compounded by the extant internal contradictions that

draw a binary between the socio-politically privileged northern Sudan and the richly endowed but dispossessed southern Sudan. The authors contend that the Sudanese situation, as embodied substantially by Mustafa Sa'eed in *Season of Migration to the North*, "dramatize[s] the trauma of modernity: for here the precipitate and the selective introduction of capitalist productive and social modes into a non-capitalist environment produced incompatible material and existential situations, generating aesthetic forms encoding these disjunctions and constituting their stylistic peculiarities" (81). Therefore, even when the aesthetic peculiarities account in a sense for how a trope like magical realism is given accent in the work, the "critical irrealism" that results, even when appearing to thrive on imagination and the imaginary, is nonetheless reconciled to realism. They explain that this understanding is weaned on Lowy's theorizing of irrealism. Irrealism's credibility for its "foundational homage to realism," finds its finest illustration in Mustafa Sa'eed's character in the sense that the authors track a complex trajectory of his life from Sudan, Cairo, and to faraway England. His life thus shows how the contradictions of extant uneven development between Black African South and Arab North in Sudan are fused with the additional violences and contradictions of capitalist modernity at the advent of British colonialism.

In the fourth chapter, Russia is conceived as a typical example of a semi-periphery whose transition from the uneven development of communism into a neoliberal capitalist society resonates with all the reflexes and contradictions of world-economy. Victor Pelevin's *The Sacred Book of the Werewolfs* the authors' analytical textual unit, particularly the way the novel critiques the entrapment of a post-soviet Russia in which development remains uneven, just as was the case during the decades of communism. The authors understand that periodization can be problematic, as experiences vary from space to space. Invariably, specific socio-political and economic experiences have to be considered in the understanding of the literature produced by different spaces. In more specific terms, they explain that,

the novel is an exemplary text that brings together several threads: the aesthetic registration of the transitions to neoliberal forms of capitalism in the post-Soviet semi-periphery of Europe; and the ways in which speculative fiction can self-consciously appropriate the phantasmic metaphors of lycanthropy and vampirism to visualise spectral economies of oil and energy, hyper-commodity fetishism and violent conversion into an ecological regime based on petroleum extraction. (97)

They argue further that the aesthetic of transition is underscored in not just the spectral and lycanthropics of the text, but also in the recurrence of anti-communist classics like those by Gogol and others as a way of affirming how the uneven development of the communist dispensation has resonances for the new ecological regime

of petroleum extraction. The uncertainties that such realities of transition portend, they contend further, account for the privileging of science fiction in the post-Soviet aesthetics and a disposition towards speculation in the fiction, all of which find illustration in *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf*.

The fifth chapter on “The European Literary Periphery” is significant by virtue of how it demonstrates the way in which postcolonial discourse tends to read Europe as one indivisible imperialist whole without acknowledging the presence of peripheral spaces of modernist capitalism within the continent. The authors list the peripheral spaces that are vulnerable within capitalist modernity, including Iberian Europe, Eastern Europe, the Gaelic, Baltic, Balkan regions, and even colonial homelands like the United Kingdom. Using sundry texts and authors, they argue that the exclusion from or reluctance of such spaces to embrace capitalist modernity creates instances of uneven development within Europe. Beginning with Peter Pist’aneč’s Slovakian novel *Rivers of Babylon*, they show how the symbolism of a female strip act in a public space indexes the exhaustion that characterised the hurried transition from Soviet communism to post-Soviet neoliberalism, a shift that in itself harks back to the previous transition from feudalism to communism. They argue further that the transience of empathic response to the condition of the stripper underscores her vulnerability and speaks to the Slovakian condition of vulnerability; it also indicates how the transition has led to neoliberal profiteering on the part of others within the nation. In a similar vein, Spanish reluctance and resistance to the modernist agenda of centres in Western Europe, and the structural mismatch that results, find both content and stylistic reflection in the works of Baroja. Other peripheral spaces and their corresponding literary imagination relating the “shock” of modernist capitalism are: Reykjavik, Iceland and Glasgow, Scotland. All of the illustrations from Europe point to one thing: the affirmation of a “singular Europe” must also acknowledge its own unevenness in terms of the world-system economy and the literatures produced in such peripheral spaces continue to provide a necessary reflection on the inequality in continental Europe.

The book’s last chapter reads a collection of short stories by Ivan Vladislavic as illustrative of the iconic symbolism of the city of Johannesburg in understanding post-apartheid South Africa, where the official collapse of apartheid and the transition into neoliberal capitalism laid the foundation for the penetration of combined and uneven development. Using Mandela’s symbolic invitation to western capitalist nations to extend their regime of neoliberalism to South Africa in the wake of apartheid, the authors illustrate how the anchoring of post-transition economy on the terms and conditions of GEAR (Growth, Equality and Redistribution) created a system of a desperate condition that mocks the decades-long struggle for freedom in South Africa. For, rather than pandering to the ideals imagined and proposed in the years

of struggle for a better economic condition for all, especially previously disadvantaged groups, GEAR turned out to be an institution of orthodox neoliberalism. The uneven development that results finds many resonances in Vladislovic's stories as spun around Johannesburg. The stories constitute a conscious aesthetics registering the paradox and contradictions of post-apartheid South Africa as a "local instance of a global trend underscored by the neo-liberal 'supply-side' economic orthodoxy" (146). The authors are quick to add that, beyond the global resonance, the condition that the aesthetics reflect are of the peculiarities that define South Africa's past and continue to frame its present in a manner that translates into uneven development both in racial and economic terms. The complexities and complications that dog the post-apartheid present are rounded off with the story, "Engaging the Gorilla Cycle". In the story, the "gorilla" has multiple "referents" that underscore "the lineaments of a paranoid consciousness that inhabits the extreme city" (167).

The central argument in *Combined and Uneven Development* is clear: literature and literary criticism cannot be about understanding rarefied texts wholly abstracted from the realities of a world-systems economy that casts certain spaces as core while inscribing others as semi-periphery and periphery. Texts are thus invested with credibility when they respond to both the otherwise global effects and local peculiarities of capitalist modernity and the contradictions they spin. In the same way must literary criticism be alive to this ubiquity of capital in framing social spaces. This is the logic of "world-literature" as an analytical category. Overall, the book radicalizes the understanding of world literature through the symbolic insertion of the hyphen in order to steer it away from the otherwise normative understanding of the term. It thus becomes a critical source material for scholars and critics interested in the deeper resonances of the world-systems perspective in the framing of literature from different regions of the world located in the global margins.

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# Relativism and the Politics of Climate Knowledge

BOB JOHNSON

Candis Callison. *How Climate Change Comes to Matter: The Communal Life of Facts*. Duke University Press, 2014. 316 pp.

Bookshelves (well, at least virtual bookshelves) burst, like breached reservoirs, with new literature on climate change. Only a few years ago, our climate scholarship suffered from a long drought, fed only by a limited stream coming out of the natural sciences and political sciences. But that is no longer the case. Climate scholarship has picked up strong feeder streams from the humanities, the arts, and the other social sciences, and this development has both filled shelves and freed the conversation from its predictable course. What has motivated this shift is that the big empirical questions – Is climate change happening? And will it affect our children’s lives? – are all but settled. It is happening and it will affect our children’s lives.

Climate scholarship has consequently moved beyond these (and other) important empirical questions to new social questions that take us into the realm of ethics, epistemology, ontology, and cultural politics. Today, we want to know, for instance: what a post-carbon economy might look like in terms of praxis and imagination; what the moral debt of rich carbon emitters is to the energy-poor Global South and equatorial regions where climate change puts people at severe risk; and the extent to which the political structures of late capitalism, and perhaps even democratic politics, rest on a carbon infrastructure that has become ecologically unstable. Social theorists and humanistic scholars are well equipped for this terrain.

Candis Callison’s *How Climate Change Comes to Matter: The Communal Life of Facts* adds another important question to this literature: how does knowledge about climate change enter into the vernaculars of different groups so that people can act with shared meaning and conviction? Climate change, she says, is not an inert thing. It is “a form of life” that can only have significance for us if it comports with the ethics and values that otherwise drive us to action (1). Put a bit differently, Callison wants to know how climate change comes to have a home in our social life so that we can make meaning of it and potentially do something about it.

On this question, Callison’s book is a thoughtful and capable intervention. It offers a

compelling analysis of the epistemic frames that give life to climate change in five different communities of activism (or *near-advocacy*, as the case may be). The communities she chooses include those of Inuit climate activists, Western climate journalists, Creation Care evangelicals, Western climate scientists, and businesses affiliated with the climate NGO Ceres.

Callison's project is anchored in the premise that we can no longer fall back on a flawed modernist belief (which still expresses itself in some scientific circles as a bullish positivism) that distributing accurate knowledge about climate change will make the course of political action clear to us. Information, she tells us, is not the problem, nor is its distribution (20). We have these in spades. The problem is how that information, or the facts of climate science, get slotted into our different cultures of knowledge, how those different cultures produce their own facts about climate change, and how this localizing of knowledge about climate change is critical to helping people to make meaning of it and gird them to action. There can be, in other words, no straight-line in climate activism between facts and truth, or between information and action. There are only the crooked lines of the structuralist and post-structuralist – lines that detour through context and values. In the world of action, the *lingua franca* of science is simply too empty to summon to life widespread moral or ethical commitment. How we articulate and translate climate change into the life of our tribes is what Callison refers to in her subtitle as *the communal life of facts*.

*How Climate Change Comes to Matter* is a monograph based on semi-structured interviews that the author did with each of these five different groups (and the institutions that represent them) between approximately 2007 and 2008. Its method is in part journalism, in part ethnography, and in part discourse analysis. For each case study, the author spent some time immersed in the communities she studied, interviewed their members, and examined key texts written by activists in those communities. Her first chapter, for instance, centres on interviews conducted with participants of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, a transnational group of Inuit activists who address Indigenous issues related to the impact of climate change on the Arctic. The second chapter centres on western journalists, including a few key journalists working on climate science at the *New York Times*, who translate climate science for the broader reading public. The third chapter turns to the fringe movement of evangelical Christians working on Creation Care who have integrated climate concerns into scripture and religious practice. The fourth chapter examines Western scientists who have stepped out of the laboratory to serve as advisors on climate change with varying degrees of ontological anxiety over their role in advocacy. And the fifth chapter centres on corporate signatories to the CERES principles, a set of climate commitments adopted by various companies around the globe under the non-profit organization by that name. Callison acknowledges that what constitutes a group or discursive

community here is somewhat loose, but her rationale for selection is reasonably conceived, and the samples she has chosen are representative enough to be compelling.

Each chapter of *How Climate Change Comes to Matter* offers a lucid analysis of how the subject of climate change poses certain dilemmas and opportunities for different communities. For instance, the first chapter on Inuit climate activists associated with the ICC explains that for these political actors the terminology, the science, and the politics of climate change have proven too abstract and detached from local concerns to gain much ground in the community's political imaginary. Instead, precedence continues to be given to what Callison calls "grounding knowledge," or Traditional Knowledge based on native observation and local experience and memory (52-57). The abstract modelling touted by climate scientists on the global scale thus finds less traction in this community, because it is, she explains, associated with actors who only pop in and out of Inuit communities and who tend to be only marginally invested in Inuit practices and life-ways. Callison argues that many Inuit activists, in fact, resist, or even "reject," the discourse of climate change because it ignores the actual problems that they face on the ground, including the dramatic reduction in tundra lichen, changes to moose and reindeer migrations, and the accumulation of toxic pollutants in the bodies of the seals, whales, and walrus that Inuit rely on for food. One effort to give meaning to climate change in this community was made in 2005 when Inuit activists submitted a petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to redefine climate change as a human rights cause that would hold carbon emitters legally culpable for the lost life opportunities of Inuit peoples in the North (64-68). Without that social justice framework, Callison says, the terminology of climate change and its politics remain less compelling to Inuit activists than do the shared tribal frameworks that govern their local responses to and mitigation of the world's industrial impact on Arctic peoples.

An equally interesting chapter focuses on the surge of climate activism among a portion of the evangelical community in the United States. For this community, like the Inuit, the dominant epistemic frames in climate change that circulate at the national and international levels do not speak to the group's values and priorities. Callison explains that because climate science reproduces a secular knowledge that is associated with evolutionism and the rejection of providence, its discursive assumptions sit uncomfortably with many in the evangelical community for whom belief in divine creation is deeply rooted (126). Environmental activists in this community (who have rallied around the 2006 Evangelical Climate Initiative and the concept of Creation Care) have instead worked to reframe the issue so that that it fits within a clearer scriptural and providential framework and so that it is not synonymous with anti-creationist scientists, Liberals, Democrats, and various left-leaning environmentalists. To accomplish that reorientation has meant emphasizing the biblical injunction that

humans are stewards of God's creation and that they are charged with caring for the unfortunate and the dispossessed (126). What is important to Callison here is that the facts of climate change come to matter in this evangelical community only after they have been "blessed" by the proper church authorities and trusted conservative insiders. The life of facts in this instance do not circulate through the generalized universe of scientific knowledge: they require validation by the right people (137, 147).

The remaining chapters of *How Climate Change Comes to Matter* focus on three other major epistemes that govern the practices of key environmental actors today: that of climate journalists whose prevailing professional norms and ethics have been put to the test by the politicization of climate science, that of climate scientists whose research has cast them into the public sphere where apolitical knowledge comes to imply ethical responsibility, and that of socially-conscious corporate actors who are working to frame climate responsibility within existing market presuppositions and structures. Of these chapters, Callison's work on the NGO Ceres is especially thought provoking. It takes us into the work that this non-profit has done to reframe climate change within the episteme of "risk assessment," which aligns closely to the social, political, and ethical life of contemporary capital. In this chapter, the communal life of facts on climate science collides with corporate prognostications about opportunities for sustainable practices and the perception of increasing environmental and financial risk from conducting business as usual. Callison's case study of Ceres draws out for us the political parameters of, the constraints and opportunities, of tackling climate change from within the dominant discourses of profit, growth, and managed risk that govern the life of capital in the global marketplace.

There are, of course, limitations to this book, as there are to any monograph. The first is that the book's theoretical framing is laid out in a plodding introduction that runs for 38 pages, making it less readable and lucid than it could be. The author's main theoretical insight, concerning the *vernaculars* of climate change, is fairly straightforward, and its replaying in this chapter makes the reading more methodical, and dissertation-like, than necessary. The second limitation is one that Callison has already anticipated: the book freezes a particular historical moment in climate politics. Most of the references trace back to 2006 and 2007, to a decade ago when the author originally conducted her interviews and visited conferences held within these communities (10). Because the field of climate activism is swiftly changing, the data analyzed (but not the argument itself) feels as much like historical documentation as it does current politics. And a third, minor, limitation to this book is that the detail of its individual chapters will likely be of most interest to scholars working on the specific groups that she analyzes. Fewer readers, with the exception of social scientists interested in the praxis of knowledge production, will need to work through the biographies of individuals and institutions or the textual examples of each chapter to

get to its main contribution. But these types of qualifications do little to detract from the contributions that Callison's study makes.

Overall, *How Climate Change Comes to Matter* delivers a powerful message with regard to climate activism, and it is a message that we should all take home. If climate change is to become a meaningful *form of life*, it will have to put the universalist language of the natural sciences in its place and enter into our lives through the particular cultural practices and values that motivate us to wake up each morning and to think in shared ways about the future. The facts can, that is, no longer be taken for granted. Our job is now to understand "how, why, and when" those facts come to matter in a cosmopolitan world that resists being homogenized (5).

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# “What *would* animals have to teach us?”: Envisioning an Integrally Animal Politics

NANDINI THIYAGARAJAN

Brian Massumi. *What Animals Teach Us about Politics*. Durham: Duke UP, 2014. 137 pp.

“We will see what the birds and the beasts have instinctively to say about this.”  
—Brian Massumi, *What Animals Teach us about Politics*

At one point or another, we have all found ourselves watching animals play. Whether in a video or our living room, we watch animals playing alone, with their siblings or as animal odd-couples; this is often a means of distracting ourselves from our own work or the “real world” of politics and international news. But, what if we could learn something significant about human politics from watching animals—and specifically animals at play? Brian Massumi tackles precisely this question in *What Animals Teach Us about Politics*. Starting with a challenge to both common conceptions of nature as chaotic, and a Hobbseian notion of the “nasty, brutish, and short” lives of animals (qtd. in Massumi 1), Massumi asks: “What *would* animals teach us [if we knew how to listen and observe well]?” (1; original emphasis). Drawing from Gregory Bateson, Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Gilbert Simondon, and Raymond Ruyer, Massumi’s extended thought experiment constructs the concept of an animal politics. *Difference*, specifically, the coming together of differences, is the best starting point for thinking about the human in relation to the animal continuum. Massumi’s conception of an animal politics requires the placement of the human back into the animal continuum, which dismantles some of the most foundational “differences” between humans and animals. While those of us within animal studies or critical animal studies might find that Massumi points to understandings of animal life that are already familiar, he provides a valuable philosophical vocabulary to discuss the contours of animal life. Further, his analysis of anthropocentrism and the construction of a human politics that learns from animals at play would be particularly helpful for people within human-animal studies. This review parses Massumi’s bold confrontation of the anthropocentric constructions of language, thought, creativity, and anthropomorphism, and explores what these

confrontations allow him to accomplish in this book, as well as its implications for human and animal life.

Think, for a moment, of two wolf cubs playing. How does their game begin? Where is the line that differentiates between playing and fighting, and how do they communicate this difference to each other? Potential answers to these questions, which signal the complexity involved in animal play, inspire Massumi's vision of animal politics. Following Bateson, Massumi highlights the necessary elements of style and value, abstraction and condition that make play "the staging of a paradox" (2). In the arena of play, the logics of combat and play embrace each other reciprocally without having their differences erased; "they are performatively fused, without becoming confused. They come together without melding together, co-occurring without coalescing. The zone of indiscernibility is not a making indifferent. On the contrary, it is where differences come actively together" (6). The beauty of animal play lies in "its logic of mutual inclusion" (6). In this zone of indiscernibility "combat and play come together—and their coming-together makes three. There is one, and the other—and the *included middle* of their mutual influence" (6; original emphasis). Massumi returns to the role of paradox in this deconstruction of play, explaining it through the difference between nipping and biting. The nip, which is similar to a bite but without the intent and force, communicates the desire to play, but when an animal nips, "the gestural statement 'this is not a bite' contains the implicit metastatement 'these actions do not denote what they would denote'" (6-7). Of course, Massumi clarifies that the wolf cubs do not explicitly *say* anything. Rather, their language works through gestures. This activity points to a difference between humans and animals whereby humans "experience paradoxes of mutual inclusion as a breakdown of their capacity to think, and are agitated by it. [...] The animal, however, is less agitated than it is activated by them" (7). By placing humans on an animal continuum, we might move beyond our fragile anthropocentric "vanity regarding our assumed species identity, based on the specious grounds of our sole proprietorship of language, thought, and creativity" (Massumi 3).

One of Massumi's goals is to problematize anthropocentric ideas about language. Bateson argues that our usual assumptions about evolutionary order and language get it wrong: metacommunication does not come after denotative communication. When the wolf cub communicates (with a nip) that this is not a bite, she enacts metacommunication, and this mobilizes both cubs into action. Whereas denotative communication refers to language, by recognizing metacommunication in animals, Massumi argues that, "in fact, 'denotative communication as it occurs at the human level is only possible *after* the evolution of a complex set of metalinguistic (but not verbalized) rules'" (8). More clearly, he says that animal play and its languages *facilitate* human language. Instead of thinking that human language exists on a unique,

superior linguistic level, Massumi posits that “animal play creates the conditions for language” (8). If what we observe in animal play is a preverbal language, or “linguistic *avant la lettre*, [...] why then shouldn’t the opposite also be the case: that human language is essentially animal” (Massumi 8)? By drawing connections between human and animal languages, Massumi begins to take down the common construction of human language as an extraordinary example of what makes humans human. Pushed a little further, he invites us to consider humor and its metalinguistic connections to animal play, asking why we can’t “say that it is actually in language that the human reaches its highest degree of animality” (8)? With such assertions, Massumi reverses the foundational human-animal language hierarchy, elaborating on the extent of this reversal in the chapter “To Write Like a Rat Flicks Its Tail” in which he positions language as the most intense form of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming-animal.

Along with rethinking language, conceptualizing an animal politics leads Massumi to complicate the idea of animals as purely instinctual. He looks to the field of ethology and the concept of sympathy to loosen the view of animals—and nature more generally—as aggressive and unthinking. By deconstructing instinct, Massumi illuminates the vibrant, creative, and thoughtful lives of animals. In order to show how variation and improvisation muddy ideas about instinct and animals, he addresses the idea that animal play operates as a mode of learning. If we follow this line of thought, animal play becomes important only insofar as it can resemble forms of combat. Of course, playing does play a role in learning, but Massumi argues that animals’ abilities to improvise and express an abundance of “stylistic excess” (12) in play prove that the relationship between play and combat is not premised on the subordination of the former under the latter. The stylistic excess, or “-esqueness” (12) of play refers to the flourish of a gesture that communicates that it does not stand for what it might in a different context. This excess is what communicates to the wolf cub that “this nip is not a bite.” This “*power of variation*” reshapes the form of the gesture, creating “a margin of maneuver” between the play action and the fight action—the nip and the bite—which ultimately “opens the door to *improvisation*” (12; original emphasis). The ability of play to invent and reinvent itself shows that it is not exclusively tied to honing adaptive, survival behaviors, although the power of variation certainly helps to avoid predictability when fighting or evading predators.

Reinvention and variation lead Massumi to rethink animal instincts. “If the instinctive act,” he explains, “were as it is reputed to be—a stereotyped sequence of premodeled actions executed by reflex in the manner of an automatism—then instinct would be incapable of responding to chance changes in the environment” (13). If animals’ behaviors were in fact slavishly tied to their “animal instincts,” and if instinct could not improvise according to conditions, then their actions would inevitably become

predictable. Variations in animals' lives, from their environments and climates to who surrounds them, "must be matched by variation. This requires a certain creative plasticity" (13). In other words, Massumi insists that, "instinct is sensitive to the relations between the particular elements composing the lived situation" (13). He traces Darwin's observations of earthworms where he saw behavior that showed clear "evidence of 'mental power'" (14), and uses this to demonstrate that "instinct is not limited to the automatic repetition of a reflex arc triggered by an inherited memory trace" (14). Rather, Massumi prompts us to "consider this power of expressive mentality to be the leading edge of evolution" (14). Without improvisation and intellect animals would not be able to adapt to their changing environments and it is not their inherent ties to instinct, but rather their plasticity that drives evolution.

The improvisational ability of animal instinct, for Massumi, is most clearly exemplified in Niko Tinbergen's concept of the supernormal and supernormal stimuli. Supernormal stimuli is an exaggerated or unrealistic version of stimulus that has an already-known response. For example, in Tinbergen's famous study of instinct, which observed the standard stimulus-response reflex of instinct, he looked to herring gull chicks to determine which stimulus would trigger the most enthusiastic feeding response. Under normal conditions, a red dot on the mother bird's bill was thought to be the feeding trigger for the chicks. But, Tinbergen found that the farther the stimuli that he constructed was from the realistic version of the mother's bill, the more enthusiastically the baby birds responded. He intended to isolate the exact factors that were essential to instinctive behaviour, but he found instead that the further the stimulus was from its realistic, normal representation, the more enthusiastic and stronger the animals' responses were; he determined that instinct "has an inborn tendency to surpass the normal [...] It is animated by an immanent impetus toward the *supernormal*" (15; original emphasis). Unable to pin instinct down to a few properties, he noted "a pronounced tendency of instinctive activity to favor what he called 'supernormal stimuli'" (Massumi 15). Tinbergen concluded that instinctive behavior "did not in fact depend on any isolatable property" but rather is better understood as being "irreducibly *relational*" (16; original emphasis). Additionally unable to make sense out of the animals' tendency toward the supernormal, Tinbergen reduced the capacities of the baby birds he was testing to one seemingly simple word (written with irritation): "somehow." For Massumi, "it is precisely the 'somehow' of this accomplishment of baby birds to frustrate the learned expectations of the scientist that needs to be retained and integrated into our notions of animality" (16). Whereas Tinbergen was agitated by his observations, Massumi is activated by this "somehow." Massumi's ability to pick up the strands of observations that others have dropped and to attend closely to the ways in which animals confound us results in a dense but elegant philosophical revelation of the creativity of animal life to surpass the given.

The strength of Massumi's analysis lies in his willingness to not only pick up where others left off, but also to challenge the pervasive charge of anthropomorphism that has often halted imaginative thinking about animals.<sup>1</sup> The repetitive emphasis on animal creativity and sympathy throughout *What Animals Teach Us about Politics* might inspire accusations of anthropomorphism. To discuss animal thought and language weakens the foundations of human-animal boundaries based on cognition and language by threatening abilities that humans think we have a monopoly over "When the task is undertaken," as it is in this book, "to integrate into the concept of nature notions such as these, so long marginalized by the dominant currents in evolutionary biology, animal behavior, and philosophy, there is little hope of dodging that accusation [of anthropomorphism]" (1). In a bold rebuttal to such accusations of anthropomorphism Massumi declares:

I willingly risk the accusation of anthropomorphism, in the interests of following the trail of the qualitative and the subjective in animal life, and creativity in nature, outside the halls of science, in the meanders of philosophy, with the goal of envisioning a different politics, one that is not a human politics of the animal, but an integrally animal politics, freed from the traditional paradigms of the nasty state of nature and the accompanying presuppositions about instinct permeating so many facets of modern thought. (2)

Massumi's eloquent challenge to anthropomorphism here is invigorating. Taking this risk willingly allows him to open lines of thought that are often withheld from animals. "Is it not," as Massumi asks, "the height of human arrogance to suppose that animals do *not* have thought, emotion, desire, creativity, or subjectivity" (51)? What lines of thought might be opened up by starting from an understanding of animal existence as thoughtful, emotional, creative, and sympathetic instead of instinctual, nasty, and brutish?

Massumi's conceptions of animal politics, language, creativity, and sympathy culminate in the final chapter of *What Animals Teach Us about Politics*: "The Zoology of Play." Massumi begins this chapter by discussing the zoo and captivity, moving through an interrogation of human spectator's reactions to captive animals, and ending with a careful exploration of sympathy and what it means when children pretend to be animals. "There was never a child who did not become-animal in play," he explains "the project of animal politics: to make it so that the same could be said of adults" (89). His attention to the "frivolous"—and in fact he insists that "the politi-

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<sup>1</sup> See Frans de Waal's *New York Times* op-ed, "What I Learned from Tickling Apes" (April 8, 2016) for a detailed description of how the fear of anthropomorphism stunts scientific observations of animals.

cal animal *does not recognize any rigid opposition between the frivolous and the serious*" (40; original emphasis)—confronts the boundaries of what we deem valuable or invaluable objects of inquiry and effectively blurs clean human-animal distinctions. Ultimately, Massumi presents us with an animal politics that is thoughtful, creative, and sympathetic. By welcoming animals into "the meanders of philosophy" (2), he uncovers a politics that exists outside restrictive lines of thought that see difference as an end point. This book has the power to germinate in our thoughts, to make us think about and live differently with animals.

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# Approaching Animals: Multispecies Ethnography and the Biocultural Hope of Entanglement

JORDAN SHERIDAN

Eben Kirksey, ed. *The Multispecies Salon*. Durham: Duke UP, 2014. 306 pp.

Between 2008 and 2010 the art show called the Multispecies Salon traveled through San Francisco, New Orleans, and New York City. Whether individual pieces involve human/goat milk cheese, raw donkey soap, dandelions raised on human blood infected with Hepatitis C, or life-sized sculptures of transgenetic companion animals, each challenge preconceived notions of species division. More than this, the Salon begins to sketch out a “new mode of interdisciplinary inquiry: multispecies ethnography” (Kirksey et al 1) that frames *The Multispecies Salon*. In the collaborative introduction Eben Kirksey, Nicholas Shapiro, and Maria Brodine note that while ethnography is, “commonly glossed as ‘people writing’ [...] Ethnographers are now exploring how ‘the human’ has been formed and transformed amid encounters with multiple species of plants, animals, fungi, and microbes” (1-2). Multispecies ethnography thus examines the multispecies relationships that constitute both human and nonhuman social worlds. As a methodology for writing about and interacting with nonhuman animals, multispecies ethnography instrumentalizes Anna Tsing’s increasingly influential claim that “human nature is an interspecies relationship” (qtd. Kirksey, Shapiro, and Brodine 2). Tsing makes this claim in “Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species,” an ethnographic study of the global scientific, ecological, and commercial networks of the masutake mushroom. By bringing Tsing’s theory into dialogue with tactics of participant observation from anthropology, multispecies ethnography challenges anthropocentric claims that nonhuman animals have no voice and offers a set of rejoinders in the name of multispecies ethnography. By placing nonhuman life alongside human life in ethnographic research, Kirksey, Shapiro, and Brodine challenge anthropocentric definitions of “culture” and “species” in order to politicize nonhuman life and the interconnections between human and nonhuman life.

The essays collected in *The Multispecies Salon* take this one step further by not simply celebrating “multispecies mingling,” but asking, “who benefits, cui bono, when species meet” (Kirksey, Shapiro, and Brodine 2)? By asking, “who benefits?” Kirksey, Shapiro, and Brodine remind us that observation is often synonymous with power

and privilege because it constructs a subject-object relationship between those observing and those being observed. While it is unclear exactly how multispecies ethnography sidesteps this problematic, the commitment of *The Multispecies Salon* to questions biopolitics and biopower specific to multispecies entanglements is rigorously maintained throughout the collection.

*The Multispecies Salon* is comprised of seven chapters divided into three parts that correspond to three scopes of multispecies ethnography: “Blasted Landscapes”, “Edible Companions”, and “Life and Biotechnology”. The essays in “Blasted Landscapes” engage with ecological disasters and the effects they have on local human and nonhuman organisms. In his essay “Hope in Blast landscapes” Eben Kirksey approaches a specific temporal geopolitical event, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. As the Multispecies Salon “migrated” to New Orleans in 2010, oil, Corexit, and other highly toxic chemicals from the spill began to reach the shoreline. “In the aftermath of disasters—in blasted landscapes that have been transformed by multiple catastrophes” Kirksey asks, “what are the possibilities of biocultural hope” (30)? Kirksey finds hope in local artists and activists that responded to the Horizon spill by organizing New Orleans-style parade demonstrations and risking bodily harm to save hermit crabs that were not considered important enough to save from the oil spill and Corexit contamination. In contradistinction to Jacques Derrida’s notion of “messianicity without messianism” that is “not bound up with any particular moment of (political or general) history or culture,” Kirksey’s biocultural hope involves engaging with other corporeal actors in specific geopolitical locations (35). Although inspired by Derrida’s resolution to an “affirmation of an unpredictable future-to-come” that is not “oriented toward a specific messiah,” Kirksey is hesitant to rely so heavily on a spectral, or nonfigurative, form of hope (31). “Rather than join Derrida in hoping for nothing in particular,” Kirksey writes, “rather than literally expecting the unexpected, organic intellectuals who swarmed the Multispecies Salon [use] figuration to animate the field of biocultural possibility” (57). Kirksey’s insistence upon a corporeal and figural hope is particularly relevant for posthuman and multispecies studies because it acknowledges the importance of embodied forms of resistance to biopower that operate in solidarity with nonhuman animal species toward more mutually beneficial ends.

Anna Tsing’s contribution both expands and challenges the terms of biocultural hope and blasted landscape developed in Kirksey’s essay. “Ruins are our gardens,” Tsing writes; “degraded (‘blasted’) landscapes produce our livelihoods. And even the most promising oasis of natural plenty requires massive interventions to be maintained” (87). Because Matsutake mushrooms require a nutrient deficient landscape and because these landscapes give economic and corporeal sustenance to local mushroom foragers, Tsing points out that some forms post industrial disturbance can be “life

giving” rather than desolate spaces void of life (88). Tsing argues that due to the fact that Matsutake mushrooms cannot be cultivated because they require long term sustained environmental disturbances, “Matsutake forests thus teach us about systems of world making and energy sharing that reach beyond the conceits of farming” (88). Tsing’s essay adds an important component to Kirksey’s conception of biocultural hope by complicating the narratives of disaster that focus on the absence and disappearance of plant specie, and pointing out how some organisms thrive where others perish. Further, Tsing pushes Kirksey’s insistence upon specific embodied and corporal analyses by focusing on the specific species relationship at the core of Matsutake picking.

Part Two of *The Multispecies Salon*, “Edible Companions,” is more unorthodox—comprised of an interlude, four recipes for multispecies food, and an essay—and revolves around what Heather Paxson calls “microbiopolitics,” a concept she developed to call attention to the biopolitics inherent to the creation and circulation of microorganisms. Paxson expands Michel Foucault’s influential theory of biopolitics by restaging it at the microscopic level: “biopolitics, then, is joined by microbiopolitics: the creation of categories of nonhuman biological agents; the anthropocentric evaluation of such agents; and the elaboration of appropriate human behaviour, given our entanglement with microbes engaged in infection, inoculation, and digestion” (116). Microbiopolitics describes the political relationship between classic Foucauldian mechanisms of bodily control and the microorganisms that are mobilized to complete them. Nowhere is this political relationship more pertinent than with food and food regulation because not only are microorganisms used to create and preserve food for both humans and animals, they are also contaminants. For this reason, Paxson calls for a consideration of the “vital agencies” of microorganisms in order to complicate how we understand how they function as both biological and social actors (120). Microbiopolitics is central to the “edible companions” offered in the *The Multispecies Salon* because it offers the recipes a critical framework for making political connections between categories of “food” and “organism” (and indeed challenges the distinction) and notions of power, colonization, and control.

Lindsay Kelley’s and Linda Noel’s recipes mobilize Paxson’s microbiopolitics to expose histories of colonization, and cultural loss. Kelley’s recipe for “Plumpiñon” is a play on the peanut-based humanitarian aid food “plumpy’nut” that is given to people in Northern African countries during times of extreme drought and famine. Linda Noel similarly offers a recipe for an acorn mash from that approximates a dish made by Pomo people of Northern California for centuries. “Acorn mush is microbiopolitical,” Noel states, because “it is a partial remedy for industrial agriculture, the homogenization and marketing of everything edible. Acorns are generally traded, not sold” (156). This could also be said of Plumpiñon and plumpy’nut a food manufactured in

France, a former colonial empire and distributed to its former colonies in Northern Africa. As multispecies ethnographies, these recipes unearth the complicated histories of power that have shaped the current political landscape and how these histories have always involved an entanglement of species relationships.

Part Three, “Life and Biotechnology,” turns to the multispecies nature of the biotechnology and genetics industries. The ethnographies in this section look closely at how science is formed from a vast network of species and sold to the public as dreams of human perfectibility and empowerment over nature. Drawing on Guy Debord’s notion of the spectacle, Kirksey, Costelloe-Kuehn, and Sagan “explore the specialization of power in biological domains [and] biographical details about hidden labourers—multiple species of animals, plants, and microbes—who sustain the life of humans and creatures we love” (185). By focusing on “multispecies spectacles” behind biotechnology, Kirksey, Costelloe-Kuehn, and Sagan begin to deconstruct the industries’ “messianic promises” of human salvation (189). One such multispecies spectacle is an art that Kate Lindsay—a scientist in cell biology at the University of California, Santa Cruz—displayed at the “The Multispecies Salon” in San Francisco in 2008. Lindsay fabricated illuminated images of *Wolbachia*, a bacteria common in tropical areas that is associated with two diseases—river blindness and elephantiasis—neglected by the American drug industries. The images of *Wolbachia* Lindsay displayed at the Multispecies Salon were produced “with the blood of rabbits, as well as ‘anti-rabbits,’ a glowing molecule generated by the immune systems of multiple other species” (Kirksey, Costelloe-Kuehn, and Sagan 190).

With this in mind, Lindsay’s work helps to draw attention to these diseases by exposing their absence in the American drug discourses while at the same time showing how the anti-rabbit molecule is an example of the multispecies relationships behind the standardized tools of biotechnology.

In her essay “Invertebrate Visions: Diffractions of the Brittlestar,” Karen Barad follows a different kind of multispecies relationship through the bioscience laboratory into the public domain. In 2001, *The Times* published an article about a team of scientists who “discovered” that the eyeless creature called the Brittlestar has a “skeletal system that also functions as a visual system” (222). The scientists then began to study how the visual system of the brittlestar could be mimicked and applied to digital imaging technology—a process referred to as biomimesis. Barad takes issue with the scientists’ dreams to create a brittlestar biomimetic camera and the studies’ subsequent uptake by western media because it demonstrates how material science and biotechnology mine nonhuman life for its “innovations” but bury any considerations for the animals themselves. Instead, Barad asks us to think with the Brittlestar and to see how its unique optical system offers us a way to imagine a different kind

of critical reflection:

Brittlestars do not have eyes. They are eyes. That is, it is not merely the case that its visual system is embodied. Its very being is a visualizing apparatus. The Brittlestar is a living, breathing, metamorphosing optical system. For a Brittlestar, being and knowing, materiality and intelligibility, substance and form entail one another [...] Knowing is entangled with its mode of being. (227)

Drawing on Donna Haraway's theory of diffraction whereby critical thinking is "marked by patterns of difference" rather than sameness, Barad argues that brittlestars open up a different kind of critical reflection tied to embodiment.

*The Multispecies Salon* provides an inroad to a new mode of doing animal or multi-species research and offers an important methodological tool for thinking through the many assemblages of species entanglements. Drawing on a wide variety of epistemological backgrounds and geopolitical situations the book is a testament to the importance of recognizing the multispecies relationships behind human social worlds. Taken together, the three parts of the collection point to the scope and complexity possible with multispecies ethnography. From large ecological disasters, to the circulations of microorganisms, to the closed doors of biotechnology labs the book provides models for productively engaging with those political sites. Recurrently, this means opening new lines of inquiry that embrace the complex ways that multiple organisms are caught up together in their vast political, ethical, and social webs. Through this mode of inquiry, the authors in this collection point to important questions and concerns that breach disciplinary boundaries through creative forms of collaboration.

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# “But in what way precisely is this political?”: Brian Massumi’s Cartography of Potential

PAUL ARDOIN

Brian Massumi. *Politics of Affect*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2015. 228 pp.

Let’s start—as remains the apparent necessity in every discussion of affect, despite these years since the so-called affective turn—with the definition of “affect” at the center of Brian Massumi’s *Politics of Affect* volume. Definition is necessary, perhaps, for the same reason as it is doomed to remain unsettled, because, “To get anywhere with the concept, you have to retain the manyness of its forms. It’s not something that can be reduced to one thing. Mainly because it’s not a thing. It’s an event, or a dimension of every event” (47). As dimension rather than thing, Massumi’s affect is less tangible than even mood or emotion. “By ‘affect’ I don’t mean ‘emotion’ in the everyday sense,” he writes. Instead—readers learn again and again in this volume—“The way I use it comes primarily from Spinoza. He talks of the body in terms of its capacity for affecting or being affected” (3). This view of affect will come as no surprise to those already familiar with Massumi’s work, or for those familiar with the works of some of his predecessors (and frequent points of reference), chief among them Gilles Deleuze. (The list Massumi himself provides is incomplete, but pretty close: “Henri Bergson, William James, Alfred North Whitehead, Gilbert Simondon, Félix Guattari,” and Deleuze, all of whom took “change as primary” and understood “the task of philosophy as understanding the world as an ongoing process in continual transformation” [viii].)

Such readers, in fact, will find little here that is new—and not just because *Politics of Affect* largely reprints existing interviews, ranging from roughly 2001 to 2013 and framed by a brief preface and a critique of twelve common “misconceptions” (204, and “missed conceptions” 205) of affect that Massumi offers “in lieu of a conclusion” (204-215). Of the volume’s 28 footnoted citations, 12 of them—almost half, that is—are of Massumi’s own individual or collaborative works.

This volume, then, is perhaps of less use to veteran readers of Massumi than it is to neophytes, and to those (and I count myself among them) who seek clarification about just what exactly is so political about contemporary incarnations of Deleuzian

strands of affect theory. For these readers, *Politics of Affect* delivers an unusually clear and comprehensible set of arguments, a few of which I will address here. Usefully, the book's format offers a series of stand-ins for potential readers. Its series of interviewers range from enthusiastic elaborators of Massumi's ideas to those more interested in positioning Massumi's work in its Spinozist-Deleuzian lineage or voicing common points of disagreement and confusion. Interviewer Joel McKim, for example, asks Massumi to respond to charges that "affective politics" are at worst "inherently fascist" (65) and at best apolitical. "I can see the importance of this [...] for understanding processes of creativity and invention," McKim admits, "but in what way precisely is this political?" (67-68).

In fact, argues Massumi, affect is *not* exactly political, and it certainly belongs to no single political orientation. Rather, "affect is proto-political. It concerns the first stirrings of the political. [...] It is the cutting edge of change" (*ix*). Nor can affect (of the sort under discussion here) be intentionally deployed in the service of any particular political aim: "It cannot impose itself. It can only catch on" (105). This brand of affect is characterized by a capacity to act and be acted on (to affect and be affected); it is not the acting. Affects "are our angle of participation in processes larger than ourselves" (6). They are not contained within a subject. Rather, affect is best discussed, argues Massumi, through the language of thresholds (3), "openings" and "grey areas" (39), or "in-betweenness" (48). It is about orientations toward events—orientations that make available "the virtual co-presence of potentials" (5).

Affect is not a thing, like a feeling or an emotion; an "emotion is a very partial expression of affect" that "only draws on" certain "memories and only activates certain reflexes and tendencies" (5). Emotions, for Massumi, have their own political utility: "Joy can be very disruptive" (44); and "anger and laughter are [...] powerful because they interrupt a situation. [...] They interrupt the flow of meaning that's taking place" (8). These emotions can express affect, and they can result in "an affective change in [a] situation" (11), but they are not affect itself, which co-exists with process, tendency, and orientation, not the kinds of namable, stable concepts implied by emotions and feelings.

We might ask McKim's question again: yes, okay, "but in what way precisely is this political?" (68). Even Massumi's most productive, political versions of affect are temporary and potential immersions and attunements that we cannot "pre-define" (117). The closest we can come to diagramming affect in advance of the political (or other) event is to think of it as "a cartography of potential. It's about techniques for moving into and out of the immersive field of life complexity in a way that is oriented, or reorienting, but not in pre-articulated directions – inventively" (117). It is perhaps no wonder that Massumi's not-conclusion will finally resort to constructing a nega-

tive definition of affect, by repeating what it is *not*: it is not “individual” (205); it is not “asocial” (205); it is not outside of culture (208); it “is not prescriptive” (209); and, importantly, it is not necessarily “good” (209). It “can be fascistic or progressive; reactionary or revolutionary. It all depends on the orientation of the transindividual desires speculatively gestured into motion” (209).

*This* is how and why we should (and, Massumi argues, *must*) understand the politics of affect. Affects and relational fields can, are, and will be used by, for example, “the capitalist logic of surplus-value production” (21). Like Deleuze (or related contemporary thinkers, Hardt and Negri), Massumi is more accurately described as an anti-capitalist than as, say, a doctrinaire brand of Marxist. He finds “troubling and confusing,” in fact, “a certain kind of convergence between the dynamic of capitalist power and the dynamic of resistance” (21). As a result, much space in *Politics of Affect* will be dedicated to rejecting “traditional Marxist notions of ideology critique and vanguard action” (107). Ideology critique does not sufficiently recognize change as primary; “power structures are secondary effects of affective encounters, and ideologies are secondary expressions of power structures. Ideology is on the side of effects – twice over” (93). If we want to be on the side of *causes*, we must think in the micro, rather than the macro; we must think of process, not structure. “Any stabilizing structuring is *emergent*, and self-improvised. This makes variation and change more fundamental than the reproduction of the same.” The traditional Marxist’s view of “society as a structure [...] is inverted” (87).

So, since we have no stable structure to resist, a productive, affective politics, “engages becoming, rather than judging what is” (71). It orients itself toward potential, but toward no *specific* potential outcome. It *primes* potential change: “Micropolitics, affective politics, seeks the degree of openness in any situation, in hopes of priming an alter-accomplishment. Just modulating a situation in a way that amplifies a previously unfelt potential to the point of perceptibility is an alter-accomplishment” (58).

The skeptic might view this as a minor politics, at best, not just a micro- politics. (And, in this way, the skeptic would be right: Deleuze regularly celebrated the minor, the minority, and the minoritarian. Affect theorist Sianne Ngai celebrates the potential of the minor, ugly feeling over the major, revolutionary one.) But Massumi’s retort is that a more major, more macro- approach would inevitably replace structure with structure, power with power, ideology with counter ideology, old system of rationality with new system of rationality. He has his own questions for those more traditional brands of politics—the ideology critique that he suggests would coagulate process (88):

How can this [Marxist, for example] undoing of ideology be achieved—with-

out inculcating a counter-ideology? How can a counter-ideology be inculcated without applying new mechanisms of power? How can those who most directly apply those mechanisms of power not become a new class, with its own special interests (the critical-ideological avant-garde turning into an apparatchik class)? [...] In short, how can the dominant ideology be changed without imposing a new one that in the end reinscribes much the same structure, and works with much the same presuppositions, as the old one – and is no less a structure of domination? (86-87)

Massumi argues that the way around coagulation, the way around structure, the way around the cycle of ideology and counter-ideology, the way around hardened presupposition, is a turn to affect as strategy, orientation, “main ethical concern” (34), and critical mode of understanding: “affect is now much more important for understanding power, even state power narrowly defined, than concepts like ideology” (32).

If McKim's question stands in for a skeptical reader looking for a “precise” politics of affect, rather than a *mere* creative orientation, such as the brand we imagine as best suited for artistic invention, then this volume's response is that the two impulses are not so far apart. Massumi's affective approach to politics is “in some ways a performative, theatrical or aesthetic approach to politics” (34). Perhaps frustratingly, even he is “not exactly sure what that kind of politics would look like,” but, “in some basic way it would be an aesthetic politics, because its aim would be to expand the range of affective potential – which is what aesthetic practice has always been about” (36). To expand the range of affective potential is to prepare for potential openings and opportunities for movement and change, to make the body “attuned to [...] certain regions of tendency, futurity and potential” (56), rather than making it rigid (37) in preparation for a specific “event” that “can't be fully predetermined” (57).

Necessarily, Massumi's argument “does not arrive at any final answers. It does not even seek solutions” (xi). His non-goal goal is, however, revolutionary. It's just not in the service of any particular revolution. He is out for the “disabling or disabling [of] presuppositions” and the “implan[ing of] new presuppositions” (117). That is, Massumi's politics does not seek to change our minds so much as it seeks to reorient what shapes our minds. He wants to “implant new tendencies into that hyper-complex ecological field of life” (117). It's an attempt at rewiring that gets to the heart of current philosophical questions about perception and presupposition.<sup>2</sup> Massumi insists that one's participation in any event “happens before you know it – or as you

<sup>2</sup> The relevance here is evidenced by (and was explored at) a recent 2016 NEH Summer Institute on the topic of Presupposition and Perception: Reasoning, Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics. (I owe a debt to this institute for my own recent thinking on these issues, particularly at the intersection of philosophy and issues of social justice.)

know it, abductively. Active participation precedes conscious perception” (195), so we should aim to be open and oriented toward potential and possibility. This is where we will find “degrees of freedom” because “there are any number of things that could happen [...] that might modulate the field’s complexion of potential, altering its presuppositions on the fly” (195).

A perhaps obvious remaining counterargument here would point toward *literal* restrictions of freedom—the enslaved or imprisoned body, for example, or the body in constant peril at the hands of a violent, racist state. Massumi himself admits that the situation he describes “doesn’t mean that police functions and the other old disciplinary forms of power are over and done with. [...] In fact they tend to proliferate and often get more vehement in their application precisely because the field that they are in is no longer controlled overall by their kind of power, so they’re in a situation of structural insecurity” (28). Here, Massumi makes room (if only very little room) to deploy a brand of action we might describe as something far more temporary than even a so-called strategic essentialism, with the warning that even here we must be wary of coagulation:

Obviously a disadvantaged group has to assess its interests and fight for certain rights, certain rights of passage and access, certain resources—often survival itself is in the balance. But at the same time, if any group, disadvantaged or otherwise, identifies itself completely with its self-interests it’s living the fiction that it is a separate autonomy. It is missing the potential that comes from taking the risk of making an event of the way to relate to other people [...] cutting yourself off from your own potential to change and intensify your life. (41–42)

To buy into Massumi’s politics of affect, then, one must not only agree that his micropolitics is politics (and is politics enough), but must also consider much of Marxism—as well as “political actions that only operate in terms of the self-interest of identified groups occupying recognizable social categories like male/female, unemployed/employed”—ultimately of “limited usefulness,” doomed to result in “creating a sort of rigidity—a hardening of the arteries!” (42). Just as his politics of affect and its cartographies of potential are aesthetic but not *just* that, so too does he leave room for “defending rights based on an identification with a certain categorized social group, that asserts and defends a self-interest but doesn’t *just* do that” (42, emphasis added).

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