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*Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* by Brian Massumi. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002. Pp. viii + 328. $21.95 paper.

If we have somehow previously missed the signs (and texts) of Brian Massumi's provocative critical production, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* provides indisputable evidence of the mastery, despite his efforts to be unmasterful, that Massumi brings to his study of the complex intersection of science, philosophy, and culture. Given the depth and complexity of the analyses contained in this volume, a review such as this can only offer a broad outline of the rich and careful work of critical reflection contained therein.

In the introduction, Massumi explains how the volume's animating concepts overlap. In doing so, he presents himself not as an adversary but as a severe yet willing ally of contemporary modes of critique, especially cultural studies. Massumi's always original analyses offer practical means to think through and with the body in its material traits that include, but are not limited to, movement, sensation, and affect. Bergsonian and Deleuzian in inspiration, Massumi's approach to movement insists on the importance of passages and becomings over the fixed and static coordinates of positions. Outlining some fifteen consequences of his adoption of the Bergsonian perspective, he adds sensation and intensity to complicate movement and then develops, through Leibniz, the links between sensation and perception, sensation and memory, and, through Spinoza, sensation and affect (14–15). Massumi maintains that all of these relations, movements, and intensities concern the sense in which "the body coincides with its own transitions and its transitioning with its potential" (15), and that such phasing is linked to the body's feeling, emergence, and subjectivity. Massumi cautions that, while not all of these conceptual clusters figure in each essay, they do "appear and reappear like a revolving cast of characters, joining forces or interfering with each other in a tumble of abstract intrigue—at times (I admit) barely controlled" (17).

In short, one finds here a sequence of conceptual role-playing games in which the stakes are the body and its sensory and affective vicissitudes. The arc of this "tumble"—from engagement with affect and its cronies as developed in Deleuze and Guattari (chapter 1) to the paean to incorporeal materialism in conjunction with radical empiricism (chapter 9)—helps Massumi toward his goal of developing invention and experimentation in the humanities, not by mastering concepts through their application, but by seeking the singularity of and in well-selected examples. Hence Massumi glories in the possibility of pursuing these examples through their myriad details and possible digressions, even "prepared for failure," in order to reach "not so much the negation of system as a setting of systems in motion" (18). The method proposed is one of "creative contagion," opening the system, connecting concepts between disciplines to "see what happens," to leave "readers with a very special gift: a headache . . . a problem: what in the world to do with it all" (19).

Well aware of being charged with "shameless poaching," of "theft from science for the humanities" (19), Massumi happily but not naively embraces such charges. His interest is in radical connectibility of concepts, the very ways in which "rhythm, relay, arrival and departure" (i.e., affect) enable a two-way transmission between science and the humanities (20). Massumi understands the purpose of creating links between science and the humanities as placing the latter "in a position of having continually to renegotiate their relations with the sciences—and, in the process, to rearticulate what is unique to their own capacities" (21). Finally, he explains that since his mode of analysis is based on examples, he has chosen "parable" for his title to indicate "the genre of writing most closely allied with the logical form of the example," a writing on the incorporeality of the body, that is, the "virtual" (21).

Having thus given a close reading of the introductory pages of Massumi's book, I propose to follow a linear outline of how Massumi pursues his examination of the book's focal concepts. "The Autonomy of Affect" (chapter 1) both lays out the initial array of concepts that Massumi elaborates in this and subsequent chapters and offers lucid exemplars to which these concepts can be linked and through which they can be better understood. A sequence of four stories in this chapter relates anecdotes to empirical experiments on perception that raise issues about affect, intensity, sensation, perception, expression, the virtual, and the actual. These stories frame the chapter's central reflection, in which Massumi draws from Gilbert Simondon to consider the multifaceted concept of "emergence" in its intricate relations with the other conjoined concepts. Emergence, says Massumi, is "a two-sided coin: one side in the virtual (the autonomy of relation), the other in the actual (functional limitation). What is being termed affect in this essay is precisely this two-sidedness, the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the

actual in the virtual" (35). Massumi ends this central reflection by explaining what is at stake in considering the nonhuman (aka nature) as more than "a construct of human culture, or inertness. The concepts of nature and culture need serious reworking in a way that expresses the irreducible *alterity* of the nonhuman in and through its active *connection* to the human and vice versa" (39; emphasis in the original here and throughout).

In subsequent chapters, Massumi turns to different ways in which the actual and virtual intersect and emerge through various manifestations of corporeality. In "The Bleed: Where Body Meets Image" (chapter 2), he starts from the tale of Ronald Reagan's life-changing experience of sensing his body as an amputee for his role in the film *King's Row* (key line: "Where's the rest of me?"). This crucial event in Reagan's life, says Massumi, constitutes an example of "the bleed," "a blend between the exemplary event and [Reagan's] ordinary world" (56). This example helps Massumi to propose a broad range of issues, most notably the temporal and spatial relations of the body as they intersect with perceptions, sensations, and their attendant affects. Then, in the chapter's final section, he links the exemplary event to questions of the unity of ideal images and emotions and to concepts that relate to the partial nature of such unity. Massumi addresses related questions in different ways throughout the book: "The Political Economy of Belonging: The Logic of the Relation" (chapter 3) considers the problem of the "in-between" as it concerns the example of the "field" (in terms of sports, art, politics, the media) and thus also play and the becoming of the event. "The Evolutionary Alchemy of Reason: Stelarc" (chapter 4) takes the modes of creative expression—physical suspensions, televisual exploration of internal organs, prosthetic extensions, among others—practiced by the Australian "body artist," Stelarc, as the exemplar for considering the problem: "In what way is the body an idea, and the idea bodily? In what way can probing one extend the other? '*How is it that the body thinks itself?*'" (90; Massumi citing Stelarc in a 1992 interview). "On the Superiority of the Analog" (chapter 5) offers a different angle on the virtual (and, necessarily, the actual), that "digital technologies have a connection to the potential and the virtual *only through the analog*" (138). Providing exemplars from forms of computing, televiewing, and the web, Massumi observes: "All the sense modalities are active in even the most apparently monosensual activity. Vision may ostensibly predominate, but it never occurs alone. Every attentive activity occurs in a synesthetic field of sensation that implicates all the sense modalities in incipient perception, and is itself implicated in self-referential action" (140). Massumi's conclusion is that rather than finding our location in a "digital age," "the challenge is to think (and act and sense and perceive) the co-operation of the digital and the analog, in self-varying continuity. . . . The analog and the digital must be thought together, asymmetrically. Because the analog is always a fold ahead" (143).

In many ways, chapter 5 lays the groundwork for the three chapters that follow, since the discussion of the virtual and its interrelations with the senses occurs in different ways in each: chapter 6, "Chaos in the 'Total Field' of Vision" (considering, among other things, the tactile, haptic function of vision); chapter 7, "The Brightness Confound" (on anomalies of vision, considering the gaps between differing empirical and philosophical accounts regarding the field of color as well as creativity); and chapter 8, "Strange Horizon: Buildings, Biograms, and the Body Topologic" (on the body understood in topological terms, and topological design in terms of corporeality). These are, of course, mere thumbnail summaries, but I hope to convey the nexus of concerns around which each of Massumi's analyses center: most notably, the body, its myriad sensations, their relations to movement and affect, and how all of these are viewed from the dual perspective of the humanities and the sciences.

Massumi's final chapter, "Too-Blue: Color-Patch for an Expanded Empiricism" (originally published in the journal *Cultural Studies,* in a special issue on Deleuze and Guattari in cultural studies), constitutes what he calls the occasion in which "incorporeal materialism meets up with radical empiricism," where "Bergson, Spinoza, and Simondon" (featured in chapter 1) "make way for James, who tumbles onto A. N. Whitehead and Isabelle Stengers" (17). This encounter occurs following the line of analysis well developed in the preceding four chapters, the persistent juxtaposition of philosophical concepts with an early-twentieth-century experiment on the effects of memory on color constancy. Discussion of this empirical test yields quickly to the interrogation of that in-between zone of the bleed. That is, the language of the experimenter's report "operat[es] simultaneously to standardize (reduce) and convey (express) an ineffable singularity of experience," whereas the experiment's subject "has been singularly struck by color" such that color "has gone over the instituted line, pushed past the mark set for it by the laboratory setup" (211). Massumi reflects on the diverse contours of this singularity of experience in order to relate a "philosophical story," how the unforeseen of the real, its "inexhaustible reserve of surprise [constitutes] . . . the snowballing *process* that makes a certainty of *change*" (214). Massumi then draws from James and Whitehead to consider how the proto- or semi-scientific object may (or may not) develop into a dependable fact, and how such birth of the technical object must be situated within a global ecology of knowledge practices.

These observations also serve to foreground Massumi's detailed review of the many "process lines" that provide access to and knowledge about an event, notably the "adoption and imposition by the experimenter of the institutional setup of the experiment" in contrast to "the self-insistence of an autonomy of experience" (212). For the climax of this encounter between incorporeal

materialism and radical empiricism lies in Massumi's examination of the limits of research in the sciences and in philosophy, on one hand, and in cultural studies, on the other. If he makes a polemical turn in the last ten pages of the book, it is in response to what he deems to be the moralistic process line in science that would speak "in the name of a universal 'we' that is a thinly disguised assertion of a restricted 'we's' exclusive right to existence based on monopoly access to the 'laws' and 'principles' 'behind' empirical reality" (246–47)—in short, science's "becoming-theological—whether it cares to admit it or not" (247–48). Castigated particularly by classical-empiricist fundamentalists such as Edward O. White are three "horrific" dimensions: philosophy, art, and cultural studies. While Massumi makes a case for intersections between the sciences and all three dimensions, he concludes, reluctantly but frankly, that few of the process lines he describes yet allow for the kinds of expansion of the empirical field that he judges as both possible and necessary, especially in cultural studies, which, says Massumi, "has missed the processual boat" (253). He states, "As it is widely practiced, cultural studies falls short of singularity at both limits [on the nature-culture continuum] because it clings to the notion that *expression is of a particularity*" (253). Among other things, this results in "miss[ing] the impersonal or overpersonal excesses of ongoing transformation," and cultural studies's lack of "processual specificity" tends to push some of its practices toward the "soft sciences" (253). In contrast, he argues for a political ecology that would emphasize "the coming-together or belonging-together of processually unique and divergent forms of life. . . . What cultural studies could become, if it finds a way of expressing its own processual potential, is a political ecology affectively engaged in symbiosis-tending, . . . an amoral collective ethics, . . . a tending of coming-together, a *caring for* belonging as such" (255).

Massumi's book imposes considerable demands on the reader's ability to follow its intricate latticework of concepts. Still, the author has the singular merit of speaking to the reader with careful attention, humor, and an ability to juxtapose complex analyses with engaging exemplars. One caution that I would make is that readers not take Massumi's analyses as a substitute for engaging directly with the many critical works and concepts that he deploys. Although I have gained immeasurably, for example, from reading the different ways in which Massumi deploys the concept of affect, I would be loathe now to employ his work as the sole referent on this concept, when the primary texts such as those by Spinoza and Deleuze-Guattari, among others, remain crucial for a nuanced understanding of affect and its conceptual nexus. Furthermore, while Massumi takes issue with certain aspects of the sciences, philosophy, and cultural studies, especially in chapter 9, his analyses can properly be viewed as quite complementary to the diversity in these approaches in order,

as he himself maintains, to extend these foundations with additional contributions of his own. In short, perhaps the greatest compliment one can pay to any theorist is to be paid to Massumi, that his study will not leave the reader indifferent and that it will continue to provoke thought and reaction, but also henceforth action and creative production in the complex and mutating domains for which Massumi's "parables" unmistakably provide the coordinates.

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