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Affect Theory

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This chapter reviews important research in affect studies published in 2020, a year that saw the appearance of a rich selection of scholarly books that further develop the insights and methods of affect theory or that apply established approaches to investigations of affective phenomena in a variety of areas of study. The chapter is divided into the following sections: 1. Critique and Affect, which focuses on *Critical Affect: The Politics of Method*, by Ashley Barnwell; 2. Literary Affect, which focuses on *Affect and Literature*, edited by Alex Houen; 3. Cultural Histories of Affect, which focuses on *Peculiar Attunements: How Affect Theory Turned Musical*, by Roger Mathew Grant, and *Unfelt: The Language of Affect in the British Enlightenment*, by James Noggle; 4. Race and Political Affect, which focuses on *Black Feelings: Race and Affect in the Long Sixties*, by Lisa M. Corrigan, and *Reading Affect in Post-Apartheid Literature: South Africa's Wounded Feelings*, by Mark Libin; and 5. Reflections.

1. Critique and Affect

A number of important studies have appeared of late that step back to think about the uses to which affect as conceptual category has been put by scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Perhaps the broadest exploration so far has been this year's *Critical Affect: The Politics of Method* by Ashley Barnwell, a meditation on method, about what's at stake—and for whom—in recent critical practice. Barnwell takes stock of moves over the past two decades to advance us past a habit of reading from a stance of suspicion, and in so doing seeks to reframe so as correct our perception of what she views as a largely incoherent rejection of hermeneutic critique. Her immediate aim is to investigate a major avenue of the recent 'ontological turn' so as to account for 'how and why critical interventions from the mid-1990s onward use affect to pursue an argument about what kinds of truth-telling matter' (pp. 4–5). At the same time the book takes on a broader remit, as Barnwell

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works from the example of her particular object of study—the affective turn—to determine more generally 'how and why we choose to put down or pick up methods and what falls out of view if we turn too sharply' (p. 8).

Barnwell starts with the observation that 'scholars are often asked to choose structure or affect, critique or creativity, detection or description' (p. 2); she then asks: 'But should our notion of methods be so fixed and divided?' The remainder of the book works diligently to offer an emphatic 'No' to this rhetorical question. The author pretends to a value-neutral interest in teasing out the implications of certain choices ('I ask not whether we should choose either affect or critique, felt or factual truths, emotion or evidence, but rather what is at stake in making such selections', p. 3). Asking *why* certain approaches gain ascendancy—who has what investment in a given position? and what are the consequences of that position?—allows Barnwell to bring into focus the 'politics of method' of her study's subtitle. Barnwell's way of proceeding is to unearth histories of the concerns and assumptions that characterize recent positions or schools of thought, histories that are hidden (in plain view, really, but hidden) until she brings them to the fore. Still, *pace* the gestures here at occupying a disinterested view-from-nowhere, there is a more robust agenda in play, one about which Barnwell is at times quite upfront: she seeks to 'unsettle the claim that critique—as a method geared towards evidence and revelation—cannot engage with the mutable dynamics of affect'. 'Rather than promoting judgement over intuition, or epistemology over ontology', she continues, 'this book rethinks the means by which we differentiate them. It shows that seemingly agonistic categories are full of crossover and complexity by drawing out the creative and sensitive aspects of critique and the censoring and coercive capacities of affect' (p. 2). In what follows Barnwell examines under a bright light the writings of a series of influential thinkers on affect—especially of the post-critical sort—to make a case for the continuing usefulness of critical hermeneutics both in accounting for affective phenomena and for providing a coherent impetus for political action.

The first chapter, 'Enduring Divisions', traces an unacknowledged lineage of recent theory in order to 'show how the current debate about affect and method refigures an enduring conflict over how to represent the mutable and diverse truths of social life' (p. 17). Barnwell accomplishes this contextualization by returning to the 'two cultures' debate from the late 1950s through the 1990s, a time when the methods and insights of the sciences and the humanities were often seen as mutually untenable. The purpose behind her method here is more than just genealogical, more than merely to show how we got to where we are now; Barnwell's goal is to

demonstrate 'how this division dissolves in a way that highlights the affective and dynamic potential of critical reading and attention' (p. 18).

The next three chapters together act as 'a sustained case study of the turn away from critical methods' (p. 13), by investigating the assumptions and rhetoric of some of the most influential figures in the story of the rise of affect theory to its current prominence. The method here is to reveal how in the very act of rejecting the hermeneutics of suspicion these figures reproduce some of the very same critical moves and moods that they rail against. Barnwell is especially keen to account for the situatedness not just of texts in history but of those authors themselves whose authority has governed the rise of affect-aware scholarship to its current status in the academy. Regarding perhaps the most influential early post-critical interventions, Barnwell notes both Bruno Latour's and Eve Sedgwick's explicit situating of their pronouncements about the exhaustion of critique in the particular material conditions under which they were writing in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when there was optimism in the air. We live under different conditions now, Barnwell insists, and the emancipatory potential of suspicious thinking remains a necessary tool for the many communities still left out of the dominant power structures in the societies they inhabit. That this last point is not even made against the spirit of post-critique is made clear when Barnwell concludes with the insight that 'the sense that we must be engaged and vigilant, or that meaning can be wrestled from the ineffable, remains the unacknowledged motivation of the critique of critique' (p. 82).

There follows a consideration of influential 'method directives' developed by scholars like Nigel Thrift and John Law who promote genres of enquiry that, they contend, capture lived experience rather than offer critique from the outside. Barnwell poses essentially the same question she has asked before: 'are the determinants of this turn in method—both the intellectual history from which it claims to depart and the raw, everyday desires it claims to access—really as different in tenor and drive as these method proposals assume?' (p. 84). Barnwell leads us through close examinations of Thrift's and Law's key texts, in which they promote conceptions of, respectively, 'non-representative theory' or 'method as mess' to account for affective forces that fly under the radar of traditional social analysis. She concludes that, no, in fact there are few grounds here to see such method directives as offering the radical break that proponents tend to claim; speaking of Thrift's project, Barnwell concludes that 'what he argues for [. . .] is to make judgements and criticisms, and arguably without the engagement that is expected to underpin them' (p. 88). The final chapters here continue a process of accreting evidence through case study, parsing, for example, the

tension between hope and an ethnographics of hyper-vigilance in Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects*, and moving through works of fiction (such as postmodern novels and TV series) to plumb the implications of a culture preoccupied with the paranoid style. On Barnwell's account, her work here 'joins efforts to diversify the methods we can use to engage with affect by addressing key theoretical and methodological tensions within the field' (p. 109). *Critical Affect: The Politics of Method* certainly offers a wide as well as a polemical vision of the current state of play in critical and cultural theory after the affective—and, more broadly, the ontological—turn, and, though it's bound to spark a polarized response among readers, it is an account whose insights will have to be dealt with (whether to be countered or embraced) by scholars working at the coalface of affect studies.

2. Literary Affect

The past year produced insightful considerations of the nature of literary affect, especially concerning its representation in texts and impact on readers. *Affect and Literature*, an edited collection of essays, seeks at once to catalogue approaches to literary affect in different generic and historical contexts, and to advance new perspectives on particular texts and on the theory of literary affect more generally. In his substantial introduction, editor Alex Houen provides a cogent overview of some of the recurrent themes of interest to literary scholars, leading us through a select recent history of critical approaches to affect and emotion, whether taken as phenomena coded in texts or as manifested in the responses of readers. The scope of his discussion exceeds the ambition of many such introductory chapters by developing an independent argument; Houen seeks 'to build the case for an approach that is neither strictly cognitivist nor noncognitivist, and that is open to considering literary affect in terms of fusions of content and style' (p. 5). As he offers an efficient run-through of positions on what is often seen as a cognitivist–noncognitivist divide, Houen convincingly shows that the, now common, apprehension that such a divide may seem unreconcilable stems from misreadings of foundational texts—especially those by Brian Massumi and Silvan Tomkins and their interpreters. In so doing Houen nicely sets up his own model for understanding literary affect, one that depends on treading a middle path that does not support 'an opposition of bodily affect versus emotion and cognition' (p. 5). Houen's view is that 'the suspended status of literary writing presents a reader with distinctly aesthetic forms of feeling that can be experienced as exerting their own affective force despite the suspension' (p. 16). He demonstrates this thesis

using Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* as a case study, moving through close analysis of moments in the narrative that body forth the contours of 'a distinctly literary form of affect'. At the same time he engages critically with interventions on the qualities of narrative voice (especially resonances of style and tone) made by Lauren Berlant, Sianne Ngai, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Houen anticipates that some readers may take exception to this model of affect, by concluding that his 'emphasis on aesthetic suspension amounts to advocating a sense of literary autonomy such that literature and its affects are viewed as being separate from socially-reinforced values of affect in the world' (p. 19). Such an inference would be mistaken, Houen counters, because on his account while the writers he considers 'make innovations to form and genre to present distinctly literary approaches to affect', they are 'still working directly with social phrasings and values of affect because the innovations involve recasting linguistically how affect is socially borne with language' (p. 19).

The chapters that follow, written by some of the leading scholars in humanistic affect studies, cover remarkably wide ground. The ten chapters in Part I, 'Origins', return to look with fresh eyes at some of the usual suspects (as well as some less obvious players) in the history of conceptualizations and dramatizations of human affective agency, in essays that range from considerations of 'poetic fear-related affects' in Graeco-Roman antiquity to theorizations of affect in key figures such as Spinoza, Lessing, Nietzsche, Bergson, Lacan, Deleuze, and Massumi. Other contributions focus profitably on the more evidently political implications of affect—whether as embodied phenomenon or as critical paradigm—and include investigations of capitalism's production of affect, of the contours of postcolonial affect, and of the 'durability' of affect in queer theory. In Part II of the collection, 'Developments', seven chapters engage in close readings of specific works as case studies of how an attunement to affect's operations can elucidate the text and its contexts. Benedict S. Robinson's 'Feeling Feelings in Early Modern England', for example, takes an essentially philological and history-of-emotions approach to tease out the differences among philosophers and theorists in conceptions of the passions and of affect, then and now. Other authors offer along the way subtle readings of the affective dimensions of tone and form (focusing on 'laughable poetry'; on camp, melodrama, and film; on the contemporary Irish novel), with the section concluding with a meditation on 'subaltern affects'. Part III, 'Applications', closes the collection with six chapters all concerned with how an understanding of affect's productive operations can better inform analyses of recent cultural forms and political forces. As with the previous sections, there

is a careful balance here between focus on cultural productions (the literary, the filmic, the digital) and social movements and historical events (ecopoetics, the 'war on terror').

3. Cultural Histories of Affect

A major contribution to the ongoing project to attend to affect as a phenomenon in cultural history appeared this year with *Peculiar Attunements: How Affect Theory Turned Musical*. Roger Mathew Grant's approach is to track the roots of recent conceptions of affective resonances back to an unacknowledged source, the aesthetics of a particular strain of music theory in Enlightenment Europe. Grant's book 'narrates an eighteenth-century transformation during which affect was slowly separated from representations of aesthetic objects', in a way that on his account prefigures an approach common to current theorizations of affect's effects. At the same time, his study 'draws attention to the central and surprising role that music played in this separation' (pp. 2–3). Adapting the kind of productive approach made popular of late by historians of emotions such as Thomas Dixon and Ute Frevert, Grant keeps the focus not on emotion but rather on affect as conceptualized in the wake of the recent affective turn. In the process he demonstrates convincingly that many of the qualities currently attributed to affect—as modulated intensity, as exceeding representation, as transmissible among bodies—are theorized in the writings of these Enlightenment thinkers. At base, Grant's study is a history of music theory, one that seeks to recover a neglected but significant tradition: that of the attunement *Affektenlehre*, under whose aegis 'affect retreated to the interiors of listening subjects and took on characteristics associated with the ineffable' (p. 110). At the same time, Grant seeks to show how this tradition of 'attunement' has much in common with—and, more, can give us an enriched perspective on—much recent work that seeks to account for the circulation of affect in art and in life.

In the core chapters here Grant develops an account of the movement in the *Affektenlehre* tradition from an object-based to a subject-based model of affective engagement with music. Grant tracks the fortunes of the 'mimetic' theory of musical affect that rose to early dominance as music theorists sought to account for the emotional impact of staged musical productions on audiences. Taking operatic works as their primary object of study, theorists such as Johann Heinichen developed ways to describe and codify compositional practice. For Heinichen, 'the primary goal of the composer' was 'to write music that amplified the mimetic work of the text' (p. 52). In

elaborating a taxonomy of musical rhetoric in close readings of common forms such as the aria and the pastoral siciliana, he presented strategies to generate through choice of note and key a mood appropriate to the dramatic situation at hand. As the mimetic zeitgeist declined, conditions then fell into place for establishment of the next phase of the *Affektenlehre*, and included such influences as the writings of philosophers on passionate experience as a form of physiological attunement (a prevalent trope figured the nerves as strings played upon by sensory stimuli). The 'mature articulation' of music theory by writers such as Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder 'offered a non-representational, nondiscursive understanding of affect that relied on autonomic corporeal responses to music' (p. 111).

Much of the work in *Peculiar Attunements* to connect the insights of a centuries-old strain of music theory to contemporary concerns takes place in the 'Coda', a brief yet remarkably rich investigation of 'affect after the *Affektenlehre*'. Grant begins with the observation that 'recent theorists of affect, like the authors writing in the tradition of the attunement *Affektenlehre*, are keen to describe the material workings of a resonant, often corporeal conduit of transmission' (p. 132). Yet these recent theorists, rather than learning from and building on past insights, seem oblivious to them, and so 'contemporary affect theory, despite its proclamations of novelty, spends a great deal of time rehearsing conceptual problems inherited from affect's long history' (p. 131). Grant's aim here is not merely to register a genealogy of recent theory to be found in the musicological archive of the 1700s, nor to make a claim for relevance of a more informed perspective for the sake of it, but to argue that familiarity with past paradigms can offer us a way out of a serious limitation that besets recent theory. 'We need', Grant contends, 'to restore diachronicity and movement to affect theory' (p. 136). Restoring such an understanding would help us move past (or at least complicate) the 'sense-certainty' of influential strains in contemporary affect theory that tend to accord a primary significance to the immediate subjective experience of affective intensities. Drawing on the observations of leading affect theorists (including Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, Alexander Cho, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, William Connolly, Theresa Brennan, and Ben Anderson), Grant makes the case for a model of 'atmospheric poetics', for recognition that connections may be generated across time, in different situations, by the work of art through a process of 'vibrational transmission' effected through mechanisms of 'resonance', of 'reverb' (pp. 132–35). In their use of such tropes these scholars are (without knowing it) participating in a 'renaissance of the attunement *Affektenlehre*'s figures and operations' (p. 134). Grant seeks to correct an understanding of

affect that 'has lost its object' under the influence of both the Silvan Tomkins- and the Brian Massumi-inspired lines of theory. Grant asks us to turn our attention to what Anderson calls the 'transpersonal' quality of affect, so as 'to understand affect as a dynamic passed between and among subjects' (p. 137). This is a dynamic whose force of encounter is registered 'through the use of objects [for Grant, we presume, musical instruments] as signifying mechanisms' (p. 137). Grant sees such a shifting of perspective to more 'robust models of affect' already evident in the work of a few current theorists (especially Jonathan Flatley and Sianne Ngai); increasing our awareness of the history of affect's theorization will serve even more to improve our collective grasp of the operations of a phenomenon that by definition is hard to define.

James Noggle takes a different if equally productive approach to building a history of affective forces in play in cultural discourse in *Unfelt: The Language of Affect in the British Enlightenment*. Rather than trace the roots of our current conceptions of affect back to an earlier time, Noggle applies the insights of recent theory to elucidate the implications of an idiom of 'unfelt affect' that he finds at work in texts from centuries ago. Noting the prevalence of the word *insensibly* in various genres of writing, Noggle brings to light the secret history of a term that has been unnoticed but—once we're attuned to its presence—seems everywhere from the 1680s to the 1780s. And not just in tales of dawning desire (as when a lover comes 'by slow degrees' to realize the intensity of their passion), but in works of philosophy, historiography, and political economy. The focus here is not on *insensibility* as a quality possessed by the individual, but on the adverbial form, deployed by writers to indicate the operations of 'a productive movement of feeling that cannot itself be felt, attended to or defined while it is happening' (p. 1). Noggle's analysis draws on recent theorizations of affect that posit affective intensities as impersonal, even pre-personal, as autonomous forces that can circulate among feeling bodies in ways that escape the emotional knowledge of affected individuals. Noggle is careful at the same time not to have his critical perspective determined wholesale by recent theory, nor for that matter to impose a psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious, but rather strives to situate the ostensibly inchoate phenomena whose contours he sets out to limn in the contexts of attitudes toward human affective agency current at the time. Musing on the explanatory power of affect theory to clarify these phenomena, Noggle insists that what he's on about is 'not a theory, not a set of names for isolatable states, forces or even processes'; rather, 'the language of the insensible spreads unselfconsciously throughout writing in the period to designate an open variety of unfelt changes to

feeling. But this variety has a shape' (p. 3). The shape he perceives is 'a common style of expression and thought' (p. 5) that's evident in a variety of texts throughout the period. The notion that what is essentially an *absence* (of sense, of feeling) could exert a pervasive influence would seem on the face of it paradoxical if not impossible, but is for Noggle at the heart of the deep logic of the idiom. 'To call a process insensible', he observes,

> is to say two things about it, in a strongly ironic tension with each other: It cannot be felt, and it exists. Its existence presses, so to speak, its unfelt status into a position especially pertinent to what we eventually do come to feel. Instead of offering criticism of or a retreat from the era's obsession with the passions and the sensing mind, the unfelt proves, again and again, to be that discourse's enabling element. (pp. 5–6)

In the chapters that follow, Noggle offers close examinations of a range of texts from a number of disciplines to tease out the forms of the insensible. The first two chapters consider the role of unfelt elements in nature and the mechanics of perception in Locke's and Hartley's epistemology, and in Condillac's and Hume's theories of association. Noggle then moves out from such theories of the constitution of the individual self to genres of writing that use the unfelt 'to build ever larger sociotemporal structures' (p. 50). He shows how moral philosopher Adam Smith 'recruits the insensible to serve moral sentiment' (p. 62), and parses novelist and periodical essayist Eliza Haywood's exploration of the 'secret Springs' of impassioned action. In an extended discussion of fiction, Noggle advances the strong claim that unfelt affects 'often decisively delineate character, advance plot, and confer a distinctive texture on narrative' (p. 69), demonstrating his claim in readings of Fielding, Richardson, Burney, and Austen. The final two chapters broaden out the scope of vision here to offer a remarkably original big-picture account of the role of unfelt affect in Enlightenment discourse. Noggle considers conceptions in English and French historiography of affect-laden processes that are gradual but world-changing (are 'insensible revolutions') nonetheless, and tracks an increasing tendency among historians such as Gibbon, Hume, and Burke to pen 'descriptions of the fundamentally affective bases of historical change' (p. 113). Noggle closes his study with a consideration of key works of political economy, texts situated 'at the most vast end of the scale of applications' of his idiom of the unfelt (p. 155). Of interest here is the way that money can *move* people, an effect evident in the way economic activity sparks recognizable passions such as greed but also in ways that 'they feel just barely or not at all' (p. 155).

The chapter reads Mandeville and writings on taxation by Hume and others, and culminates in a meditation on the 'invisible versus insensible' in Smith's *Wealth of Nations*.

4. Race and Political Affect

This year saw the publication of a number of studies that interrogate the implications of affectively charged discourse in order to address the legacies of racism. Both authors considered in this section employ approaches informed by affect theory to better understand what's at stake in public appeals to emotion. Lisa M. Corrigan explores a conflicted period in American public life in *Black Feelings: Race and Affect in the Long Sixties*, part of the University Press of Mississippi's 'Race, Rhetoric, and Media' series. The book begins with a powerful statement by the author that makes clear her impetus for taking on this challenging project. 'I was tired', she explains, 'of reading reviews that lazily rejected any rhetorical analyses that took seriously the political theory or practical activism of radical black movement organizations. I was tired of hearing that radical black leaders were "too emotional" and weren't pragmatic enough' (p. ix). Powerfully testifying to her own affective engagement, her frustration, Corrigan sets the stage for a bracing post-mortem on a period of hope, violence, and disappointment in American public life that is both rigorous in its reasoning and compelling in its contained fury at the injustice it finds. Her method is to consider a broad archive—of politicians' speeches, of black intellectuals' writings and statements, of journalists' editorials—through the lens of cultural critique informed by recent affect theory. By unpacking the discursive structures, rhetorical tropes, and affective resonances of politicized expression, Corrigan's study seeks to 'articulate how feelings have motivated and continue to animate white assessments of black activism and to understand how black activists have used emotions to propel radical and innovative political theory and engagement' (p. ix). Corrigan's parsing of charged contemporary speech-acts—whether of the polemical sort or more personal testimonials to embodied experience—informs a broader political analysis, as she uses such an approach as a way of 'thinking through antiblack public policy and radical black activist responses to the failures of liberalism in ways that challenge myths about the civil rights and Black Power movements' (p. ix).

Perhaps the most trenchant analysis here is Corrigan's account of the move 'from cruel optimism to black pessimism' that followed the watershed event of Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968 (pp. 115–23). Deploying Lauren Berlant's paradigm to great effect, Corrigan reads King's death as

showing the failure of nonviolence as an activist strategy, one based on a dream of unity as a way to achieve social justice. Corrigan sees in 'the bitterness and hardness of Black Power commentary after King's death' by Eldridge Cleaver and others a sense of betrayal and of hopelessness, in that the tragedy 'exposed the cruelty of the dream as a trope of racial progress and racial liberalism' (p. 118). Has anything changed? In a closing section on 'Black (and Brown) Pessimism after Obama', Corrigan casts a harsh light on the failed promise of racial reconciliation in the years since 2008, in an analysis of the pressures on different communities of color to embrace a 'colorblind' model of post-race America that depends on a state of 'racial dissociation.' In a striking indictment of the last two presidencies, Corrigan makes the strong claim that the failure of the Obama administration to curtail violence against the black community—the product of 'a culture of predation, dating back to enslavement'—made the Trump presidency's egregiously prejudicial policies against a range of minorities *not* an aberration, but, rather, 'a continuity that is legible only to critics of colorblind liberalism, regardless of its champion' (p. 163). At the end of a study that has tracked the long shadow of an era that promised much but delivered little in the way of racial justice, Corrigan speaks with authority when she insists that rather than muse about America's progress toward an ideal of color-blindness, 'it seems more productive to trace how racial dissociation has been an intrinsic demand of liberalism since the nation's inception, as well as to investigate moments where grievances about racial (particularly black) dissociation have been raised as part of new political formations that cluster around affective rhetorics' (p. 163).

Investigating the political uses to which appeals to affect can be put is also the focus of Mark Libin's *Reading Affect in Post-Apartheid Literature: South Africa's Wounded Feelings*. This study is concerned primarily with the decade following Nelson Mandela's release from prison, a period that saw a concerted effort to cleanse from the body politic the taste of 'Apartheid's bitter fruit' by building a new 'a nation built on feeling.' In seeking to track the implications of post-apartheid culture, which, Libin observes, 'can be understood as phenomenological in its emotional discourse, a dynamic but unpredictable exchange of affective registers' (p. 6), the author adopts an approach explicitly allied to Sarah Ahmed's investigations of the cultural politics of feeling, as well as to Eugenie Brinkema's analyses of the formal qualities of particular affective expressions. Libin details how the leading figures of the new South Africa, seeking to build a 'Rainbow Nation', promoted an ideal of empathy—for victims, even for perpetrators—as a way to achieve reconciliation, and thereby to enable a newly unified

community to move past the collective trauma of the apartheid years. The major figure in this affective project was Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who promoted the African concept of *ubuntu*, or 'interrelatedness', as paradigm for social cohesion. On Libin's account, recourse to *ubuntu* in the context of the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission 'articulates the desire to create a space of public intimacy in which the audience experiences an emotional connection with the subject of testimony' (p. 72). Libin's aim here is to register 'the emphasis the ANC government placed on promoting and performing a politics of affect for the nation'—but even more to show 'how this particular programme is questioned, challenged or subverted by the cultural artefacts being produced in the same period' (p. 17).

Libin lays out his approach early on: his study will consider

> several different genres of representation—novel, memoir, poetry, film, drama and audio recording—and in each case will strive to determine how formal structures of each work—narrative point of view, literary style, camera work, sound editing, mise-en-scène—bring the reader closer to the affective subtext of each work than any surface reading could produce. (pp. 7–8)

A central body of evidence for Libin's examination are the hearings of and documentaries about the TRC. Also key here are case studies of novels—including Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2001), Méira Cook's *The House on Sugarbush Road* (2012), and Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981)—that dramatize a central concern of this study: what can happen when people in affectively charged situations get *too* close and are hit with 'the shock of unexpected, disruptive and disorienting emotions' (p. 8). The therapeutic promise of the TRC hearings depended on the proximity of participants, with scenes of affective intensity performed regularly in hearing chambers, and then broadcast for local publics as well as international audiences. Yet in this very proximity there is risk and tension, and much of Libin's attention is on how—and, even more importantly, why—the various forms of cultural expression he considers engage 'in a renewed, always fraught, negotiation with the attraction and resistance of intimate proximity' (p. 74). The core chapters here explore a variety of representations of negative affective reactions to proximity, ranging from evocations of 'the cage of public intimacy' in Ingrid de Kok's poetry collection *Terrestrial Things* (2002) in Chapter 3, to the 'compassion fatigue' that plagues white characters dramatized in texts such as Antjie Krog's fictionalized memoir *Country of My Skull* (1998) and J. M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* (1999) in Chapter 5. Libin closes his 'reading of disruptive affect in post-apartheid narratives' with a look to

the future by considering the significance of playwright Mongiwekhaya's *I See You* (2016), a work that 'gestures to what might be the next phase of the intimate, irritating entanglement of the South African polis', in that it 'represents a post-post-apartheid South Africa, a society still aware of both the trauma of apartheid and the hope of genuine transformation, but exhausted at the thought of either' (pp. 244–45).

5. Reflections

The publications reviewed here offer a clear sense of the investigations being carried out by researchers in the realm of critical and cultural theory to account for the workings of affect. A strong case can be made, in fact, that affect studies has now reached a stage of maturation, given the range of approaches and the sophistication of analysis reflected here, which includes studies that: (1) offer a wider view of the politics of method, and so move us past the lingering notion that detecting affect at work in social and scholarly phenomena is a novel insight, and assert instead that the approaches that got us here can be profitably subjected to a critical examination as one historically situated conceptual 'turn' among many; (2) catalogue the many facets of affective circulations within literary texts and among readers; (3) formulate how a cultural history of affect might be different from a history of emotions, using case studies of early music theory and of broader cultural discourses to make the point; and (4), apply now well-established key insights and paradigms such as Berlant's 'cruel optimism' or Brennan's 'transmission of affect' to new contexts, so as to elucidate the operations of racialized politics and rhetoric in recent US history, or of affective coercions in post-apartheid South Africa. These projects demonstrate convincingly that—as with many of the other strains of the ontological turn—affect studies is a vibrant multidisciplinary endeavour that will continue to matter for a long time to come.

Books Reviewed

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Corrigan, Lisa M., *Black Feelings: Race and Affect in the Long Sixties* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020). ISBN 9 7814 9682 7944.

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