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# Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event

Lauren Berlant

The essay to follow takes as its literary archive two novels that are, in some strong sense, about the US: Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* (1998) and William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* (2003). However, it claims no interest in contributing to "American Literary History," insofar as that project sees the US as the protagonist of its own story or even as the magnet that organizes stories about it, however chaotically. Rather, this essay takes on the linked problem of writing the history of the present and the literary history of the present. It sees this problem as a problem of affect, a problem of apprehending heightened moments in which certain locales become exemplary laboratories for sensing or intuiting contemporary life.

Sometimes such locales can be national—for example, the nation can be seen as one of the locales of globalization, a place where forces are managed, processes settle, and things happen. But even from that perspective the national is lived simultaneously in diffused and specific places as well as in bodies that are working out the terms of what it means to feel and to be historical at a particular moment. This essay's interest is in the historical sense, particularly of the present—any present, even a past one. How does a particular affective response come to be exemplary of a shared historical time, and in what terms?<sup>1</sup>

On the face of it, affect theory has no place in the work of literary, or any, history. Gilles Deleuze writes, after all, that affects act in the nervous system not of persons, but of worlds.<sup>2</sup> Brian Massumi posits the nervous system as so autonomous that affective acts cannot be intended (35–36). Yet, as they and Teresa Brennan—writing from another tradition—argue, affective atmospheres are *shared*. For the purposes of this brief essay my claim will be that affect, the body's active presence to the intensities of

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the present, embeds the subject in an historical field, and that its scholarly pursuit can communicate the conditions of an historical moment's production as a visceral moment.

Another way to ask this is, why are so many novels so quickly written, these days, about the intimate experience of disasters such as 9/11, and how does the aesthetic rendition of emotionally complex sensual experience articulate with what is already codified as "knowledge" of a contemporary historical moment? How is it possible for the affects to sense that people have lived a moment collectively and translocally in a way that is not just a record of ideology? I will argue later that a particular model of trauma has become, for a certain contemporary literary audience, a main way to talk not about what Cathy Caruth calls "unclaimed experience," but about experiencing the present as an ongoing process and project of collective sensory detection. Especially when the terms of survival seem up for grabs, the aesthetic situation turns to the phenomena of affective disruption and the work of retraining the intuition.

What follows conceives of action and cognition as following out the goals of affect, but more centrally tracks the production of intuition as central to the historicizing sensorium. There is a history, from Henri Bergson on, of this kind of thought about intuition. Additionally, there is a strand within Marxist cultural theory, including everyday life theory, which focuses on the historical novel precisely for its address to the normative affective sensorium that registers history in transitional moments that are both in continuous time and stand out from within it. For this essay's purposes, *The Intuitionist* and *Pattern Recognition*, two novels of the historical present, will provide the main archive for tracking the building of an intuitive sense of the historical present in scenes of ongoing trauma or crisis ordinariness.<sup>3</sup> In it, all generality—what nations do, how power works—is derived from stories constituted by catching up to a crisis already happening in worlds that are being shaped by a collectivity that is also caught up in making and apprehending the present moment. In talking about writing histories of the present it asks what a historicism that takes the affective event seriously might have to attend to, alongside of paying attention to the institutions, events, and norms that are already deemed historic and historical. Both novels feature protagonists distinguished not only by their acute intuition, but also by their professionalization of intuition. My interest is in constructing a mode of analysis of the historical present that moves us away from the dialectic of structure (explanation of what is systemic in the reproduction of the world) and agency (what people do in everyday life), and toward attending to their embeddedness in

scenes that make demands on the sensorium for adjudication, adaptation, improvisation, and new visceral imaginaries for what the present could be.

### 1. Genre, Affect, History

In conjunction with the neuro-affective line of thought with which I opened, Marxist cultural theory, from György Lukács to Fredric Jameson and Harry Harootunian, provides a salutary education in reading history through affect in its frequent return to the historical novel. Paradoxically, this is because of the ways the genre mobilizes anachronism, the overdetermination of any historical moment by forces that each have their own histories and histories of relation to each other.<sup>4</sup> In the historical novel, a past historical moment is opened up as itself anachronistic, a moment in transition; it also refracts a problem in the present of the writing that similarly is emerging and unstable. This juggling of anachronisms within and across moments is achieved aesthetically by embedding the historical narrative in the intensities of affective life, whose activity provides a relay through which the historical can be said to be a space of time not yet overcoded with meaning, and that can be experienced before it is redacted. Yet despite the singularities of affect, the historical novel points to a unity of experience in an ongoing moment that historians can later call epochal, but that at the time was evidenced as a shared nervous system that it was the novelist's project to put out there for readers.

My interest in the historical novel is, therefore, threefold. The first interest attends to genre: *The Intuitionist* and *Pattern Recognition* are historical novels of the recent past, partaking directly in the genre's conventions and specifically addressing the question of how to become literate in the affective apprehension of a newly unstable present moment. The working definition of genre in this paper is: a loose affectual contract that predicts the form that an aesthetic transaction will take. Second, the tradition of Marxist cultural analysis that established its conventions values the historical novel not just because of its status as historical archive of a once-present moment, but because its aesthetic conventions for communicating the you-are-thereness of any present requires making the past apprehensible as affective experience. However, this tradition has not been very precise about the substance, structure, or atmosphere of affect, reducing it to a "feeling," "residue," or "the carnal reality of the human member."<sup>5</sup>

My third motive for focusing on the historical novel as the archive for gleaning the affective substance of any historical

*[D]espite the singularities of affect, the historical novel points to a unity of experience in an ongoing moment that historians can later call epochal, but that at the time was evidenced as a shared nervous system[.]*

present has to do with being an Americanist in the contemporary moment. Americanists who work with literature are trained to read everything these days as a historical novel, as a system of obscured hyperlinks whose archival excavation will tell us something about the operation of power on institutions, infrastructures, and bodies in some past, the fidelity to which purchases critics some latitude for doing creative “readings” and “using theory,” but only if they avoid being anachronistic conceptually. Yet Americanists have not generally been trained to think about the sensual remediation or aesthetics of the historical environment in the affective terms that are embedded in the entexualization and circulation of these same histories, at least after the rise of the historical novel.

The present is often disrespected by people who are cultivating a historical sense. It is conventionally regarded flippantly or romantically, as something fleeting and phantasmatic. Or, to gesture toward Harry Harootyan’s work on the present as historical anachronism, it is seen as the articulation of historical forces that cannot be known fully or well enough by the presently living, who require scholarly and political education toward comprehending the structural and the systemic.<sup>6</sup> Or, paradoxically, the present is seen—for example, by Slavoj Žižek—as affectively ahistorical, a space of distracted disconnection and pseudo-activity, a space protected by disavowals that keep taking blows from a Real that constantly shocks people with unretainable knowledge about what determines the conditions of their lives.<sup>7</sup> Or, as in trauma theory, the present is seen as a symptom, the detritus of the significant relation between lived and remembered pasts and occluded futures.<sup>8</sup>

This essay explores ways of opening up affect to history as a kind of intelligence about it. Affect works in the present, and so the ongoing historical present, rather than being matter for retroactive substantialization, stands here as a thing being made, lived through, and apprehended. I focus on genres of crisis here because the sensorium created by chronic crisis produces the present as a constant pressure on consciousness that forces consciousness to apprehend its moment as emergently historic. As an aesthetic it foregrounds the work and the world of adapting to a situation and desiring to force certain forms of adaptation normatively onto the scene. Affective and aesthetic self-development are mutually constituting in this view. Crisis reveals and creates habits and genres of inhabiting the ordinary while reconstituting worlds that are never futures but presents thickly inhabited, opened up, and moved around in.

These novels further complicate this aesthetically through the use of a wildly freestyle indirect discourse that veers around all knowledge worlds, including consciousness and real and imaginary times and spaces, curating an uninhibited ongoingness that unfolds

an affective map in presence and as the present. The narrators track, they read, and they judge—they superintend and perform “telepoesis.”<sup>9</sup> They are a voice in the head of the book in a way that sublates the realist and the avant-garde without being surreal. The referent reappears explosively and inhabits virtuality and vice versa, remaking contemporary historical time into something lived and stretched out. Processing history amidst the resonances of such encounters, this version of the historical novel aesthetic forces readers to be like the protagonists who are also making sense of things without generic or structural guarantees: we are positioned to live the presented present by being in it, touching, tasting, over-hearing, and tracking how we are responding to it. In the thick and spacious ordinary life present of the works that provide a context for their responses, the protagonists’ ambitious pursuit of an understanding of the presenting situation produces a personal, political, and aesthetic ambit that never quite becomes a bounded event for them or for us, laden with a burgeoning historical sense.

This very need to block the becoming-object of the event is what embeds the affective in the historical. When Foucault talks about eventization, he refers to a need to undo the moment when a happening moves into common sense or a process congeals into an object-event that conceals its immanence, its potentially unfinished or enigmatic activity. In these novelistic histories of the present, the protagonists shift between knowing and uncertain modes of intuition.<sup>10</sup> Tracking this shift enables us to think about being in history as a densely corporeal, experientially felt thing, whose demands on survival skills map not the whole world in one moment, but a way to think about the historicity of epistemologies immanent to living at a particular moment, where feeling it out becomes identical to the activity of being in history and in the aesthetic.

## 2. Feeling In and Feeling Out the Present

*The Intuitionist* and *Pattern Recognition* feature two citizens of the contemporary US world of economic, gendered, and racialized violence, torture, and death; of secreted political, military, and economic power whose processes are open secrets, and yet whose opening to knowledge does not make them any more vulnerable to contestation or transformation. The novels take pains to tell stories of the present’s origins in the past: the techno-utopia of New York’s Crystal Palace of 1853, Jim Crow, the Cold War, 9/11, the global culture of disseminated production and localized consumption, advertising and design as the

new setting for the arts, and the redeployment of state militarism for the protection of intellectual property. *The Intuitionist* also has its eye on an imminently historical and utopian future, in which elevators will violate the “plodding, mundane” physical world as ordinary “citizens” now know it (254). *Pattern Recognition* spends pages speculating on “how we [already] look . . . to the future,” whose unimaginable parameters are changing what we mean as a past, which itself is always changing (54, 57). Both novels, then, embed the history of empire in the long durée of the built world that they convey, but what matters dramatically is how the affective sense of the moment is being transmitted and what sort of organization of force and desire that reveals. In this archive, intuition is the organ that interfaces the sensorium and history, and its rehardwiring provides the drama of survival in the historical present.

For example, shortly after *The Intuitionist* opens, Lila Mae Watson leans against an elevator wall. Lila Mae inspects elevators. She is an African American in a profession that is white supremacist. It is around 1964; most professions are still segregated. The city she lives in, implicitly New York City, has just recovered from a race riot, but things are simmeringly quiet now, in the everyday. That is, they are quiet from the perspectives of the normative event and structurally privileged people, but Lila Mae is an intuitionist. In this novel, Intuitionism is foremost a school of thought that teaches people to take on the sensual perspective of the object they investigate in order to read the state of the object’s health.<sup>11</sup> Intuitionists use an encounter between their bodies and a moving elevator’s wall to produce signs that reveal the elevator’s condition. Intuitionism rivals the Empiricist school of elevator evaluation, whose engineers are deemed throughout to be thugs who “bend down” and look at machinery, but know nothing of affective gestalts. Here is Lila Mae at work:

As the elevator at 125 Walker reaches the fifth floor landing, an orange octagon cartwheels into her mind’s frame. It hops up and down, incongruous with the annular aggression of the red spike. Cubes and parallelograms emerge around the eighth floor, but they’re satisfied with half-hearted little jigs and don’t disrupt the proceedings like the mischievous orange octagon. The octagon ricochets into the foreground, famished for attention. She knows what it is. The triad of helical buffers recedes farther from her, ten stories down the dusty and dark floor of the well. No need to continue. Just before she opens her eyes she tries to think of what the super’s expression must be. She doesn’t come close . . . (6)

James Fulton, the original theorist of Intuitionism, calls these “excreted chemicals, understood by the soul’s receptors . . . true speech” (87), but this affective communication does not work between persons. However, Lila Mae’s nervous system has developed some human-intuitive gifts as well. As she moves toward the elevators she is about to inspect, she negotiates a city landscape whose affects are palpably, intensively, and predictably stressed out. There is a “zero-point” of collective kinetic life, “the locus of metropolitan disaffection . . . situated” (4). The farther she gets from it the more precisely she can “predict just how much suspicion, curiosity, and anger she will rouse in her cases” because she is black, female, poised, reserved, and an expert at something whose expertise is usually associated with a different kind of body, not that of an abstract supremacist elite, but of a white, male, working-class, appetitive subject who enjoys the benefits of the authoritarian personality,<sup>12</sup> with its culture of hierarchy, deference, and pleasure in the torture of outsiders (4). Through an intensity of attentiveness, Lila Mae develops expertise in the shifts and nuances of alpha-male professionalism, and she uses it to intimidate, but not to bond internally with, the pack.

What remains is what goes without saying. In daily life, as she moves farther from the zero-point, she is aware that she will be transacting affective exchanges with the racist and misogynist world that do not congeal into events. She knows that she will do nothing to incite these investments in the perturbations her body makes. Having learned from her father “that white folks can turn on you at any moment” (23), she cultivates “erasing” herself and making “her sad face hard” (36, 57), refusing to play the game of “equality-staring,” or incited response, that shoots through the nervous system of transracial contact in the era of white supremacy (P. Williams 222).

That zero-point, a collective affective habit and norm of the city, is where history reveals itself shaping the affective. Lila Mae’s body has constructed an affective map which predicts the near-future experience of a movement in moments where there are few events in any vernacular sense, few impacts or memorable episodes. Lila Mae knows hardly anyone. She has “been a practicing solipsist since before she could walk” (235). She is safe being this way, a minimalist, surviving because capable of navigating the tacit rules affectively communicated in the historical present.

In fact, the narrator says, in free indirect discourse, “she is never wrong” (9, 197). We witness her sitting in her car and sensing things; waiting in the dark corner of a bar perceiving; wondering, while waiting at red lights. We trust her as far as she trusts herself, which is pretty far. Aleatory thought is where she

lives, except in those few moments of professional performance where, focused, she feels the elevator's health in the affects her body releases, pressed against the vertically moving wall. This is to say that she has developed her intuition into two registers, the machinic and the social. Each reaches regularly its own peaks of demand for affective intelligence.

Thus, most wandering encounters in this novel take place in a penumbra of crisis. The environment is organized by atmospheres of the affective, atmospheric work of the historical novel's "I was there" that speaks to what it felt like to live on in proximity to a suffused violence so systemic and intensity-magnetizing that it is a relief when an event expresses it. The narrator notes that a catastrophe is just "what happens when you subtract what happens all the time" (230). A traumatic event does, then, organize *The Intuitionist*, but this event does not change everything. It threatens to subtend what Lila Mae knows about life, and how she knows it. It induces and reveals a shared history of crisis within the ordinary whose terms the powers that be want to control.

In *The Intuitionist*, the traumatic event that induces and reveals a history of crisis ordinariness is an elevator crash. The crash turns out to be a red-herring. An election is happening for control over the Elevator Guild. The crash offers a sensationalizing opportunity to distract public attention toward the fight between Intuitionists and Empiricists and away from the reproduction of structural inequality. Meanwhile, there is a conspiracy among all of the reigning elevator corporations to destroy plans for a revolutionary elevator whose engineering will make the old technologies archaic, destroy cities as we know them, and bankrupt the companies that control them. This potentially revelatory perturbation in capital and its handmaiden, politics, opens up new contracts between Lila Mae and her world (166). The crash becomes a crisis in the kinds of knowledge that will reign in the elevator public, the political sphere, and for Lila Mae: it sends Lila Mae into a detection pattern of her own that leads to the destruction and rehardwiring of her intuition: for she was the inspector of the elevator that crashed. Lila Mae had read its health the day before, when she checked out the sparkling new Fanny Briggs building (12). Fanny Briggs was a famous escaped slave—now the building, symbolically embodying a US that supports racial uplift, is the scene of a catastrophe that reveals the machinery of white supremacy as at the heart not only of politics and corporate ideology, but engineering itself. Lila Mae senses the elevator calling out to her to clear her name and find the higher truth.

This detective plot reveals slowly a secretly racialized map of twentieth-century utopian technologies. It turns out that Fulton,

having migrated from south to north and from African American to passing white, made up Intuitionism as a joke on engineers that he then came to believe, a story about uplift that violates racial norm and natural law. He invented, in code, a “black box” with the key to a new gravity. Meanwhile, it turns out that the thugs who pursue Lila Mae *and* the people who protect her are also not all they seem. They are corporate agents hot for the information they think that she has because they find her name in Fulton’s notes, and so figure it must be a clue to the location of the dangerous utopian truth, which it is not. He just saw her studying at night at the Institute for Vertical Transport, and asked who she was.

But there are other resonances: She too has migrated from the South, come up north for anonymity. They both love anonymity, and they imagine the utopian city as a place where people live on top of each other but “do not speak. Nobody knows anybody’s business. Nobody knows where you came from” (134). Dread (of being exposed, humiliated, beaten, arrested, lynched) is the most deeply ingrained affective structure of African-American intuition in this novel: northern integration turns out only to shift the nightmarish intimacy of the white supremacist world from “violence to deferred sure violence” (23). This is why theorizing, not achieving, utopia is so necessary. Fulton says, “There is another world beyond this one” (62). This sentence sounds like it is about the future but the point, in the novel, is spatial. Theorizing opens up the present to a lived alternativity *in the present*.<sup>13</sup>

This phrase about the other world is from Fulton’s tome *Theoretical Elevators*. In college it induced Lila Mae’s “conversion” from Empiricism to Intuitionism (59). It reshaped her viscera, changing her intuitions about the world from the habit of being untrusting and politically and socially depressed to the next utopian tendency. The novel tracks her being jolted out of her viscera a second time after the crash. Its affective historicism slyly employs the intensities of the noir novel: find evidence, make people pay, produce justice, and meanwhile, in the opening to attention not just to the built world but to the evidence of motive, become a sucker for love.

“Natchez”—his real name is Raymond Coombs—is an industrial spy who flirts with Lila and makes her remember desire, for the employment of which she has awkward skills. When Lila Mae leaves her comfort zone this time, she becomes *wrong* about everything. In the end, someone else has to tell her the story of her life and expose the uselessness of her intuition, but this revelation does not make her psychotic—she shifts into yet another new intuitionism, in which she is again intimate with the world of

things, but alienated from the world of capital and love, with its tricks of false reciprocity.

As the novel closes, Lila Mae steals Fulton's utopian manuscripts and goes on the lam. She finds rooms in anonymous places. She commits to extending his unfinished work in her reenactment of his own voice in hers, to produce a better-engineered intuition of an immanent present that will break all of the empirical rules. No future, no past, just an uncompromised now. We note that a very creepy gender dynamic is expressed in the novel's intuitionist story, a pattern repeated in *Pattern Recognition*: women take on men's projects to emancipate their intuition. Also, the necessity of labor falls away—how *does* Lila Mae live? Noir becomes romance becomes utopian novel, all the while insisting that it is *history*—which it is, affectively. It is as though her intuitional shift to living a fearless racialized imaginary in the present, with no fidelity toward protecting the built white world as such, and theorizing the beyond as an act of vitalism, performs sustenance enough. In *The Intuitionist*, therefore, a series of errors makes traumas whose collective suspension of the normative real opens up into a new realism, toward creating the architecture of a new ordinariness that she, and we, can only intuit. Lila Mae gives up the foundational fantasy that utopia—or upward mobility, meritocracy, the American dream—comes later. It is that stretched-out now—or never.

Cayce Pollard, the protagonist of William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, is an intuitive, like Lila Mae, and likewise has turned her intuition into a career. To be more precise, she is a "sensitive," "allergic" to commoditized icons, like the Michelin bibendum or the Tommy Hilfiger logo (2, 8, 164, 188). Post-epistemological in a world "more post-geographic than multinational," a world where she "has no way of knowing how she knows" what is powerful (12), she is not debilitated by this condition. We see her go "sideways," falling apart at the force of the commoditized sign, and she, too, is never wrong (17). The very authenticity of her powerful nonsovereignty makes people want to hire her, to link their products to her nervous system. She markets her nerves as a freelancer, one of the sovereign figures of neoliberalism, the person on contract who makes short-term deals for limited obligation and thrives through the hustle over the long haul. However, she prefers precarity to the too-closeness of the world, and the novel is structured around her physical and affective migration from one place to another, a becoming found in becoming lost that is like giving "herself to the dream" (309). But in this, she is an extreme of exemplarity, not special. Everyone is on the make in *Pattern Recognition*: advertising, movie making, viral marketing,

recycling trash into kitsch. Hubertus Bigend, head of Blue Ant, the advertising firm with which she is presently contracted, tells her that it is the empire of the amygdala, the epoch of the limbic system that “culture tricks us into recognizing . . . as all of consciousness” (69). A woman of affect, not of feeling, Cayce is the empress of the amygdala.

The language Gibson’s narrator uses for Cayce’s post-sovereign sensorium is not solely the language of dissolution, however, because she has the skills to ride the wave of the moment, to make her situation what it is, a thing to live through, be embedded in, and *feel out*. In this, so described, her ordinary life sounds singular to her sensitivity and not unusual at all. It manifests the career and careening of what Katie Stewart calls “speculation, curiosity, and the concrete . . . the forces that come into view as habit or shock, resonance or impact. *Something* throws itself together in a moment as an event and a sensation. A something both animated and inhabitable” (4). This is to say that Cayce has a singular talent for reading the trademark’s immanent and imminent power, but she is sharing in a general nervous system.

The novel provides a number of cognate aesthetic forms for organizing this intelligence: steganography, a practice of watermarking or distributing information by concealing it throughout other signification (74–76), and apophenia, “the spontaneous perception of connections and meaningfulness in unrelated things” (115). The distributed writing is associated with men like her father, the spy; the psychic power, with women like her mother. What is dependable is the incessant communication between beings, transversing through sensation all points of the grid of encounter. Otherwise the world lives manifestly without guarantees, where the potentiality of the deal that could always sour is the primary affect of optimism, and the potentiality of an intimate and economic world of genuine, not technical, reciprocity is held out contractually and is otherwise more or less accidental.

Cayce generalizes her own sense of contingency to the atmospheres of the present because, like Lila Mae, she has encountered a trauma, a situation that has become stuck in the event. And, as Lila Mae’s elevator crash just organizes and foregrounds a racial and gendered situation as a crisis within the ordinary, so too the situation of unstable affect ballasted by “psychological prophylaxis” (46) that Cayce has been living has been brought to focus by an event of trauma and ungrieved grief that is personal and political. *Pattern Recognition* is organized by the relation of two shared public events: the destruction of the Twin Towers on 9/11 and the shared obsession of myriad strangers with footage of a kiss that appears mysteriously on the web. These

events organize *Pattern Recognition* in a cluster of temporalities engendered by production, circulation, and consumption. They are marked epochally by the Cold War and its successor, the industrial espionage of global capital. Each locale has its own relation to the footage, which “has a way of cutting across boundaries, transgressing the accustomed order of things” (20). Footage, of course, measures distance, not time: this is footage released not in feet but in frames, which measure multiple potentialities and contemporaneous mirror worlds more than the time of projection or what might be amounted to, if they add up to narrative time. It is instead footage in the time of its *rendering* (as we discover later in the narrative, when Cayce finds the Russian maker and watches her work); footage in the time of *posting and being encountered* (which goes on infinitely, in waves, as different publics hear about the absorption of other publics in a scene of *intensity* that is, by being available on the web, porously accessible by anyone with access, at any time); and footage as a site of potential conversation and expertise for anyone motivated to belong, for whatever reason, to the intimate public created by the circulation of the kiss.

But whatever potentiality exists here is not about futures, in any real sense of world-changing. It is about alternative presents, interrupting what there is and world-making in the just now, the thick space of the present moment that keeps being reiterated not as a utopian ahistoricism, an immanent future, or the negation of the capitalist, commodified present.<sup>14</sup> People follow their intuitions and so change the shape of the present, which is not fleeting at all, but a zone of action in a transitioning space. Like *The Intuitionist*, this is a drama of adjustment, of intuitive retraining.

9/11 appears first in a chapter called “Singularity.” The concept of singularity bridges what is absolutely ungeneralizable about the subject and the place where the space-time continuum folds in on itself and becomes a black hole—trauma. Intuiting and transforming the intuitive relation of those two irreconcilable concepts, recapturing the present, is one version of the work of the novel. To be in trauma historically is to diffuse it into ordinary crisis. Cayce’s father, Wingrove Pollard, former CIA agent and security entrepreneur, has disappeared in the chaos of 9/11—he is in another place where the systematicity of power is revealed, where the personal meets the impersonal. The novel works through this articulation of the singular and the politically traumatic event through the homeopathy of a detective plot on which Cayce is sent. This forces her to be absorbed in someone else’s project, and the interruption of her intuition by the “critical event stress” of pursuing that project (354) enables her progressively to feel what she has only been able to sense while not becoming lost within

mourning. Another way to say this is that she rewires the trauma into a crisis and moves through that to an atmosphere of diminished intensity, a new, post-intuitive home. In the end, she feels “the recent weirdness of her life shift beneath her, rearranging itself according to a new paradigm of history. Not a comfortable sensation” (340) at first but then, supremely satisfying.

The vehicle for this plot is the film of the kiss, housed on the website F:F:F, Fetish Footage Forum, where fans all over the world debate whether the slowly emerging collection of film frames that seem to stage a heterosexual kiss are a narrative or something nonteleological, a work in progress. The silly seriousness of fan culture echoes the image of the parodic political debates in *The Intuitionist*. Here, the Progressivists, who think that the film is unfolding frame by frame without a plan, fight theory and concept with the Completists, who believe a completed object is being released puzzle piece by puzzle piece (46–47). Bankrolled by Blue Ant’s obsession with viscerally powerful marketing, Cayce flies all over the world to solve the mystery of the film of the lovers. Her only resources are the skills she inherits from her father, a spy who understands secrecy and security, and her mother, a psychic who hears voices from the other world through a kind of electronic static.

Inheriting ways of knowing the unknowable, Cayce travels to Russia, London, trailer parks, Tokyo, the subway, the train, the sidewalk, and the plane. She wanders, drinks coffee, asks questions, theorizes, and sleeps a *lot*. She learns to “table all intentionality” (256)—like Lila Mae, she makes dozens of errors and has close calls. But Cayce is no modernist flaneuse: the aleatory is a professional *style* by the time of *Pattern Recognition*. Life, like the film and everything else, turns out to be “a work in progress.” Cayce genuinely detaches from her intuitional style; she begins to see singularity, and so can be in the room with things, and attach to persons. She ends the novel post-soul lag, in bed with Parkaboy, the one attachment she has made from within the traumatic moment. They are both hustlers, exemplary cultural producers not housed anywhere, but creative embodiments of globalization’s subjectivity-on-the-make. Still, even they need a vacation from it all, an impasse folded into the impasse of the present.

Likewise, trauma does not make experiencing the historical present impossible, but possible: not in the sense that it still has a conventional biography to tell that provides a foundation for possessive identity, but that as the trauma shatters the biostory that was a blockage to living, it transforms the whiplash of temporalities that could have been stuckness into singularities that produce epistemophilia so powerful that the world seems a place not to master but to

attend to, move around in, and survive without much of a plot, or guarantees, at all. I am not making victorious noises here, either for *The Intuitionist* or *Pattern Recognition*—the world without guarantees is the world without safeguards too, the neoliberal world of contract intimacies and flexible, fragile networks. The novels address the productivity of ordinary crisis as also a potentiality that is accessible, at times, as a felt sense and structure of affinity and solidarity, a lived utopianism of *we-are-there-ness*.

In short, in each novel, after two historico-traumatic moments when the frame of an ongoing translocal life in a national context is abolished by a catastrophic event, the sensorium of everyday life changes suddenly and in ways that no one could control or predict. Yet this event does not change the fact of living on but becomes absorbed in a new ordinariness. There is a change in the emotional weather, the atmosphere, the public discussion of causality and consequences. The protagonist also changes, and her changes are both shared and singular. I have described how, in both novels, crisis within the ordinary incites research projects, going to the library, to the internet, and to other humans to find out something not in the idiom of pasts and futures, no longer about the past's presence as *revenant*, but about the present's ongoing condition. The way they live felt like something else, before crisis perturbed them and pushed on them a demand to cruise the situation and redirect it toward a better here and now. In these works, historical pasts and phantasmatic futures are the heuristics that bring us back to what is affectively charged and experienced in, but what can only be intuited as, the historical present.

### Notes

1. What follows is a short version of the introduction to a more elaborate staging of these concerns in my forthcoming book, *Cruel Optimism*.
2. See Deleuze, "Percept, Affect, and Concept," *What is Philosophy*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (1994), 163–99.
3. See Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Obesity, Sovereignty, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33.4 (2007): 754–80.
4. Harry Harootunian's recent work on anachronism as a defining feature of the neoliberal present rejuvenates my longtime insistence on anachronism's centrality to the historical sense of the historical novel. See especially Harootunian, "Remembering the Historical Present," *Critical Inquiry* 33 (2007): 471–94.

5. Lukács, 32, 38, 48, 58–63, 195–196; R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132 and *The Long Revolution*, 63; Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 6 and *Postmodernism*, 10–11, 15.
6. See Harootyan, “Remembering the Historical Present.”
7. See also Valerie Rohy, “Ahistorical,” *GLQ* 12.1 (2006): 61–83.
8. See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996).
9. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Forum: the Legacy of Jacques Derrida,” *PMLA* 120.2 (2005): 492. The word and concept “telepoesis” is from Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (1997), 32 (translation modified). See also Spivak’s use of the concept in “Harlem,” *Social Text* 22.4 (2004), 116.
10. One might say, then, that to eventalize an event would be to force it from its status as object (use value) to thing (resistant, attractive enigma). For the extensive consequence of the object/thing distinction, see Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28 (August 2001): 1–22. For Foucault on eventalization and the historical present, see “What is Enlightenment?,” *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1984), 32–50, and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969; 1989).
11. Intuitionism seems not to refer to the philosophical project associated with L.E.J. Brower; it is more likely to be in conversation with Bergson.
12. This brief summary derives from Bob Altemeyer’s *The Authoritarians* (2007). To track the development of “authoritarian personality” theory since Adorno, et al., see his introduction at <http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~altemey/>.
13. In claiming that *The Intuitionist*’s utopian gaze is really on the present, I am arguing against Madhu Dubey’s formidable claims about the novel’s fix on futurity in *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism* (2003), 235–41.
14. See Benjamin Blattberg, “The Style of the So-Called Inanimate: Commodity Style in *Sister Carrie* and *Pattern Recognition*,” unpublished manuscript, 2007; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991); and Phillip E. Wegner, “Recognizing the Patterns,” *New Literary History* 38.1 (2007): 183–200.

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