

## **Atmospheric Attunements by Kathleen Stewart**

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*Bees*

In every instant, two gates.  
One opens to fragrant paradise, one to hell.  
Mostly we go through neither.

Mostly we nod to our neighbor,  
lean down to pick up the paper,  
go back into the house.

But the faint cries—ecstasy? horror?  
Or did you think it the sound of distant bees,  
making only the thick honey of this good life?

(Jane Hirshfield, *The Lives of the Heart*)

Writing ethnography over the years has been a slow, and sometimes sudden, accretion of ways of attending to the charged atmospheres of everyday life. How they accrue, endure, fade or snap. How they build as a refrain, literally scoring over the labor of living out whatever's happening. How they constitute a compositional present, pushing circulating forces into form, texture and density so that can be felt, imagined, brought to bear or just born.

I was living in the coal mining camps in West Virginia when Reagan was elected. Right away everyone knew that something was happening, that we were *in* something. Right away the stories started about the people who were getting kicked off social security disability – why *her*? She's a widow with diabetes, no car, no running water, no income. Why *him*? He's crazy and one-legged; he's got *nobody*. Old people were buying cans of dog food for their suppers; you'd see them at the little rip store – just maybe six cans of dog food on the conveyor belt and that was it. Young people were living in cars; the stories traced their daily movements over the hills - where they were spotted parking, how the baby's dirty diapers were piling up in the back seat. These were extreme stories - dense and textured stories that made a scene out of the end of the socially responsible state as it had been lived in this place until just yesterday. Sort of. None of this was a surprise. Just a shock. Just the recognition. When things shifted in the political economy of coal, the big mines closed and people were getting killed in the deadly little punch mines. Then it was over. The union died one day in the middle of a strike. Word came down that the company wasn't negotiating. A feeling of stunned defeat settled on huddled bodies. The bodies wheezed. They reeled. They were hit by contagious

outbreaks of “the nerves.” People “fell out.” They said it was like they were being pulled down by a hand that grabbed them in the middle of their back. The force of things amassed in floods of stories and in ruined objects that piled up on the landscape like an accrual of phantom limbs. This was not just some kind of resistance, or even the resilience of a way of life, but the actual residue of people “making something of things.” The material, sensory labor of attending to an emergent and enduring hum that stretched across the world as they knew it. People said the place smothered them and they “wouldn’t never want to leave.”

This worlding of the place accreted out of what we might call opening events. A story, a gesture, a look, or an outbreak of the nerves would establish a trajectory and pick up crazy speed or disperse, or settle into a still life, or blanket the place like a premonition spontaneously generated in the lives of all those attuned. The barer the life became, the more its worldings proliferated and accrued. The attending to what was happening became the direct materiality of people’s shared senses. Intensity was the air they breathed. Bodies were on alert – marked, readily engaged, always talking, gathering the eccentricity of characters, exercising the capacity to affect and to be affected. Snake handling boomed in the churches whenever the economy went bust. For the sinners, there was drinking and drugs and sucking the gas out of other people’s cars with a tube. Sometimes there were phantasmagorical eruptions, maybe a teenager going on a week-long burning spree and ending up living under a rock, or racist violence in the dark, in the woods, in a space of condensed displacement – a white on black rape, all men, an escape and a long night’s walk back to the safety of a segregated camp. Never an official confirmation of any kind. Later, when the talk shows started, young people who were overweight or “didn’t talk right” were flown to Hollywood to be *on* the shows. Fast food chains in town became the only place to work; the beat up pickups went and the beat up Ford Escorts came. When the idea hit that the young people were going to have to leave and go to the city for work, the girls all started taking Karate lessons in preparation so now there are a lot of black belts in West Virginia and Cincinnati. Wal-Mart happened in West Virginia. Oxycontin happened. Tourism *didn’t* happen. Falwell’s moral majority didn’t happen either; the little metal stands full of moral majority pamphlets appeared in the back of churches but after years of standing there untouched, they faded away. The kind of utopian thinking that comes of hard drinking flickered on and off through it all like the blue lights of a TV set left on at night.

It was in West Virginia, in the heavy and diffuse social living I was doing there, that I got into the habit of watching things arrive in the company of others. Things like a shift in the sensorium, or the stink of some national transformation settling over the hollers, or the sheer weight of power coming down, or the weirdly giddy possibilities that popped up with the advent of a Wal Mart over the mountains in Beckley. It was then that I began to think, along with others, that nameable clarities like family or friendship or love or collapse or laughing or telling stories or violence or place are all atmospherics. All forms of attending to what's happening, sensing out, accreting attachments and detachments, differences and indifferences, losses and proliferating possibilities.

Attending to atmospheres and attunements to them is for me a lateral move. A sideways step into what normally gets stepped over, a curious pause to wonder what analytic objects might matter in the singularity of a situation and what forms of writing and thinking might approach them. An atmospheric attunement is an alerted sense that something is happening and an attachment to sensing out whatever it is. It takes place within a world of some sort and it is itself a generative, compositional worlding.

Academia's own charged atmospherics compose by scoring over forms and registers of what are recognized as worthy and knowable objects. The link between its worlding and some other worlding that becomes its object can be simple or tenuous or violent or abusive or neglectful, loving, mournful, repulsed, obsessively attentive, abject, divorced. Whatever its form, this link between worldings is sensory and affective. In any worlding we can ask how things come to matter and through what qualities, rhythms, forces, relations and movements. Here I'm interested in the peculiar materialities of things that come to matter. The way they are at once abstract and concrete, ephemeral and consequential, fully sensory and lodged in prolific imaginaries. The way they stretch across scenes, fields and sediments, attaching to the very sense that something is happening. These are the qualities of an atmosphere attuned.

Atmospheric attunements, then, attend to the quickening of nascent forms, marking their significance in sounds and sights and the feel of something's touch or something penetrating. It's like a sixth sense. It turns a potentiality into a threshold to the real.

In his novel, *Atonement*, Ian McEwan describes the migraine of a woman of means as a "black-furred creature beginning to stir." The woman is in bed at home. It's 1935. She has developed an acute sensory attunement to the atmospherics of the house.

Habitual fretting about her children, her husband, her sister, the help, had rubbed her senses raw; migraine, mother love, and over the years, many hours of lying still on her bed, had distilled from this sensitivity a sixth sense, a tentacular awareness that reached out from the dimness and moved through the house, unseen and all-knowing. Only the truth came back to her, for what she knew, she knew. The indistinct murmur of voices heard through a carpeted floor surpassed in clarity a typed-up transcript; a conversation that penetrated a wall, or better, two walls, came stripped of all but its essential twists and nuances. What to others would have been a muffling was to her alert senses, which were fine-tuned like the cat's whiskers of an old wireless, an almost unbearable amplification. She lay in the dark and knew everything (2003, p. 63).

Every attunement is a tuning up to something, an accretion chosen or unwillingly shouldered. A labor. A sentience to a world's work, bodies, rhythms, ways of being in noise and light and space (Nancy, 1997). It depends on the first feel of an atmosphere as you enter and the angle of arrival (Gregg and Seigworth 2009). And yet an atmospheric attunement also arrives already weighted with what it's living through, already abuzz with sensory imperatives that jump. Edward P. Jones opens *The Known World* with this scene:

When he, Moses, finally freed himself of the ancient and brittle harness that connected him to the oldest mule his master owned, all that was left of the sun was a five-inch-long memory of red orange laid out in still waves across the horizon between two mountains on the left and one on the right. He had been in the fields for all of fifteen hours; he paused before leaving the fields as the evening rapped itself about him. The mule quivered, wanting home and rest. Moses closed his eyes and bent down and took a pinch of the soil and ate it with no more thought than if it were a spot of cornbread. He worked the dirt around in his mouth and swallowed, leaning his head back and opening his eyes in time to see the strip of sun fade to dark blue and then nothing. . . . This was July and July dirt tasted even more like sweetened metal than the dirt of June or May. Something in the growing crops unleashed a metallic life that only began to dissipate in mid-August, and by harvest time that life would be gone altogether, replaced by a sour moldiness he associated with the coming of fall and winter, the end of a relationship he had begun with the first taste of dirt back in March, before the first hard spring rain (2003:1–2).

The intimacy with a world is every bit about that world's imperative (Lingis 1998). The things in it have a force and a say. We sense out what affects us, and the sentience of a situation is filled with tracks of labor and attunement - a dwelling in the expressivity of something coming into existence. We take a world for what it seeks to evoke, or what it brings into being, for what it's up to, not for what it is (LeFebvre, 2004). Yet, in that lived evocation, every breaking world becomes as real as it gets.

Something throws itself together. A tendency takes on consistency. A transformative force field literally presses itself into rhythms and sensory habits.

Or something sags, shifts tone, dissipates or fails. The ordinary hums with the background noise of obstinacies and promises, ruts and disorientations, intensities and resting points. It sediments, rinds up like the skin of an orange, registers invisible airs as public feelings that waver and pulse. It weighs. It demands a tuning in.

Atmospheric attunements are not just the effects of a distant something elsewhere but the actual affects of modes of living being brought into being. A commonplace, labor-intensive process that stretches across imaginaries, social fields, sediments and airs, linking disparate and incommensurate registers and scales into some kind of everything. This is why there's nothing dead or inconsequential in even the flightiest of lifestyles or the starkest of circumstances. The lived spaces and temporalities of home, work, school, blame, adventure, illness, rumination, pleasure, down time, release and phantasmatic or unthinkable situations are the rhythms of the present as a compositional event weighted with atmospheric fill.

Anything can feel like something you're in, fully or partially, comfortably or aspirationally, for good or not for long. A condition, a pacing, a scene of absorption, a dream, a being abandoned by the world, a serial immersion in some little world you never knew was there until you got cancer, a dog, a child, a hankering ... and then the next thing - another little world is suddenly there and possible. Everything depends on the dense entanglement of affect, attention, the senses, and matter. This is not exactly intended or unintended, not the kind of pure agency we imagine marching forward, like a zombie going doggedly after what it wants (Terada, 2001), and not couch potato passive either, but a balling up and unraveling of states of attending to what might be happening. It's an attunement to possibilities opening up and not necessarily good ones. But maybe.

The world is now a promissory note. An allure and a threat that shows up in ordinary sensibilities of not knowing what compels, not being able to sit still, being exhausted, being left behind or being ahead of the curve, being in history, being in a predicament, being ready for something – anything - to happen, or orienting yourself to the sole goal of making sure that nothing (more) will happen. A world can whisper from a half-lived sensibility. It can demand collective attunement and a more adequate description of how things make sense. It can fall apart, become something else, leaving

its marks, scoring refrains on bodies of all kinds - atmospheres, landscapes, expectations, institutions, states of acclimation or endurance or pleasure or being stuck or moving on.

Everywhere now I overhear the question “how’d you get into *that?*” What *is* that? I never *heard* of it. Wow. Ha. Ya.

A scene might appear of something that looks like “getting a life.” Or maybe, as it turns out, the life you’re *in* is just a bad relationship you *now* see you’ve literally *spent* yourself *enduring*. Your life is a stuckness of some sort. You might suddenly find yourself in a desperate financial situation where you have to catch up with what’s been going on unbeknownst to you, or *sort* of. Some publicly circulating strategy for self-transformation or some ordinary life attunement to illness, faith, body-modification, hoarding or *whatever* can become a mania or a scene; it can start to take on the weight of a *life* from time invested, identities invented, or the *need* for something. Not to mention the labor of inhabitation that starts right away. A sexuality might be finally lived, or it might stay on the edges of things, or drop out of sight altogether. “Fuck it.” All of a sudden your job at Wal-Mart morphs into the deadly dull game of being an associate in a team. Or you live in the undulating intensities of racialized experience. Or one day you notice you’re one of those women-with-kids suffering from “anger illness” – an epidemic of unknown origins and implications.

A life’s trajectories traverse the materializations of scenes or pulsations. Ways of inhabiting things coagulate into mysterious partial inevitabilities. How did it happen that everyone now is ADD or OCD (and they’re not that different)? Everyone labors with attentions that go into overdrive or ball up in a paralysis, or spin off in prolific compositions we come to know as strategies or faults. Hypo and hyper disorders of attention merge and grate. They both require the making of lists in order to get started and a daily or hourly or minute-by-minute taking stock of what’s happening that’s like pushing a reset button (Susan Quesal, ms.). And that’s just one thing....

What gets sensed, sharply or vaguely, with pleasure or pain, with or without the help of lists or routines or luck or the law is an accretion. All the sensing out and living through *worlds up* in gangly accruals, in the rendering of the something you’re in as if it’s a beginning or an end, as if it’s all, or nothing, or enough, or never enough, or not for you. But still something you’re *in*, trying (or not) to attend to what *matters* or what *might matter if*.

Every tuned in present has its singularities and trajectories. But these do not just add up as a collection of characteristics or the elements of a prefabricated system. Atmospheres have gradients, valences, moods, sensations, tempos, and lifespans. An atmospheric fill resonates the edge between the material and the potential. As a proliferative condition it not only allows, but spawns, the production of different worlds, experiences, conditions, dreams, imaginaries and moments of hyperactivity, down time, interruption, flow, friction, eruption, and still lifes.

We could say that there are some important aspects of atmospheric life as we now know it: the collective saturation of the senses, the voracious productivity of the marketing industry, the hard-edged, caste-like quality of relations of race, class and gender, the seamless sprawl of the built environment, the chronotypical transformations of time and space, and so on. But how are they constituted *as* an atmosphere for living? How do they sometimes, for some people, hang together to produce a felt, or half-felt, or barely felt sense of something happening? Do their transformations constitute events? Do they take on the texture and density of a background hum? Forms of attunements are now prolific: hypervigilance, denial, risk taking, graphomaniac constant recording and reporting, cocooning of various kinds, the proliferation of little worlds that seem to become everything, or the explosion of different tracks of self-transformation that slide the subject into the world in some way or constitute a grating against some aspect of life or an adjustment to some big explanation of what's going on, or whatever. Rather than rush to answer the general question - "what's going on?" - we might give pause to wedge into that question a speculative curiosity - a descriptive detour into the necessarily compositional and generative nature of a present moment caught in the throes of emergences and wanings of all kinds. How can we know anything about what's going on without thinking about a transformative present as it is being variously lived out? A worlding taking place in difference. Every person is a nexus of compositional moments. Every scene, every effort, every sensory engagement weirdly shared is a case.

The sensory rinding up of worlds to be *in* is a high stakes labor, both rote and intense, foolish and skilled, twisted and precise, corrupted and from the heart if anything ever was. It starts young. In her pink phase, my daughter, Ariana, had to wear pink dresses and pink cowgirl boots and any effort to get pants on her would elicit the scream - "I CAN'T BE THE PRINCE!!!" Once, when asked why she didn't speak Spanish in the school playground anymore she said, "Because we don't care." "Who?" "Marisol,



Ixchel, Dominique y *me* – Ariana. Miss Dulce dice ‘Las Princessas cowgirls.’ Little fingers. That’s what Ixchel does (she hooks her two little fingers together). Comprendes?” “Ya.”

When he was in high school, my stepson John skipped classes every afternoon to play basketball with the guys even though it often ended in assault suffered. At night he would disappear to hang out with the budding neighborhood “gang” and no amount of talk or grounding would pull him back into the *something* of our household instead. Not even close. His buddies shaved gang symbols into his hair and painted the icons all over his arms and neck. He got thrown out of school under a no gang tolerance rule. He was arrested for trace amounts of marijuana possession – an event set off by him looking suspicious. And all of that was just the beginning.

Take ten steps forward (alternative high schools, Job Corps and getting kicked out for fighting, enrolling in the military and having his enrollment set aside as fraudulent for failing to report his marijuana conviction even though it had been expunged from his record, getting trained as a nurse’s assistant and getting a job and losing it after making it to the certification test but forgetting to bring his ID, living in group housing but getting kicked out for losing his job and not working his program to get another one, following someone he knew to a transitional housing duplex and just staying there until he got kicked out). Now John is becoming homeless. People like to simplify the situation of homelessness as if it is a self-evident process of abject poverty without a safety net or as if it’s just a matter of personal blame or failure. But it is also an attunement to a singular world’s texture and shine. The body has to learn to play itself like a musical instrument in this world’s compositions.

John is on the street, now, learning the sensory labor of attuning as a homeless person. The walking, the finding places to sleep, the broken nose from rolling over on a rock, the encounters with the police, the talk – “I’m gonna get a place of my own with Jimmy, I’m gonna get my job back, I’m gonna get *myself* off the street, I won’t be on the street for long, I give it 90 days. Give me 30 days and then I’ll be back... It’s not as bad as you think.” He and his running buddy have a fight, split up, then reconnect; the counselor at the homeless shelter gives them the language of watching each other’s backs. Their blankets are stolen. One night when it’s below freezing someone throws a blanket over them while they sleep, wasted. It’s like a miracle. He shows me what’s different about him now; he has no hair on the insides of his calves because of all the walking they do to get food – Wednesday night it’s on the east side of town at a church,

Tuesday, Thursday mornings there's a truck down on the tracks, the Sally serves but no one likes the Sally, mostly they go to Lifeworks down on the drag – that's for the kids. But the drag rats are so grabby. He's had so much milk, no coffee, he's lost weight from not having enough to eat. He's proud of his new shirt – it's worth like 20 bucks - and he took a shower before he showed up on our steps this time. Every time he comes he has forgotten what he said last time, what he was planning. He says he looks good. He says he can't go into the army because of his feet and the swelling in his testicles. I say you need medical attention, these things can be fixed. Not *these* things, he says. Maybe the Navy. The labored viscerality of being *in* whatever's happening renders choices and surfaces already weighty. Already the atmosphere you're literally attuning to. This kind of attachment can be easy to get into when the hard labor of attuning is pulled to the task. And of course it can be hard to get out of once you're in it.

John spends all of his time roaming to gather resources. He shows up at our house with blue tooth headphones, a C-D player, a radio, a huge stuffed Sonic character for his little sister. He went dumpster diving and only got \$21. Can we do him a favor? Can we help him out financially? He'll be off the streets soon. He's working hard at being put into motion by a worlding that has arrived. Last night we got another call from the county jail. They were only calling to say that he had left his backpack when he was released the day before. We say we'll try to get word to him to go pick it up. But I'm sure he doesn't know how to get there by bus. An imperative opening can catch you up and then deflate, pop, leave you standing, a fish out of water. Or, same thing, catch you in its moves.

“We” others outside *whatever* have problems (that is, lives) of our own. Already *in*, deep as anyone else. But we watch and wait for what's unfolding or erupting in some other world as if it is, by extension, our own. Or as if we're otherwise blind to what might be coming for us, too. Scenes pop us and we mine them proactively. Sometimes you can see someone else's worlding snapping into form like a force of nature and recognize it as your future or your past or as a previously unrecognized aspect of your now. It can provide comic relief or a horrifying preview. Louise Erdrich describes teenage trouble hitting rural New Hampshire:

On my walks I've seen the turbulence of each neighbor child hit like a small quake. ... Most of the houses on this road are surrounded by a depth of dark trees and a tangle of undergrowth. No two are within shouting distance. Yet you know, merely waving to the parents

whose haunted eyes bore through the windshields of their car. You hear, as new trail bikes and motorbikes rip the quiet, as boom boxes blare from their perches on newly-muscled shoulders. The family cars, once so predictable in their routes, buck and raise dust racing up and down the hills. It is a painful time and one averts one's eyes from the houses containing it. The very foundations seem less secure. Love falters and blows. Steam rises from the ditches and sensible neighbors ask no questions (*The Painted Drum* 2005, p. 13).

Atmospheric attunements animate precise expectations, recognitions, judgments dreams, maybe a stab at some truth that drifts by, barely noted. Or they chafe like a heavy, aching body left too long in a chair. Immediate impacts can be dramatic, as if they bring to life states already hardened up into something big and powerful, or operate as a vortex pulling bodies in. The state you're in is the state you're and yet it takes such fine-tuning, such receptivity, such hard-won accretion, such a labored, consuming response that it also propels. Generativity is fueled by densely felt textures immersed in something. That's why sensory worlding is not the kind of thing that follows the prevailing tastes of outside judgments and sensible advice. Rather, as we know of addicts and lovers, any undue outside intervention only pushes things deeper into smaller, more intense, perhaps madly troubled worlds that might play themselves out, or last for only a little while, or sink into a substrate, or deflate.

Particular attunements can become habitual and rind up or they can slough off as they are replaced by what comes next. You might look back on your pile of sloughed off and still-shouldered rinds as a history of your sensory labor or as a mass of alien bodies dragging on your current hope of pure agency or newness. A history of forms is a defeat as well as company. But there is always also something to attune to, whether depressively or with pleasure, alone or with others. Always the literal registering of forms and forces that have brought you to whatever situation you're in and now haunt you or offer solace or float lightly around the room or whatever. There is always the living through things. The states of expectation or disgust. The moments of arrest, the sidling up to things, the serial immersions in one thing after another.

Transitions can be hard. That's an understatement when you're old and frail and giving up your last home. My mother was born to a life of hard transitions. Her father was one of a long and broad line of hard drinking bricklayers and farmers. They built the big public works in the area - schools, bridges, banks. They disappeared into violent, abandoning drinking for weeks at a time, beat their wives and/or kids, and then spent days crying for forgiveness to their eldest daughters (like my mother). Hard transitions.

Once her mother, Bea, walked off with all her little girls to live with a relative in another town. They walked all day. Once her father dropped off all the girls at a school the next town over and never came back to pick them up. They waited. They gave a girl a quarter to get them a drink but she never came back either. My mother laughs about it now – a lesson learned. She can't remember how they ever got back home; she'll ask her sisters. They were by then a pack of scared but competent girls who had each other's backs. It was the Depression. They ate potato soup and my mother still loves it. Later they all had children, lots of them, the extended family was huge, and there was work, pleasures, illness, deaths, a house lived in for 50 years and then given up. Transitions. The big epochal ones you look back on are not so hard, at least not when you're looking back, their outlines etched as history on a landscape and a collectivity. Then you're not alone. You're part of the great generation or something. You're in it with others, going through something, a long line of somethings. When my mother looks back, she's just amazed at all the changes in her town, as if the ground itself had shifted again and again and before you knew it, everything was unrecognizable, the force of things snapping into place as sheer transformation.

Now all my mother's sisters and mine are gathered again, ritually, for the occasion of my mother's death. Not yet, but pressing. We sit the old ladies in comfortable chairs in my mother's apartment but they rearrange themselves around a table with tea and cookies. Suddenly they're loud. They're talking in rapid fire, overlapping, stories that my sister and I have never heard before. They're piecing together the details that only some of them knew, had heard. Scraping the barrel. They hated Uncle Bill. They were afraid of him. (Which one was Uncle Bill?). They piece together good enough stories of events and characters by pulling on their individual senses. Shirley heard something once; Joan remembers a smell in a house; Tisha remains fearful of something that seems innocuous; Claire has a picture of him somewhere. Afterward, my mother goes back upstairs to the nursing home where she now lives. She's making the transition. Moving on, one step in front of the other, has a whole new meaning when you're blind and can hardly stand without the help of a walker. Yet she has the habit of a worlding. She is trying to find the rhythm of her new bodily life. Hit the reset button. Laboring to literally fall into step with the pacing of The Meadows, to find lines of attachment, to become describable as a body by learning how to affect and

to be affected in this world such as it is. She is looking for a track for a flourishing of some sort.

The aides will slowly come to know her, know what she can and can't do. I will slowly learn to leave them to it. Hard transitions. She asks me to describe the place, her world. I say it's really nice; whoever knew there was this whole world up here on this wing – it's big and complete, so many people working here, its own dining room, activities room, therapy room. It's amazing. She's wondering how she will make doctor's appointments, where her check book is, whether they will bring up her mail. She wants to get her things organized but they won't let her out of her chair without an aide. She asks her friend Eleanor (who is also blind) what her tricks are. Eleanor says she doesn't have any. She asks me to tell her about her room. It's a cottage. You have a beautiful ash tree right outside your window, the snow is falling hard, beautiful, there's a full moon, the ground is covered, in the distance there is a dairy barn, there are still horses in the field, beautiful healthy horses in chestnut brown, they have woolen blankets on and beyond the barn is Half Mile Hill where kids have always sledded and we went this afternoon. It was wild. We climbed to the top of the hill. Someone has left two Adirondack chairs and a table up there and you can sit and see the whole lake and mountain range. It's beautiful. Down below, tucked into the valley, Edgewood looks like a Scandinavian village. All white and collective. The Christmas lights are beautiful. Would you like some hot chocolate?

When we have to leave she struggles for something to say: "Don't worry about me, I'm living the life of Reilly."

Now everyday on the phone she has stories meant to pull her into the sentience of the world she's in. Give it density, texture. She knows all the life stories of the aides, the other residents, she greets them by name when she hears them enter her room or pass in the hall. She's great at the trivia games they play in activities. She says she doesn't mind just resting. It is matter of literal contact, exposure to the rhythms, interruptions, bodies, pacings, and relations of this new territory. A living through the transmission of affect. The production and modulation of 'life itself' through worlding refrains. An accumulation that scores. A sharpening of attention, again, to the expressivity of something coming into existence.

What happens in moments when the ephemeral touches matter or the well known loses its shimmer?

I'm suggesting that we rethink what our analytic objects might be to include the openings, saggings, and trajectories of things that are both compositional and lived. This means also experimenting with forms of theory and writing that are responsive to the moving objects they're trying to trace or highlight or escape, or whatever. So I am trying to describe what might be happening in little moments, scenes, a series of short cases set up to explore the intensity and plasticity of lived compositions that might now be proliferating with every breaking and waning situation. In these little scenes, the senses sharpen on the surfaces of things taking form. They pick up texture and density as they move in and through bodies and spaces, rhythms and tempi, possibilities likely or not. They squeeze into tight little spots or pool up in open fields. They establish trajectories of difference and repetition that shroud and punctuate the significance of sounds and movements.

An atmosphere is not an inert context but a force field in which people find themselves. It is not an effect of other forces but a lived affect. A capacity to affect and to be affected that pushes a present into a composition, an expressivity, the sense of potentiality and event. It is an attunement of the senses, a labor to make matter potential ways of living or living through. Writing and critique that score over such things detours into descriptive eddies and attaches to trajectories, following the rhythms of breaking and waning cultural-material-sensory somethings. It tries to stick with something becoming atmospheric, to itself resonate or tweak the surface of potential ways of life. Instead of asserting oppositions between material and representational things, or holding objects in abeyance in order to evaluate them as good or bad, it hopes for a horizontal plane of incommensurate elements hanging together in a compositional atmosphere. The intimacies of things thrown together in a sense of something happening that might somehow include an "us" whose ears prick up, whose bodies labor.

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