

WEATHERWORLDS:
Affective experience, atmosphere and event

FHS in Geography
2015

CULTURAL SPACES
Candidate Number: 231144
Word Count: 4068

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INTRODUCTION

For Massumi, our lived experience swims in an infinite cloud of infinitesimal monadic awarenesses, 'an uncontrollable, unspecified whole of the flow of things and the world' (Massumi, 2002, 196). Affective experience stretches and ribbons on the cloud-edge of an advancing wave-crest. 'The individual', Deleuze writes, 'is undulatory, launched in orbit, on a continuous beam. It surfs the flows, rides the waves. When surfing, the technology, the surfboard has to slice the wave to ride it. It cuts in, to extract a quantum of forward momentum [...] into the flow of labour extracting a wage. It cuts again with its wage, this time into a flow of goods whose purchase extracts a quantum of life-satisfaction rewarding all the pain and sacrifice that has gone into energising the forward momentum, encouraging one to stay on the wave' (Deleuze, 1987, cited in Massumi, 2015, 53). Lived experience grows in this way by drops and buds, in a flow of events, cuts, pulling out quantum-threads from the torsional coalescence of an unspecified whole, an infinite cloud.

This essay critically examines the relations between affective experience, atmosphere and event. Here, affective experience emerges as a sort of atmospheric, a kind of distributed, immanent field of sensible processuality, the felt reality of relation. Affective experience in this sense is a series of sensory games, of becoming enveloped and exposed to 'what's throwing together and falling apart' (Stewart, 2011, 72), the shape of things and forces as they make a felt difference, a cut in the machine-flow. Primarily, this essay begins with the event. I explore the notion of the event as an affective commotion, a 'something doing' that ventilates (with) intensity, contrast and *compossibilities*. Events in this sense are a sort of immanent and ontogenetic constellation of surface relations, no sooner prehended (by an only-just-there subject) than unravelling, 're-continuing toward new transition.'

The second part of this essay moves more explicitly toward the atmosphere, or the event of atmosphere. Atmosphere by this logic refers to the spatiality of affective experience; the processual, distributed and sensory entanglement of affection, attention, the senses and matter that enfold and unfold the event. For McCormack, atmosphere might be conceptualised through the untethering of a single balloon, its release, generative of an event-envelope of (weather)worlds, subjects and 'interfacial greenhouse effects' (Sloterdijk, 2011). 'Interfacial greenhouse effects' in this sense refer to all the resonating percepts, affects, feelings and sensations stretched between and across bodies: all the anxieties, fears, hopes, dreams, investments; potential expressions and orientations held together contrastively in the event of untethering, of balloon becoming-lighter-than-air. An atmospheric envelope of experience in this sense is always positively

dissensual, non-representational, dissipative: always-already spilling out, unravelling, re-constellating toward new transition in drops and buds and spheres and bubbles.

The third part of this essay tends in this sense toward experimenting and exemplifying affective experience as exposure and envelopment to the atmosphere of event. For Sloterdijk, modern social life is lived, experienced and perceived in a series of foams; our lived experience ribbons on the cloud-edge of an advancing wave, 'like being a water bug, living on the surface tension of some kind of liquid' (Stewart, 2007, 72). The everyday in this sense forms a series of atmospheric envelopes, a foamy aggregate of spheres, little worlds, crystallising commotionally out of an unspecified whole. For Stewart, these little weatherworlds 'proliferate around everything and anything at all': little worlds of hope, anxiety, love, loss, dread and desire (Stewart, 2007, 75). In this respect, I compose a brief story on a flow of events: a financial climate as it collapses into spheres and bubbles colliding and falling apart in the composition of our affective and everyday lives.

THE EVENT

For Massumi, affect is an event, or a dimension of every event. Affect is intensity: 'not a subjective state expressing an affective investment of a person but a dimension of events into which the life of the body is braced' (Massumi, 2008, 2). In this sense, affective intensity is the notion of a qualitative force immanent to events that gives them their power to effect transitions: their 'decisional power to make a cut that re-continues the flow of events' (Massumi, 2015, 17). For Manning, walking in this respect co-composes as a flow of singular events. 'Moving relationally, the walker senses not the step per se [but] the intensity of an opening, the gathering up of forces toward the creation of space-times of experience into which s/he moves' (Manning, 2009, 33).

Affective intensity in this sense is not a dimension of the walker-subject but a qualitative force immanent to the event of tendential relation and commotion, to 'the side of the wire-fence approaching through the leading perceptual edge of the eyes, and the feeling of the ground as it expands toward the pelvis giving into the weight of gravity's pull, participating kinaesthetically in the shifting dynamics of one leg grounding at a time' (Manning, 2009, 34). The event of each footstep-stepping in this sense is complexioned by the atmospheric relations of elements and forces that happen to constellate toward the coming event.

'Now enter a bull at the far end of the field,' Massumi writes. 'The moment the bull makes its presence felt, before you have had time to think consciously, even to the extent of registering the bull in a fully formed act of recognition you are braced into the necessity of living out the situation, for better or worse [...] you are absorbed into the immediacy of the brewing event, a becoming field of potential' (Massumi, 2015, 41). For Whitehead then, there is an additional element to the intensity or vivacity of the affective event that is the

contrasts it holds together. An intensity in this respect is a 'measure of the mutual inclusion of what under other circumstances tend to separate out': whether objects, perceptual forms, qualities, bulls. 'The more such contrasts that an experience is capable of holding in itself' therefore 'the more intense it is, the more surplus value of life it produces' (Massumi, 2015, 43).

The intensity of contrasts immanent to an event's arising in this sense form its *compossibilities*: copresent alternatives as to which transitions - or future-potential footstep-stepping events - might follow. Hence, the emergence of the bull at the far end of the field braces in a new set of alternative action-paths intensifying the flow of events to a greater array of 'compossible tendential unfoldings, held in readiness potential' (Massumi, 2015, 47). These compossibilities furthermore never settle into the coming flush of the event's unfolding. In the few seconds to decide, to cut, everything is up in the air, atmospheric, in a rhythmic quasi-chaos of nearly taking form.

Then the bull startles and begins to run shifting the qualitative tenor of the event again. For Massumi, the bull's 'modulatory gesture' - of muscles catapulting through air - is 'a catalytic event converter, a punctual whole-field resynthesizer' (Massumi, 2015, 49). Fear and the run of running cut in to re-continue the flow of events. Affective experience then emerges as the fronting of the edge of an advancing wave-crest of bull-charge-field-run intensity. For Massumi, this inventive creation of foot-step-running space-times in this sense forms 'the fabulatory art of the event', its finessing of contrastive relations across intensity: the inventing of potential, 'flush with the event's dynamic form of expression, movingly one with its unfolding' (Massumi, 2015, 51).

ATMOSPHERE

Atmosphere and event in this respect are co-composing dimensions of our lived experience. We 'swim in an infinite cloud of infinitesimal monadic awarenenses, gnats of potential experience', the intensities, contrasts and compossibilities of which, we cut into to re-continue the flow of our eventful lives in forward-gaining momentum (Massumi, 2002, 73). Affective experience in this sense is a series of atmospheric stretchings and ribbonings into the qualitative tenors of events. For McCormack (2008), atmospheres are therefore a qualitative dimension of every event. Atmosphere is the intensity in extensity of an event, the experiential plasticity and spatio-temporal complexions of relations, contrasts and compossibilities, movingly one with its unfolding.

McCormack exemplifies the relations between atmosphere, event and affective experience through the 'whole-field resynthesiser' of the balloon. For McCormack, the affective event of untethering - of a balloon becoming lighter-than-air - invents intensity (like a bull) by potentialising the relations between different

bodies in movement: bodies inflating, foot-stepping, running, staring. The balloon in this sense invents the contours and edgings of the event, its spacings and timings.

For Massumi, the time of the affective event's taking-effect is no more linear in time than its moving-relation is in space. The balloon event emerges 'only answerable to its own rhythm, which is fabulated as a whole-field effect from the way in which the relational field has been primed and conditioned' (Massumi, 2015, 71). A tethered balloon in this sense is pre-emptively primed and conditioned to 'the prospect of becoming untethered: felt and sensed affectively as the anticipation of the potential for movement - for sudden, rapid, uncontrolled ascent' (McCormack, 2009, 31). An atmosphere of barely sensed unease merges with the future affective fact of the balloon's untethering to hang like a loose constellation of ethers, mists around the balloon's earthy seams of attachment.

Affective difference swirls in the same priming event, building out of the tendency toward fabulation in individual's perceptual experience. Every body carries a different set of tendencies and capacities (fears of flying, vertigo, memories of fires and mechanical failure and balloons bursting out of the sky) that differentially inflect the(ir) 'future-tensed fixings of the event's intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions of owned and recognised emotions' (Massumi, 2002, 22). For Massumi, this experiential plasticity or difference in unison of the affective event is a return to the bull and its *compossibilities*. Alternative action paths are distributed atmospherically beyond the infra-climate of the (in)dividual and across the bodies, subjectivities and worlds forming in the weatherworlding-event of the balloon coming flush with its own untethering.

ENVELOPMENT AND EXPOSURE

Becoming-untethered. Uplift. 'Everything', McCormack writes, 'is transformed. Things being and becoming lighter than air disclose a vertiginous affective event sensed as the sudden apprehension' (McCormack, 2009, 33) the affective strike of anticipated untetherings actualising in a popping constellation of folds, bulges and inflections skyward. For Engelmann and McCormack (2015), the airy expansion of an envelope presents itself in this way as a series of peaks and troughs - like waves - propositioning bodies to the allure of becoming

elemental. In the throwing together of rope and wood, fabric and helium, experience emerges, lighter-than-air, in the stretching or the fold between exposure and envelopment to the pull of the elemental. The event of atmosphere in this sense is a filamental folding and shaping of forms of life that is simultaneously meteorological and affective, diffuse and particular, porous and tensional *So you find yourself peering over the platform, as the balloon rises and the bull shrinks. Into a dot, then a fleck, then nothing down below.*

For Wilson (2014), the proposition of becoming-lighter-than-air is in this sense a series of envelopments and exposures unravelling interfacially, and sensed processually through the body's bipolar affectability. In Klein's formulation, envelopment emerges as the expression of a relation of sheltering and merging continuity, the 'oceanic feeling' analogous with the experience of regressing into the balloon's warm, interior and womb-like platform-spaces. Exposure on the other pole forms a tendential expression of relation to detachment and object-otherness, analogous with the experience of open spaces - of the vanishing ground and the bull - and the external confrontation aloft with the atmosphere's 'hyper-objectness' (Morton, 2013) and seeming endlessness in three-dimensional space. A body becoming lighter-than-air in this sense holds in contrastive tension the polar propositions of envelopment and exposure. For Sloterdijk, a small zone of atmosphere immediately envelops the body, constantly expanding and contracting as a miniature respiratory economy. Balloon-body-skin and air intermingle as muscular vacuums expand and inflate in the flow of events of air inward rushing.

For Sloterdijk, the flow of airy events forms a sort of 'bipolar intimacy', 'a canal filled with endless double echo games', air and lungs co-conspiring to respire and inspire (Sloterdijk, 2011, 41). The popping constellation of folds, bulges and inflections re-pop in serial continuity, rhythmically tracing the 'shape' of the envelope, enveloping. *As if escaping.* Yet envelopment is always-already exposure - *as a seagull carves a line then drops into the blue* - waves of anxiety and visual exhilaration that sweep over the event. Being and becoming lighter-than air in this sense is fronting the edge of a flow of events, intensifyingly unfolding; of being and becoming exposed and enveloped to the infinite and endless regress of open spaces aloft and aground: weatherworlds.

WEATHERWORLDS I: THE HOUSE

For Sloterdijk, the everyday forms a series of atmospheric envelopes, a foamy aggregate of spheres, little worlds proliferating around everything and anything at all 'as if the solid ground has given way, leaving us hanging like tender cocoons suspended in a dream world' (Stewart, 2007, 96). Experience emerges as a series of sensory games, like 'being a water bug, living on the surface tension of some kind of liquid, some kind of condition, a pacing, a scene of absorption, a dream, a being abandoned by the world, or becoming

serially immersed in a little world you never knew was there until you got cancer, a dog, a child, a hankering...and the next thing - another little world, suddenly there and possible' (Stewart, 2011, 13).

For Foucault, individuals are linked in this way to a course of worlds that outstrip and elude them in every respect. Each individual is 'dependent on an *uncontrollable, unspecified whole of the flow of things and the world*' in which 'the most distant event taking place on the other side of the world may affect our interest, and there is nothing we can do about it.' Experience rides and surfs in this way, an eventful atmospherics of serial envelopment and exposure, what Deleuze (1987) terms 'enterprise-being.' An enterprise 'is a soul, a gas', a lightness of being.

'Enterprise being dissipates in the playing-out of its own gravity-defying lightness. It remains buoyant because rather than project an internal force outward, it borrows the energy of its outside and takes it into its own movement. It buoys itself on the quasi-chaotic air currents of the rapidly changing climate of life. Constantly banking, shifting, turning, churning with the flow, the life of the enterprise-subject continually assumes new shapes [new popping constellations of folds, bulges and inflections] [...] as it moves in environmental spaces that are themselves moving, autonomous, and self-deciding, in the same way the weather is - and every bit as moody' (Massumi, 2015, 39).

Weatherworlds in this sense proliferate kinetically out of everything and anything at all, event-envelopes experimenting experiences of love, loss, desire, hope, anxiety. For Deleuze, enterprise-being and becoming lighter-than-air links the individual to an unspecified whole of capitalist flow and things in the world. To capitalism's atmospherics, its hyper-objectness 'become essentially dispersive, waftingly dissociative in its self-relation, continually varying across the full range of its differentially correlated levels, integrating them wholesale into the same universal deformation' (Massumi, 2015, 41). Capitalism 'launches subjective models', spheres and bubbles, 'the way the automobile industry launches cars', fabricating differential envelopes of stretch, strength, lightness, opacity and transparency in the everyday flow of events (Deleuze, 1987, 12).

For Sloterdijk, even the monosphere of the home has developed cracks and leaks in all directions (like the prison, the hospital, the factory, the school) - becoming foamy - where 'what was previously imagined as a unified space is now a series of precariously strewn together egospheres that flit in and out under one roof'. (Sloterdijk, 2011, 244). Concealed factors of doubt, precariousness, hope and fear - and (why not?) love, friendship, joy - bubble at the surface as barely sensed weatherworlds of what's throwing together and falling apart.

For Stewart: 'the living room strewn with ribbons and wine glasses, the kids or dogs asleep in the back seat of the car after a day at the lake, the telephone on the floor' (Stewart, 2007, 22), and her mother dying in a care home, with the stress that levels it all nowadays, and the self-help books piled up on the sofa, and the power of the drug industry and advertisements in the television, and the road rage and foreclosures, and the drug-fuelled break-ins in the neighbourhood that bubble up then dissipate every few days into hearsay and foamspeak.

That weatherworlds can weigh down in the exposing and enveloping. Like when a financial climate goes awry, and uncertainty starts to feed on uncertainty. 'Fear builds into panic. Negative multiplier, [bubble] effects take over. Household savings vapourise and national economies crumble. Suspicions grow that the invisible hand suffers from a degenerative motor disease and subjects world into 'circling themselves more and more tightly around their individual powers of choice, wrapping themselves centripetally around a center of promised satisfaction' (Massumi, 2015, 9). The atmospheric flow of events that is experience leans into a certain structure of feeling: *'feeling insecure? Be reasonable. Defer your satisfaction to a more secure time of life. Work toward retirement'* (Massumi, 2015, 10).

Individuals plug in, 'to ride the wave of the system of attachment that they are used to, to syncopate with it, or to be held in a relation of reciprocity, reconciliation, or resignation that does not mean defeat by it' (Berlant, 2011, 112). Subjects cluster to weatherworlds that 'keep ticking, not like the time bombs they might be but like a white noise machine that provides assurance that what seems like static really is, after all, a rhythm that people can enter into while they're dithering, tottering, bargaining, testing or otherwise being worn out by the promises that they have attached to in this world' (Berlant, 2011, 122). Every now and then, some tune in too hard to the intensity of events and blow their ears out.

WEATHERWORLDS II: THE ROAD

'My son used to believe that he could look at a plane in flight and make it explode in midair by simply thinking it. He believed, at thirteen, that the border between himself and the world was thin and porous enough to allow him to affect the course of events. An aircraft in flight was a provocation too strong to ignore. He'd watch a plane gaining altitude after taking off from Sky Harbor and he'd sense an element of catastrophe tacit in the very fact of a flying object filled with people. He was sensitive to the most incidental stimulus and he thought he could feel the object itself yearning to burst. All he had to do was wish the fiery image into his mind and the plane would ignite and shatter. His sister used to tell him, Go ahead, blow it up, let me see you take that plane out of the sky with all two hundred people aboard, and it scared him to hear someone talk this way and it scared her too because she wasn't completely convinced he could not do it. It's the special skill of an adolescent to imagine the end of the world as an adjunct to his own discontent. But Jeff got older and lost interest and conviction. He lost the paradoxical gift for being separate and alone and yet intimately connected, mind-wired to distant things' (DeLillo, 1998, 43).

WEATHERWORLDS III: THE TOWER

'The second plane coming out of that ice blue sky' (DeLillo, 2007, 134).

WEATHERWORLDS IV: THE BRIDGE

Rough and smooth, warm and cold. The bridge was lines becoming lighter-than-air and life sometimes getting too heavy. The bridge was a machine weathering worlds.

Everything the bridge touched became a metaphor. It was the path to a horizon, a fantasy, a goldrush, a circus tightwalk, a promise of witnessing, encounter, love, San Francisco. The bridge was a sunset, an endurance, a drivenness, a fog, a feeling, snatched on the fly. The bridge was 'time stretched, shortened, wasted. Space unfolding, compressed' (Stewart, 2011, 10). The bridge was speed, blur, noise, metal, salt. Flickering prism, kaleidoscope. The bridge was sound and light and space.

The bridge was a mangle of moving things that fell and rolled and collapsed and collided. The bridge was elemental, magnetic, charging, ballooning relations like fog out of thin air. The bridge was a way of hearing the world, and the worlds within worlds, an affinitive listening. *"What do you see? Dr Joyce asks. I peer forward, as if asked to admire the detail brushwork of some famous painting. 'Doctor,' I say, 'I see a fucking great bridge"* (Banks, 1986, 83).

The bridge was
intensity, looping, stretching, unravelling; worlds
charging, rutting, sliding. The Bridge was an infinite cloud in the
flow of experience, a slipstream streaming sensations. Cool summers spent gazing on the Golden Gate
Bridge.

So when you jumped
and hit the water like a pick-up truck.

WEATHERWORLDS V: THE ROOM

Affect is an event, or a dimension of every event. Crystallising volumes of matter, tension, sensation and virtuality coming flush with the event's unfolding (McCormack, 2009, 31). For Barnes (2013), grief is a strange kind of affective machine, reconfiguring time and space, their length, texture, function. 'The skies retained in memory, dramas of cloud and sea storm, and the electric sheen before summer thunder in the city, always belonging to the energies of sheer weather, of what's out there, air masses, water vapour, westerlies' (DeLillo, 2007, 142).

Love is intensity: 'not a subjective state expressing an affective investment of a person but a dimension of events into which the life of the body is braced' (Massumi, 2008, 2). That the world weighs in the enveloping and exposing. Love is a certain exposure to the other, a gap, a fracture, an absence, a room to what has happened and not yet (Wylie, 2009). Love is a 'measure of the mutual inclusion of what under other circumstances tend to separate out': the fabulatory art of love. Tethered love is primed for loss: 'the prospect of becoming untethered' (McCormack, 2009, 31). For sudden, rapid, uncontrolled descent. Unravelling like a ribbon.

CLOSING

For Stewart, little weatherworlds proliferate around everything and anything at all. Our lived experience swims in an infinite cloud, 'an uncontrollable, unspecified whole of the flow of things and the world' (Massumi, 2002, 196). Affective experience in this sense is a series of sensory games, of becoming enveloped and exposed to 'what's throwing together and falling apart', stretching and ribboning a flow of events intensifyingly unfolding. The shape of capitalist experience is a one-sided topological figure, constantly banking, shifting, turning, churning with the flow, in a continuous variation of atmosphere, matter and event.

This essay has moved toward experimenting the relations between affective experience, atmosphere and event. An event in this sense is an affective commotion, a something doing, a popping constellation of folds, bulges and inflections, of a weatherworld throwing together and falling apart. Atmosphere is the intensity in extensity of the weatherworld's worlding, the experiential plasticity and spatio-temporal complexions of relations, contrasts and compossibilities, movingly one with its unfolding. Affective experience grows in this way event-fully, atmospherically, by drops and buds and spheres and bubbles. 'As if the solid ground has given way, leaving us hanging like tender cocoons suspended in a dream world' (Stewart, 2007, 96). The house, the road, the tower, the bridge, the room. The house, the road, the tower, the bridge, the room. An infinite cloud.

For Adey, cultural geography 'suddenly seems afloat with airs and winds, fogs and aerial fluids, with volumes, verticals and objects in the air' (Adey, 2015, 99). *Writing weatherworlds* in this respect constellates over vibrant terrain (Stewart, 2007; Anderson, 2009; Berlant, 2011; Choy, 2011; Manning, 2009; Wylie, 2009; Bennett, 2010; McCormack, 2014; McCormack and Engelmann, 2014). What is more in this sense, *writing weatherworlds* is a proposition, a speculation, an airy poetics for experimenting experience and the affective relations between worlds, subjects, atmospheres and events. The melting edges of spheres that fall and roll and collapse and collide.

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