IS THE BODY AN IMMANENT DOMAIN? ON POSTSECULAR AFFECTS

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Illustration || Andrés Müller
Article || Received on: 08/07/2015 | International Advisory Board's suitability: 09/11/2015 | Published: 01/2016

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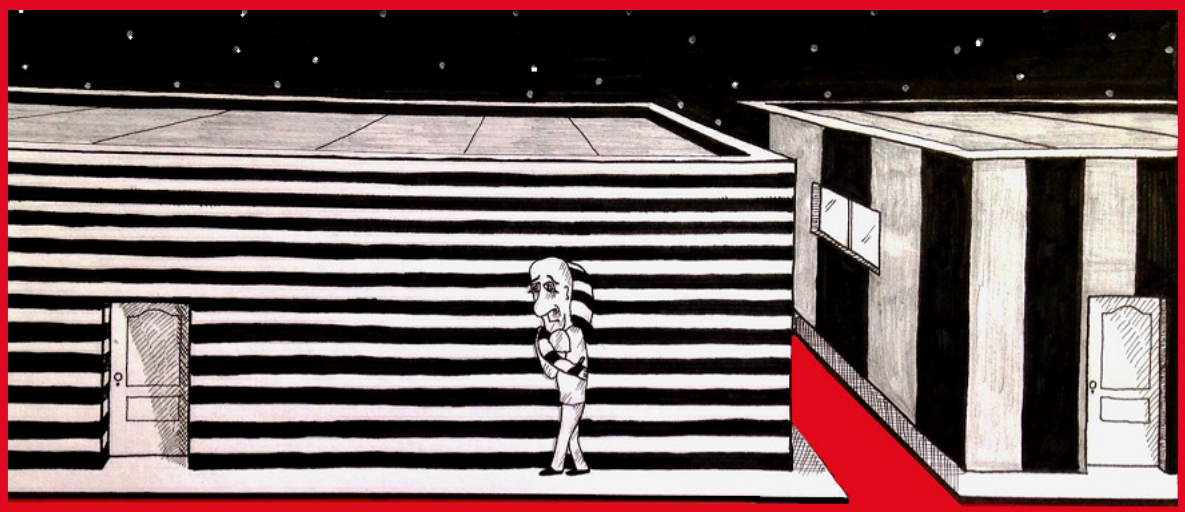

Abstract || What critical possibilities and problems emerge when affect theory and postsecularism are brought together? This article explores this question and its implications for literary theory. Can affect at once open a space beyond rationality while at the same time remaining emphatically materialist and foreclosing feelings of religious transcendence or automatically subsuming them within materialism? What might be the critical and cultural authority of postsecular affects, of feeling religiously? I suggest that if past modes of rational, public arbitration for such questions are declining, literature, specifically the contemporary novel, can serve as the site for imagining these new ways of being and feeling in the contemporary world.

Keywords || Affect | Postsecularism | Secularism | Materialism | The Body

Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817)

0. Introduction

Affect theory has sought variously to engage emotions outside of the critical categories determined by rationality or to study the pre-conscious neural impulses that many theorists of affect argue inform our political and aesthetic responses. In a largely separate line of critical inquiry, the postsecular has taken up the persistence of ambiguously but undeniably religious forms that have continued to shape public and private modes of value and meaning absent any clear connection to the orthodoxies and doctrines of formal religions, past or present. One particular conjunction that has hitherto gone largely unremarked is that descriptions of the postsecular have primarily been made in the language of affects, of moods, emotions, senses, and feelings, so that, like much affect theory, the postsecular attempts to establish critical value and cultural authority beyond the limitations of secular rationality. Postsecular feeling seems lately to be more and more pervasive. Julian Barnes begins *Nothing to Be Frightened Of*, a kind of memoir on death, with a secular statement in the terms of belief, only to be followed closely by a declaration of loss and mourning in the terms of affect: "I don't believe in God, but I miss Him" (Barnes, 2009: 1).

This essay proceeds by asking three questions that occur at the intersection between these two largely separate lines of inquiry: Is affect theory secular? Is the body secular? And, does the meaning and critical authority ascribed to affect extend to postsecular feeling? At stake in these questions is not only the status of a new type of religious meaning in contemporary theory and literary interpretation, the ascendant postsecular, but the broader complications that come with ascribing cultural and political authority to general forms of pre-conscious experience or to emotion, the unintended results of challenging a normative rationality. In that sense, this essay is less a prescription for postsecularism or affect than a descriptive outline of their striking alignment and its implications. One broad claim, however, will be that we are now seeing a significant cultural shift in where we examine the meaning of postsecular feeling, with the literary, specifically the contemporary novel, as a privileged location for this exploration. Given that the novel has long been thought to be an inherently secular and even secularizing form, my argument not only repositions the novel as open to postsecular feeling, but sees it more broadly as one central site of postsecularism's contemporary

manifestation. If in late modernity rationality and reason have waned as modes of public arbitration, the contemporary novel's ability to express and explore our subjective feelings positions it as the literary sphere where we can question or follow, contest or embrace the authority and value of postsecular affects.

Attempts at asserting religious meaning have begun to change, leaving behind traditional and specifically western modes of apprehension and description in *belief*—as a cognitive ascription to certain doctrines or positions, often polemically contrasted with reason.[1] Postsecular meaning has often sought new expressions of religion through the terms of affect, mood and emotion, sense and feeling. These religiously traced, affective turns are not returns to the historical forms of religious enthusiasm; they foreclose any sense of that possibility when they stridently disconnect from recognizable forms of organized religion and its specific doctrines. As John D. Caputo writes, "The 'post-' in 'post-secular' should not be understood to mean 'over and done with' but rather *after having passed through* modernity" (Caputo, 2001: 60-1). Postsecular feeling represents, in other words, not the resurgence of traditional orthodoxies, nor simply the overcoming of secularization. As Christoph Schwöbel suggests, postsecular forms of religion

> cannot be interpreted as a return to traditional religion. They presuppose a radical break in the continuity of tradition and a conscious, often selective re-connection with traditions. Therefore post-secular forms of religion are, by definition, post-traditional forms of religion, even if they are programmatically traditionalist.
>
> (Schwöbel, 2007: 177)[2]

Instead of an uncritical return to old forms of religion, postsecular affect is a particular kind of religious feeling, often conveyed in the basic vocabulary of traditional religious concepts like "soul" or "transcendence," but emptied of easily recognizable doctrinal content and inflected by the ambiguous linguistic terrain of the emotions and pre-conscious affects. Postsecular feeling appeals to "sense," "aura," "energy," and "awareness," humming with religious meaning on the often unheard frequencies of the affects.

1. Is Affect Theory Secular?

The affective turn most noticeably begun in the mid-1990s has now come to prominence across a wide range of disciplines, with significant implications for the practices of queer theory, feminism, anthropology, philosophy, and critical race theory as well as cultural and media studies.[3] Religious studies has recently begun to join this cross-disciplinary inquiry, with the American Academy of Religion

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1 | In *Does God Exist: An Answer for Today?*, Hans Küng asserts that since classical philosophical proofs of God's existence have lost their "coercive force" (Küng, 1981: 531), an "*indirect criterion of verification*" must emerge (1981: 550, emphasis in original), while Alister McGrath finds that it "is increasingly recognized that philosophical argument about the existence of God has ground to a halt" (McGrath, 2004: 179).

2 | For a recent debate on the status of the postsecular, see the special issue of *boundary 2*, "Antinomies of the Postsecular" (2013).

3 | For introductions to affect theory, see, among many others, Seigworth and Gregg (2010) and Figlerowicz (2013).

creating the Religion, Affect, and Emotion group in 2013.[4]

Critical diversity is native to any emerging field of discourse, but affect studies may be said to have largely adopted an exclusively naturalistic model of causality, one centered on a strictly material concept of the body. In the second chapter of volume 1 of *Affect Imagery Consciousness* (1962), Silvan Tomkins, often looked to as the founder of affect theory, announces this natural model as what seems to be a founding and essential principle. He begins that chapter by asserting that "[t]he philosopher, the theologian, the artist, the jurist precede by centuries the psychologist, the biologist, and the social scientist," significantly replacing "the theologian" with "the biologist" in his list of cultural authorities (Tomkins, 1962: 28). Tomkins next asserts that theories that subordinate or repress the biological drives in the name of a freedom to seek "higher, spiritual values" are incorrect, as are those that see only one form of biological drive, which determines all things. This debate occurs, Tomkins suggests, "not because man is a non-biological or spiritual creature, but because there are other neglected biological roots which are the primary motivating forces. The distinction is not between higher and lower, between spiritual and biological, but between *more general* and *more specific biological motives*" (Tomkins, 1962: 28-9, emphasis in original). In these formative moments for affect theory, Tomkins asserts a fundamental, if more open and complex, biological basis for affect, dismissing, at least in his early work, the theologian and the "spiritual."[5]

Contemporary studies follow suit and explore the nuances of the biological while ignoring the spiritual. Affect is, in Brian Massumi's terms, "irreducibly bodily" (Massumi, 2002: 28), attended to what Nigel Thrift terms "the biological constitution of being" (Thrift, 2004: 31). In this reading, affect's causal mechanisms are purely material, genetically contingent, and evolutionarily determined. Massumi's seminal *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* describes its project in precisely these terms: while maintaining the gains of poststructuralism and its linguistic emphasis, he wants to make "matter in its most literal sense (and sensing) […] culturally-theoretically thinkable" (2002: 4), to put "matter unmediatedly back into cultural materialism, along with what seemed most directly corporeal back into the body" (2002: 4). If this materialism covers those theorists who examine affect as pre-cognitive and so determinative of political agency, it applies equally to those like Charles Altieri for whom affects have a more "*immediate mode of sensual responsiveness*" with an "*accompanying imaginative dimension*" (Altieri, 2003: 2, emphasis in original) or Teresa Brennan who defines affect as "the physiological shift accompanying a judgment" (Brennan, 2004: 5). The metaphors of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, which provide the originating

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4 | In his introduction to the collection *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, Hent de Vries includes "affect" as a component of any possible definition of "religion" (de Vries, 2008: cf. 6, 31, 46, 66, 69, 80, 83).

5 | Curt dismissals of theologians are common in critical theory from this period and reflect its normative secularism. Even while he appropriates and reimagines the concept, Michel Foucault breezily dismisses "l'âme" as the "illusion des théologiens" early on in *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Foucault, 1975: 38). Yet, in the preface to volume 3 of *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, *The Negative Affects: Anger and Fear*, published the same year Tomkins died in 1991, he writes that his intervening thinking "has been very substantially shaped and enriched by a most improbable friendship and dialogue between a Jewish son of an atheist [Tomkins] and a truly Christian theologian, the Reverend David McShane. For over twenty years his deep excitement at the relevance of affect theory for understanding the religious impulse has prompted a resonance in me toward the Judeo-Christian tradition I could have experienced in no other way. His extraordinary love of humanity combined with his passion for ideas made it impossible for me to continue in my totally secular posture" (Tomkins, 2008: xxxiiii).

vocabulary for much affect theory in terms like "intensity," "force," and "energy," originally extended this immanent conception of the body into the terms of a machine in works like *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980).

The commitment to a material ontology of the body aligns affect theory with a dominant mode of *secularism*, which Michael Warner observes is "dialectical by nature and immanent to the struggle of the age" and so "not a neutral analytic framework," a term that requires "constant qualification to be of any analytic use" (Warner, 2012: n. pag.). For Charles Hirschkind—whose idea of the secular body I turn to later in this essay—"we have little sense of the social ontology of the secular, and the kinds of practices, sensibilities, and knowledges that it opens up" (Hirschkind, 2011: 644).[6] While secularism's genealogies have been shown by critics like Talal Asad and Charles Taylor to be bound up in modernity's occluded religious history, and admitting the instability of the term *secular* (an attitude? a cluster? a sensibility?), the secularism I argue dominates affect theory precludes religion and religious imaginaries. In this understanding, *secularism* conveys a binary and an oppositional logic between the terms secular-religious. It offers a subtraction account of religion, what Harvey Cox famously identified in *The Secular City* (1965), and what Asad calls the "triumphalist" accounts of reason and secularism (Asad, 2003: 88, cf. Asad, 2009: 46 n. 64). Colin Jager defines it succinctly enough: "the idea that religion declines as societies modernize" (Jager, 2008: 2). This secularism ascribes to an emphatically materialist worldview, which denies the existence of the supernatural, spiritual, or transcendent. Its imaginaries are stridently immanent, and its complexities are born only of matter.[7] In the words of Wallace Stevens, it declares, "Let be be finale of seem" (Stevens, 1990: 64). Noting that Deleuze was willing to "take the step of dispensing with God," Massumi finds the Deleuzian philosophy to be distinguished from its contemporaries by the idea that "ideality is a dimension of matter" (2002: 36). The secularism inherent in the materialist basis of affect theory finds fit correlation in the projects of liberation often attached to affect, those originating in queer theory, feminism, and critical race theory, which have often required a secular mindset, given religious histories of oppression and exclusion.

From within emphatic naturalism and as part of the new materialisms, theorists of affect have reconceived the potential of matter, as in Patricia Clough's idea of its "in-formational" "self-organization" (Clough, 2008: 1), or William Connolly's conception of "radical immanence" (129), which imagines a degree of openness in a universe whose capacity for autopoeisis produces a felt sense of "wonder" (Connolly, 2010: 133). Diana Coole and Samantha Frost assert that "materiality is always something more than 'mere' matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative,

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6 | Hirschkind goes further than Warner, to ask not simply for "constant qualification" but for an "analytical distance from what is clearly a foundational dimension of modern life" (Hirschkind, 2011: 634). Warner ultimately opines of studies of secularism, "The more we understand, the more problems we see" (Warner, 2012: n. pag.).

7 | Linked across thinkers from Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) to John Toland (1670-1722) to Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), immanence conceives of substance without pre-existing cause, where objects remain "immanent to one another" and are "mutually constitutive" (Daniel Colucciello Barber, 2010: 163). Immanence "precludes every transcendent plane" so that there is nothing "beyond immanence" (2010: 163): "Immanence refuses anything other than its own immanent operation" (2010: 163). Reading Deleuze's monograph on Baruch Spinoza, Giorgio Agamben finds "the idea of immanence has its origins in Spinoza's affirmation of the univocity of Being in contrast to the Scholastic thesis of *analogia entis*, according to which Being is not said of God and finite creatures in the same way" (Agamben, 1999: 226).

productive, unpredictable" (Coole and Frost, 2010: 9). Outlining eight orientations onto theorizations of affect, Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg describe one like-minded orientation that "embraces pluralist approaches to material," to a celebration of

> scientific practices that never act to eliminate the element of wonder or the sheer mangle of ontological relatedness but, in Isabelle Stengers's words, "make present, vivid and mattering, the imbroglio, perplexity and messiness of a worldly world, a world where we, our ideas and power relations, are not alone, were never alone, will never be alone" (2007, 9). Here affect is the hinge where mutable matter and wonder (ofttimes densely intermingled with world-weary dread too) perpetually tumble into each other. (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010: 8)[8]

As Ruth Leys observes—in her critique of the affective turn—such theorists "seek to recast biology in dynamic, energistic, nondeterministic terms that emphasize its unpredictable and potentially emancipatory qualities" (Leys, 2011: 441). Such a sense is given vivid literary form by Ian McEwan in *Saturday* (2005), when his protagonist, neurosurgeon Henry Perowne, stands before an opened brain:

> Just like the digital codes of replicating life held within DNA, the brain's fundamental secret will be laid open one day. But even when it has, the wonder will remain, that mere wet stuff can make this bright inward cinema of thought, of sight and sound and touch bound into a vivid illusion of an instantaneous present, with a self, another brightly wrought illusion, hovering like a ghost at its centre. (McEwan, 2005: 262)

An emphatic materialism dominates and determines, but in such a way that McEwan's and Connolly's, Seigworth's and Melissa Gregg's "wonder" endures.[9]

A seeming paradox of affect theory's dedicated material secularism emerges in its knotty relationship with rationality. While a naturalist ontology and the findings of contemporary neuroscience—which depend themselves on a scientific rationalism—ground many theorizations of affect, it has needed to reverse "a longstanding cultural bias that set irrational, seething emotions against the cool, analytic operations of reason," in Altieri's reading (Altieri, 2003: 4). Affect and emotion, in this sense, can come to "complement reason by establishing salience and by constituting versions of value that ground private interests in shared cultural concerns" (2003: 4).[10] Leys summarizes the relation to reason of the pre-cognitive types of affects explored most notably by Massumi, Thrift, and Eric Shouse, among others:

> what motivates these scholars is the desire to contest a certain account of how, in their view, political argument and rationality have been thought to operate. These theorists are gripped by the notion that most philosophers and critics in the past (Kantians, neo-Kantians, Habermasians) have

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8 | In keeping with my description of affect studies as materialist and scientific, Seigworth's and Gregg's eight orientations variously emphasize their ascription to these naturalist ontologies, but never stray from their fundamental claims.

9 | That sense of wonder has been a central affect of modernity, coming, for instance, at the core of Joyce's *Ulysses*, when Leopold Bloom watches the ghost of his son Rudy read enigmatically from the Haggadah: BLOOM (*Wonderstruck, calls inaudibly*.) Rudy! (15.4961-4962)

10 | For Altieri, the arts offer a different mode of "conceptual orientation toward affective experience," one that sees "affective states as ends in themselves" not "means for generating actions and attitudes" and where "states, roles, identifications, and social bonds become possible" if we "dwell fully within these dispositions of energies and the modes of self-reflection they sustain" (Altieri, 2003: 5).

> overvalued the role of reason and rationality in politics, ethics, and aesthetics, with the result that they have given too flat or "unlayered" or disembodied an account of the ways in which people actually form their political opinions and judgments. (Leys, 2011: 436)

In one reading, what we might call the complementary one, affect can come to inform aesthetic and political judgments alongside reason in a kind of collaboration that improves our evaluations. In another, affect reveals reason's pretensions to objectivity; it unmasks the pre-cognitive affects that actually govern our judgments. Even while affect depends upon a robust rationalism particularly focused on cognitive science, it modifies and inflects—(might we even say "weakens"?)—the traditional accounts of reason most often put to other purposes for the secular project, specifically to mount an opposition against "irrational" religious belief. Linked most explicitly in modernity by Friedrich Schleiermacher's description of a sense of felt dependency on God, religion and emotion are most emphatically rejected in one popular conception of Enlightenment reason. Brad S. Gregory describes and critiques this rationalistic model as the normative one in the modern university, where "knowledge and reason—in contrast to faith and feelings—are and must be secular" (Gregory, 2012: 34).

A second complication of secular affect stems from the implications of its spatial and descriptive metaphors, which often echo descriptions of mystical states and that open space for religious meaning in the language of indiscernability, becoming, and indefiniteness. Clough describes the "imperceptible dynamism of affect" (Clough, 2008: 2) and the "the dynamism of matter that had been hidden" amid critical and cultural "oppositions" (5). Massumi speaks of the "infraempirical" (2002: 16) and "superempirical" (2002: 152) qualities of affects, what Clough describes as his attention to an "incorporeal, nonphenomenal complexity that is the condition of possibility of the empirical" (2002: 4). Shouse, who defines affects as distinct from emotions in that they are "pre-personal," sees them as a "non-conscious experience of intensity," "a moment of unformed and unstructured potential," which "cannot be fully realised in language" (Shouse, 2005: 5), while Mark Hansen's study of affects attends to how the "unframed, disembodied, and formless" becomes embodied (Hansen, 2004: 13). Both Leo Spinks as well as Seigworth and Gregg read Deleuze and Guattari to describe ways of becoming in which, in Spinks's terms, "blocks of sensation […] take us beyond the limits of subjectivity" (Spinks, 2001: 37).

Knee-jerk transcendentalism, where religious meaning is assumed to float amid any and all ambiguities, need not kick in at every flight into abstract metaphor: affect theory's language of ineffability and pre-bodily intensities is not necessarily theological. Yet, could such

open descriptions of affect and its modes inadvertently include a new space for religious meaning, which often deploys precisely the same linguistic and spatial set of metaphors, those of disembodiment, of outside consciousness, of nonphenomenal complexity, of abstract becoming? Certainly the intention behind these terms, as affect theorists use them, is material and secular. But does their formation within affect theory do enough to foreclose the reach of the supernatural? And, if the descriptive and metaphorical language of affects inadvertently opens a space for new religious meaning, how could a literary experience like "wonder" be containable? Can it be delimited and taxonimized in such a way that it resonates as a contained affect, one immanent in its reach, without any implication of religious transcendence? Rather than stridently reassert a naturalist ontology of the affects, theorists committed to secularism would need to re-express affect in such a way that they specifically and carefully foreclosed the possibility for supernatural transcendence and ensured instead a strictly materialist grounding for affects.

2. Is the Body Secular?

These tensions and unseen complications in affect theory's materialist ontology take on more sinister form when they are applied to the body, which affect theory largely assumes as strictly material and so strictly secular. As we saw earlier, these assumptions stem partly from the Darwinian and biological line of affect theory, which originates with Tomkins's work and that has as one of its founding assumptions the axiom that the human and the human body are only biological, that is, material. A second line of affect theory, that which stems from Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, imagines the body within the plane of immanence and so produces essentially the same biological, material concept of bodies, though as Joe Hughes rightly observes, "the body has an uncertain place in Deleuze's work" and is "a problematic site" (Hughes, 2011: 1-2).

While Deleuze might not offer a sustained theory of the body, by imagining the body from within what he reads as Spinoza's univocal idea of Being, he produces a body that can only exist within immanence, that can only function on the "common plane of immanence on which all bodies, all minds, and all individuals are situated" (Deleuze, 1988: 122). In response to the question, "How does Spinoza define a body?" Deleuze asserts that there are "two simultaneous ways" that establish individual bodies: in one way, a body "is composed of an infinite number of particles" and the relations of these particles "define a body" (123). In the second way, "a body affects other bodies," and from these origins in Spinoza Deleuze proceeds to his discussion of affects and "affective capacity"

(Deleuze, 1988: 123ff). By taking as given a univocal theory of Being that situates bodies on a plane of immanence without, by definition, the possibility of transcendence, Deleuze initiates an affect theory that ontologically precludes those forms of experience incompatible with immanence and its implied materialism. He removes, by an act of ontological definition, the possibility of a religiously transcendent affect. Yet doesn't an assumed immanent, material, and secular body involve a foreclosure that would amount to a control over the body and its affects, to mapping a normative immanence, materialism, and, hence, a secularism that is forced onto the bodies of others, including those bodies that feel religiously?

*Announcing its intervention in the fields of cultural studies and theory, Massumi's Parables resists precisely this idea of a body confined to the framework of others, specifically to a grid, a grid-locked body: "*How does a body perform its way out of a definitional framework that is not only responsible for its very 'construction,' but seems to prescript every possible signifying and counter-signifying move as a selection from a repertoire of possible permutations on a limited set of pre-determined terms?" (2002: 3). But to what degree might that project itself reinscribe the body within an account that is strictly material, that limits the body's possibilities to "matter in its most literal sense" or to feeling within immanence only (2002: 4)?

Asking whether a secular body exists, Charles Hirschkind asserts that "a secular person is someone whose affective-gestural repertoires express a negative relation to forms of embodiment historically associated with (but not limited to) theistic religion" (Hirschkind, 2011: 638). Going further than Hirschkind, one determinant element of the secular body is not only a "negative relation" to "theistic religion," but to a religious body, to ways of feeling religiously, to those affects that depart from a concept of the world as univocal and unique matter alone. In this sense, the "indeterminacy" Massumi sees in a body would be a qualified one; it would be the body imagined within the limits of materialism alone (Massumi, 2002: 5). For Massumi, the body's indeterminancy, "its openness to an elsewhere and otherwise than it is, in any here and now," is "inseparable from it," "strictly coincides with it," but carries a "charge" that "is not itself corporeal" (2002: 5). Emphatic emphasis falls on both parts of this seemingly incompatible formulation: there is "an incorporeal dimension *of the body*" that is also "[r]eal, material, but incorporeal" (2002: 5). And, to think this "real-material-but-incorporeal" dimension, Massumi uses the metaphor of energy's relation to matter. Yet, the material ground of this conception of affects renders the indeterminancy of the body determinant to the grid of positions demarcated by materialism. Bodily indistinction or indiscernability, a source of seeming liberation, is thus always already inscribed within the secular logic of naturalism. The body of others becomes an immanent domain.

Doesn't such a mandate for affects suggest that materialist understandings are an exercise in critical power, a reiteration of one form of intolerance toward not only the beliefs of another, albeit supernatural and "irrational" ones, but toward that other's body, its affects, and its modes of feeling as well? Is it not only what Rey Chow wonders might be "epistemological disenfranchisement," but a deeper ontological and bodily one as well (Chow, 2005: 874)? When affect theory shifts modes of critical validation from cognitive rationality and belief to feeling and emotion, it unconsciously adjusts typical denials of religious meaning as well: instead of rejecting the beliefs of religious believers, affect theory's implications would seem to require a rejection of their feelings and so of their bodies as well, of the ways in which religious bodies register the world and its impressions, a religious sense and a religious body always preemptively assumed to be incompatible with the findings of naturalism and always confined within immanence. If the irrational no longer suffices as a dismissive category, and reason has been subordinated or complicated by affect, what potential means of invalidating religion would remain, aside from bluntly and uncritically asserting materialism?[11] And, if postsecularism further shifts the site of religious meaning from rational belief to affective feeling, can those religious feelings be discounted in the same way religious beliefs have been traditionally resisted as irrational? Would an intolerance toward postsecular feeling not be a kind of biopolitics, one that enforces, through a kind of critical violence, secular meanings onto bodies and onto life?

3. Postsecular Affects/Postsecular Literature

That enforced secular feeling has come at a time when many seem to feel less than secular. Julian Barnes's felt loss at the death of God describes equally a broader cultural affect that has been taken up by a number of recent studies. In *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age*, Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrace Kelly bemoan the "nihilism of our secular age," one that "leaves us with the awful sense that nothing matters" (Dreyfus and Kelly, 2011: 71). Charles Taylor also sees in our contemporary condition a "malaise of modernity" (Taylor, 2007: 302) and a "malaise of immanence" (307). In *A Secular Age*, he asserts that such disaffection breeds the sense that "actions, goals, achievements, and the like, have a lack of weight, gravity, thickness, substance" (2007: 307). There is the "sense that all [our] answers are fragile, or uncertain; that a moment may come, where we no longer feel that our chosen path is compelling, or cannot justify it to ourselves or others" (2007: 308). Ultimately, he asserts that "[t]he sense can easily arise that we are missing something, cut off from something,

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11 | In one perhaps surprising and strikingly widespread approach, this resistance to religious feeling is actually articulated in the form of secular feelings. Rey Chow uses the term "unsettling" to describe her reading of Bill Brown's use of religion as a means of interrogating "a certain epistemological limit in contemporary critique" (Chow, 2005: 874). Simon During describes his reaction to Brown's article as one of "disquiet," since, if Brown's theories were accepted, it could "increase the amount of religion in the world" (During, 2005: 876). Aamir R. Mufti, introducing a recent issue of *boundary 2* that challenges postsecularism, uses nearly the same language, asserting that the postsecular provokes a feeling of "concern and disquiet" (Mufti, 2013: 3). In "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?", Saba Mahmood rightly calls for a "labor of critique" that will "recognize and parochialize" these "affective commitments" (Mahmood, 2009: 91).

that we are living behind a screen" (2007: 302), living with "a sense of malaise, emptiness, a need for meaning" (2007: 302). The particular kind of feeling this appraisal of late modernity describes moves from sensation to affect in the shared sense of a vertigo or nausea of meaningless, an "awful sense" (Dreyfus and Kelly), "a sense of malaise" (Taylor). If this is so, as I think it is, then Teresa Brennan's transmission of affect indeed applies not only to the location of the clinic, but to the entire climate of a culture. Warner is right as well when he observes that secularism and postsecularism seem to operate as moods, attitudes, or atmospheres, not merely analytical concepts (Warner, 2012: n. pag.). Secularism and postsecularism, then, can be seen as ways of feeling, modes that each allow and foreclose certain types of emotion and certain affects.

A postsecular sense has emerged in theorists like Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Luc Nancy, and in broad reappraisals of Abraham and Paul in critical theory. Žižek describes his sense of the absolute—the central value of his book *The Fragile Absolute, or Why the Christian Legacy is Worth Fighting For*—precisely through a metaphor of affective response, one articulated in the temporality of the modernist moment:

> That is to say: what *is* the Absolute? Something that appears to us in fleeting experiences - say, though the gentle smile of a beautiful woman, or even through the warm caring smile of a person who may otherwise seem ugly and rude: in such miraculous but *extremely fragile* moments, another dimension transpires through our reality. As such, the Absolute is easily corroded; it slips all too easily through our fingers, and must be handled as carefully as a butterfly. (Žižek, 2000: 128) [12]

The religious energies of this passage come into dramatic relief next to Schleiermacher's description in *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799) of the moment the self senses contact with the divine through religious feeling:

> Did I venture to compare it, seeing I cannot describe it, I would say it is fleeting and transparent as the vapour which the dew breathes on blossom and fruit, it is bashful and tender as a maiden's kiss, it is holy and fruitful as a bridal embrace. Nor is it merely like, it is all this. It is the first contact of the universal life with an individual. (Schleiermacher, 2008: 43)

James Joyce, too, has Stephen Dedalus conceive of his "spiritual" epiphany along these lines in the drafts of *Stephen Hero* from the scene of the modern in the early twentieth century:

> By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments. (Joyce, 1963: 243)

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12 | While Žižek purports to reject postsecularism, especially in deconstruction, in his essay "The Real of Sexual Difference," under the heading "'Post-Secular Thought'? No Thanks!", his positions in *The Fragile Absolute*, *Belief*, and *The Puppet and the Dwarf* position him within the concerns and procedures of the postsecularism that I have outlined.

As these three broad points of strikingly similar description suggest—from Schleiermacher, to Joyce, to Žižek, with no clear direct influence—religious feeling persisted as a key component of meaning, particularly linked to the modernist transformative moment. Today's new formation in the postsecular recasts these enduring religious energies in the body and its sense of affect, where a postsecular body stands open to an ambiguous range of experiences that cannot be inscribed within the catergories of secular materialism alone. Such postsecular bodies slough off the buffering Taylor identifies in the secular subject who is closed to supernatural impingement (Taylor, 2007: 38).

Literary scholars including Manav Ratti, Amy Hungerford, and John A. McClure have catalogued the varieties of postsecularism across varied points in contemporary writing, while Pericles Lewis has located a kind of postsecularism in aberrations and deviations from the presumptive secularism of European modernism. For McClure, postsecularism describes "a mode of being and seeing that is at once critical of secular constructions of reality and of dogmatic religiosity" (McClure, 2007: ix), a sensibility attuned to "new forms of religiously inflected seeing and being" that are "dramatically partial and open ended" (2007: ix). When Hungerford and McClure describe the postsecular engagements of contemporary American writers, their language is precisely that of affects: McClure's terms are those of "religious energy," while Hungerford's are "religious feeling." Each begins with a descriptive analysis of this postsecular phenomenon, but both finally turn in similar ways to the kinds of critical and public authority such postsecular affects could claim. In "Postmodern/Post-Secular: Contemporary Fiction and Spirituality," McClure describes the advent of postsecular culture in part as a "resurgence" of "spiritual energies" (McClure, 1995: 143), ones that have been mobilized in certain forms of postmodern fiction to resist "conventionally secular constructions of reality" (1995: 143). Taking into perspective the "unprecedented power" of these challenges allows us to "generate 'thicker,' more fully culturally contextualized, readings of canonical postmodern texts" (1995: 147). The language of "energies," one he shares with affect theorists like Massumi and Altieri, returns in McClure's *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* when he reads Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* as a play that opens the audience to the possibility that the world is "shot through with mysterious agents and energies" (McClure, 2007: 2). For McClure, the play understands religion "not as a monolithic truth but as a complex field of enigmatic apparitions, assertions and counterassertions," of complicated "energies and claims" (2007: 3). Energy provides a central descriptive metaphor for his study: he describes formations like "redemptive energies" and "enabling religious energy" (2007: 77, 103). These experiences lead to a strange new kind of personal power: "larger claims for any

one tradition's universal reach, absolute accuracy, and authority are denied" (2007: 5). Instead, personal discernment, "intuition," secular and religious, guides the self through "the sense that the world is seamed with mystery and benignity, by awakened impulses to reverence, wonder, self-forgetfulness, and care" (2007: 6). The authority of these experiences, then, is open and ambiguous, but usually directed to progressive politics.

Following McClure's work, Hungerford's *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960* shows how "meaninglessness and religious feeling interact in contemporary fiction" (Hungerford, 2010: xxi), to produce a belief without belief, a belief that occurs in the space of literature. In the literary "beliefs" and "practice" of the writers she surveys, Allen Ginsberg, Don DeLillo, Cormac McCarthy, and Toni Morrison, Hungerford finds a "species of religious thought" and "of religious practice," one where "meaning drops away from language […] to create a formal space that we find filled with religious feeling, supernatural power, otherworldly communion, and transcendent authority" (2010: xvi). Feeling provides perhaps the central means of perceiving this transcendence, specifically "religious feeling," but one disconnected from previous conceptions of religion where doctrine and a canonizing approach to inspired texts were central. Yet, whereas the literary works she examines might disavow the moral and theological claims of scriptures like the Bible, for her contemporary literary writers a "sacred aura persists as a religious feeling about literary form" (2010: 79). Like Massumi's study of affects and like McClure's of postsecularism, Hungerford ultimately connects her study of religious language and literary belief with the larger question of cultural authority in the wake of modernism, postmodernism, and poststructuralism. Ginsberg, DeLillo, McCarthy, and Morrison attempt to craft a form of "literary authority closely allied with the ambitions of modernism" (2010: 136) where "the turn to religious authority" offers a form of restored cultural power in the wake of "deconstruction and multiculturalist critique" (2010: 136). That renewed energy comes in the shape of an affective force, where religious authority appeals to literary figures because it is an "authority that can be mobilized at the level of feeling" (2010: 136, cf. 166).[13]

The American focus of McClure and Hungerford can be expanded beyond the perhaps more religious United States to include the form of the contemporary novel, both in its local or vernacular instances and in those that aspire to circulated globally, those that Rebecca Walkowitz recently calls "born translated" (Walkowitz, 2015: 3). With early examples in works by Graham Greene— *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948)—or Shusaku Endo— *Silence* (1966), *Scandal* (1986)—such undeniably postsecular affects emerge across a wide range of contemporary novels, from those read by academic critics, such as works like Peter Carey's *Oscar and*

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13 | These new postsecular feelings occur for writers and critics like McCarthy, Frank Kermode, and Robert Alter in high literary form, "the site," for Hungerford's reading of them, "of religious feeling" (Hungerford, 2010: 105). In her discussion of Alter, Hungerford observes that one central distinction between his moment at the end of the twentieth century and the ancient moments of canon formation that are on his mind is a qualitative difference in the relationship between religion and doctrine. Doctrine is no longer "central," it is "evoked as something like religious feeling" (2010: 86). In Hungerford's analysis of McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* as a new kind of "sentimental novel of the highest order," one that "withholds all but the aesthetic and sentimental effects of scripture," the work "is designed to make us feel, above all, like God is speaking" (2010: 95).

Lucinda (1997); J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), *Elizabeth Costello (*2005), and most recently *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013); Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), *The English Patient* (1992), and *Anil's Ghost* (2000); Jeanette Winterson's *Weight: The Myth of Atlas and Hercules* (2006); David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010), and *The Bone Clocks* (2014); or, A. S. Byatt's *Ragnarok: The End of the Gods* (2011), to popular novels like Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2001). If theorists of affect have inadequately attended to the religious implications and openings in affect theory, literary critics exhibit similar problems, allowing secular assumptions to blind them to significant religious developments in modern and contemporary literature. While the literary criticism and scholarship of the twentieth and even twenty-first centuries has grown increasingly secular, the content of that study, specifically the novel, has instead shown an openness to, a curiosity about, and a feeling for religion, but in distinctively postsecular forms. These disparate paths between critical writing and literary authorship come to light when, for instance, secular critics express their bafflement and puzzlement at a work like *The Childhood of Jesus*, although Coetzee's novels have long explored postsecular forms of religion and religious feeling.

The idea of a secular novel, even in the face of a flowering of postsecular feeling staged and explored in that form, stems from a hasty reading of Ian Watt's influential assertion that the novel, with its focus on the individual subject and its rejection of the supernatural forces that drove the epic, reflects an ascendant western secularism. In *The Rise of the Novel*, Watt famously observes that "It is therefore likely that a measure of secularization was an indispensable condition for the rise of the new genre. The novel could only concentrate on personal relations once most writers and readers believed that individual human beings, and not collectivities such as the Church, or transcendent actors, such as the Persons of the Trinity, were allotted the supreme role on the earthly stage" (Watt, 1957: 84). Saying that his "impulse is to agree" with Watt on this count, Bruce Robbins has recently powerfully argued for literature itself as a secular project, drawing on a reading of "literature" in Richard Rorty as consensus achieved in freedom, a meaning that resists dogmatic value, tyranny, and authoritarianism (Robbins, 2011: 297, 295). Against Derek Attridge's model of literature as resistant to any project or Hayden White's implication that narrative is a variant of mystical closure, Robbins' ultimate end is to argue for literature itself as a secular concept, one that specifically critiques theodicy.

Yet, Robbins' religious target in the essay turns out to be one rather broad form of classical theodicy, the defense of the goodness of God in the face of evil, pain, suffering, and natural disaster. This more traditionalist and defensive form of religious discourse, *apologetics*,

often entails issues of obedience, authority, and legalism, along with a desire to preserve forms of theology rather than develop them; it has little connection with the openings, ambiguity, and curiosity suggested by the postsecular feelings that haunt the contemporary novels I listed above. These works instead reimagine religious authority through literature's unique position to resist and critique what Robbins, following Rorty, summarizes as "more authoritative discourses" (Robbins, 2011: 295). Postsecular affects seek a less authoritarian form of authority than that traditionally claimed by religion.

At the same time, these new modes of cultural authority grounded in postsecular feeling reverse a long-standing reading of religious experience, dating to William James, when they strive to authorize individual religious feeling through literary form. For James, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902),* mystical states can be "absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come," however, *"No* authority emanates from them which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically" (James, 1936: 410). Watt echoes this merely individual authority when he adds that despite "a measure of secularization," the novel could still present and examine spiritual questions; it just had to be sure that "the realm of the spirit should be presented only through the subjective experiences of the characters" (Watt, 1957: 84). The contemporary novel has followed through on Watt's admonition, but not, as is often thought, to the ends of greater secularization. Instead, the contemporary novel has actually become a form that grants individual religious affect and experience a greater cultural authority.

If critical theory has largely ignored the possibility of thinking affect with postsecularism, the contemporary novel proves to be ahead of us, seeing in narrative form new ways to explore and even authorize postsecular affects. The postsecular novel challenges the limits of our dominant discourses, the enclosed and proscribed meanings of secular reason, and grants to postsecular feeling a global readership and wide literary circulation. But beyond its powers of distribution, the contemporary novel also gives to postsecular affect the fragile authority we find in literature, its power to tell us stories that should shape our public and private lives. These works suggest that we might now begin to feel our way through faith, or at least through the more willing suspension of our disbelief.

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