genres of impasse, or political theorizing at the end of a world

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western political science association annual meeting, 2-4 april 2015
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1 | introduction

Toxic romances. The United States's fantasies of global sovereignty in the aftermath of 11 September 2001. The ambivalence of minoritized subjects regarding multicultural liberalism. National identity in the face of critiques of settler colonialism. Neoliberal capitalist life in the face of climate change and species extinction. These vastly different situations all involve attachments on the brink of collapse. They raise personal, collective, and political questions of the ongoingness of life. Of the difficulties of unhinging optimism from business as usual. Of taking a chance on loss, on becoming, on half-formed alternatives and vague visions that might feel all wrong.

Lauren Berlant has given the name "impasse" to the *potential* loss of attachments when alternatives are undesirable or unavailable. Impasses are not matters of ideology and of false consciousness. One can have all the evidence in the world that one's anchors are harmful, unworkable, or mere fantasy; yet attachments can remain intact because they have provided a sense of self, of world, the optimism to live on. Because they evoke the gravity of a thing, a place, a public—whatever. An impasse makes one face, to borrow the words of Kathleen Stewart, "the unspeakable sadness of being abandoned, in the end, by the world you have made matter in a life achieved."[1] Brushes with unlearning, shattering, and even trauma elicit a defensiveness that is followed by lots of self-damage or to the identification of others, some human, some not, as threats to be contained, shamed, disciplined, tortured, or eliminated. Impasses also, however,

1

make greater political pluralism opportune, should people strive to imbue their attachments with flexibility.

Impasses trouble method. Berlant writes that impasses "can only be approached awkwardly, described around, shifted."[2] Might impasses prove troublesome for the usual genres of political theory? According to Berlant, a genre is an "aesthetic structure of affective expectation" whose form is elastic amidst minor variations.[3] Can predicaments of attachment be adequately addressed through the usual tools of political theory that tend to parse the conceptual from the affective—tools such as argumentation, interpretation, representation, justification, demystification, tight-knit narration, and prescription? Are the available genres and conventions of writing political theory adequate to impasses—to their uncertainties, their mixed feelings, their intensities, their entangled temporalities, their short-circuiting of sensoria, their dark atmospheres?

An appreciation of impasse might shift political theory into a compositional mode. "Rather than rush to incorporate the thing coming into form into a representational order of political or moral significance," writes Stewart, "compositional theory tries to register the tactility and significance of the process of coming into form itself."[4] Less definitional than generative, compositional theory fashions a critical poetics to register impasses. Rather than discussing impasses from a remove, it is partly the effect of an impasse that expresses itself through writing. Claims to knowledge become unsettled as the writing fills with mixed feelings, staccato, stumbling times, fragments, bursts of loquaciousness, loose ends, dead ends, uncertainties, stickinesses. The value of a compositional theory of impasses lies not in truths told and hard-edged justifications. Nor does it derive from available models of political thought. What matters is the wiggle room opened, the affects induced, and the styles of approach inspired.

Autoethnography can be a fruitful inroad into compositional theory. According to

Stewart, "Autoethnography is one route into a broader-ranging, more supple exploration of what happens to people, how force hits bodies, how sensibilities circulate and become, perhaps delicately or ephemerally, collective."[5] Autoethnography is less representational than exemplary; through the singularities of a life, it refracts an emergent situation that does not align with grand ideas and expansive explanations. It focuses not on fixed and final forms but on bundles of intensities, becomings, and the squiggly lines of a life unfolding. It strives to register emergence, intensification, and dissolution to allow the rough, unfinished edges of ordinary life to find expression in writing.[6] In short, autoethnography is "a composing that attunes to forces coming into form."[7] Energized by Stewart's ethnographies of ordinary life,[8] Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of becoming, new materialisms,[9] and work on affect,[10] this essay performs an autoethnography of impasses in a compositional register of political theory. I approach ordinary life with an intuitive attention to complex worldings that precede the patternings of life and matter, culture and nature, word and world and that evoke the strange temporalities of an undead past that mixes with incipient futures.

The autoethnographic political theorist returns to the messy milieu that it tried to rise above. Its senses grow hypervigiliant. It practices "archive gathering, phrasemaking, conversing, reading around, rephrasing, listening, nitpicking"—not only in regard to texts but to the surges and ruts of ordinary life. The political theorist "spread[s] out into the lateral spaces often drowned out by the demands of argument and of interlocutors who want 'ways out';" the theorist searches for ways of attuning to a clustering of forces.[11] Autoethnography uses the self as an alternative way into the political. In an autoethnographic mode, a political theorist feels pulled by things that might be political precisely because they *don't* readily seem to be. Rather than rolling over those things or pigeonholing them into preexistent political narratives, one might tend curiously and patiently to all sorts of enigmatic and attractive ephemera, affective atmospheres,

half-formed tracks, and tiny thoughts. Only after gathering a broad range of convergences and displacements can the autoethnographer begin to write political theory. Or, political theory begins to write itself long before the theorist picks up a pen.

This essay engages the ongoing colonization of Hawaiʻi by Asian settlers as its example. It refracts Asian settler colonialism through my own impasse in being a principal beneficiary of settlement while struggling to become a decolonial subject. It circles around my attachment to Hawaiʻi as home, which became apparent only *after* I moved to Baltimore—after growing up and living in Oʻahu for twenty-five years. The focus here is less on the well-documented historical details of coloniality and the resilience of Native resistance.[12] Instead, I adopt myself as a case study to explore the complicated micropolitical relationships between settler attachments to home and the afterlife of dispossession.[13] The essay zooms in on autoethnographic scenes of ordinary life to "forge a link between self and world, the abstract and the concrete, the massive and minute, the fuzzy or smudged yet precise."[14] It does not separate the ordinary from the social, the economic, and the political; it enfolds the latter into ordinary life as forces, textures, rhythms, viscosities, flows, ruts. Ordinary life is both dense and unfinished, full of patternings that take hold and live wires into an elsewhere.[15] Here, the autoethnographic cracks open a space, already cracked open in ordinary life, in Asian settler colonialism and turns it into an impasse that recalibrates the genres of political theory.

Although no one has yet determined what political theory could do, the discipline sanctions certain methods, forms, and objects of inquiry at the expense of others. This essay engages impasse to encourage reflection on the conventions of political theory and to open more breathing room for half-formed genres of political theorizing.

Stewart writes that autoethnography "might skid over the surface of a thing throwing itself together or take pains at a slow description that pauses on each element. It might spread itself across a scene, sampling everything, or hone in on a single strand to follow it as it moves, maybe document how it pulls into alignment with other strands or falls out of sync, becoming an anomaly or a problem."[16] Autoethnography develops a close, painstaking attention to details, knitting them into the patchwork of a life lived. Or it could glide across the surface of details in pursuit of the abstractions that reverberate through them.

For an autoethnographic political theorist, an abstraction might be the afterimage of shifts in intensity rather than a transcendental ideal. It is composed of impacts that are real but not consolidated as a formed thing. Autoethnography might shift abstractions in political theory from identifiable forms and functions to forces that are vague but palpable. As abstractions, preformed concepts carry the possibilities and limits of their emergence and thus remain insensate to shifts underway. Autoethnography recharges concepts by returning them to the intensities of ordinary life. It enacts Deleuze's understanding that concepts escape "anthropological predicates;" rather than condemned to the slaughterhouse of our own image, concepts are free-range things that peep about fields of intensities.[17] They are abstractions that shape-shift through encounters with difference. Their liveliness is energized, not dampened, through displacements and transits.

Take the abstraction that is place. "Place presents in singular but not accidental things. The timeless granite, the Dunkin' Donuts sign, a common hand gesture, the biting air in January. It's two-dimensional and it's three. All talk and icon and then the taste of a Macintosh apple. Less a structure than a prism, less a grammar than a collective search engine, it's like scratching on a chalkboard already overcrowded with lines and erasures. And that means it has a body."[18] Hawai'i is not merely a geopolitical entity nor a culturally exotified imaginary but a place. It is a

regionality, a lived abstraction that flashes up from site to site, encounter to encounter.[19] It

depends on the relation. What elements throw themselves together, how, and when. The patterns

and viscosities that emerge. The lines of flight that shoot off or get blocked. Autoethnography

registers Hawai'i as a swarm of forces coming to form.

Place stretches across borderlines. You carry it wherever you go. Or, it carries itself into

another form through you. It latches onto the skin. Burrows into the viscera. Lies dormant.

Spikes up in moments of pause and surprise. Moments like getting lost in a new city.

"Displacement, and singular forms of getting lost, are bubble worlds that reinvent the self-in-

place by testing its limits. There is a habit of setting out alone, without a map. A venturing into a

world that remains palpably unpredictable and seductive beyond the carefully cordoned zones of

familiarity."[20] I wander. I plot myself in relation to a road or two that forms the brittle backbone

of my slack sense of direction. My bearings eventually emerge. The grid helps. So does the

sequencing of streets. Okay this is 21st, so 22nd is next, then... My inner compass begins to align

with that of maps: east of Charles Street, south of North Avenue...

I realize that these metrics hadn't informed my sense of direction back in Honolulu.

There were mountains. There was the ocean. Mauka and moana compose a local poetics of

direction that does not abide by a mapping of north-south-east-west. So many roads there don't

follow a grid anyway. They wind and roll with the shape of the island volcano called "O'ahu."

Baltimore then feels so flat. The difference is not merely conceptual; it manifests in hard-won

habits that meet the friction of transit. *Honolulu doesn't work in Baltimore*. Displacement provokes the

coordination of different strategies of navigating complex ecologies—a mix of the urban, the

geological, the oceanic, the... It requires calibration to time—to bus schedules, the midday

sunniness bookended by passing showers, the city as standstill traffic that is worse than that of Los

Angeles, the dwindling of restaurant options past 9pm. The city as season: as sore throats and

pollen-filled sneezes, as cranked-up heat and sticky humidity, as sidewalks stained by leaves after a storm, as ice-slicked paths that jar one's confident stride.

A sense of direction is a complex mapping of place that throws itself together from materialities, rhythms, and repetitions—all paved over histories that brood quietly in the lived present. Place is a palimpsest of lives and worlds strewn across scales of visibility, erasure, and duration that engender habits and break them apart.

 3 | home

Home is where home is not. It emerges partly through a remove. It registers the friction between places. It is a lure and a longing that materializes through displacements and transits. It magnetizes desired returns and dreaded departures. Or dreaded returns and desired departures. It's an attachment, after all, not necessarily a sense of belonging.[21] It tugs at the heart through all sorts of ambivalences.

Displacement can register the plenitude of things that make up home. Colors matter. Shades and tones matter. Climate matters. The earth's cycle matters. The tilt of the planet matters. Timing matters. I arrive in Honolulu on an early December afternoon rather than in the usual dark of night. The vibrant range of greens and blues strikes my eyes, accustomed as they've become to the grays and whites and browns of Baltimore winters. Later that day, I walk to the park, sit on a bench by the playpen, take off my shoes and socks. It takes a few moments to realize how strange it's become to sit outside in the winter. My feet sink into the cool, prickly grass. Mānoa Valley is alive. The air is full of birdsongs myriad, the guttural cries of mynah birds especially distinct since they've been etched into my skin. Gray clouds brew over the northern mountain but elsewhere the sky is all shiny and blue. You can be dry in one part of the valley while horizontal sheets of rain drench another. When the wind blows, you can hear all the leaves

7

of the valley rise up like waves of the ocean. Midnight walks brim with cricket chirps, the rare car sailing down the dark street, a dog or two being walked, the crinkling of the stream that winds through the valley, the three sets of traffic lights that cycle through green-yellow-red for no one, clear skies filled with stars and constellations and the high-hanging moon, the two or three houseless people asleep on the bus benches outside of Starbucks, the quiet solitude that spills into a sense of oneness with the world.

Home is a psychic, social, cultural, and political construct, but not only. It is the shorthand given to an array of materialities that throw themselves together into a complex attachment. "An attachment circulates across bodies of all kinds—human bodies, bodies of thought, plant and animal bodies, bodies of pain and pleasure—assemblages of histories and politics, forms of caring and abuse solidified into models."[22] Home is a contraction of details and abstractions. It is grass. It is sun. It is clouds, leaves, mountains, water, birdsongs, open spaces— all linked by an invisible thread that runs from the vast cosmos to hidden depths of the heart.[23] It is a force-field that accrues more than we could ever know and patterns them in ways to which we have yet to catch up. The unfinishedness of home shape-shifts through transits and ventures through other places and other times.

Home is when home is not. It comes long formed but remains partly open. It is belated, a feedback loop, a layer that recomposes the lifelines to which it is added. It is the palpable distance between the present moment and a no-longer. Or maybe a never-had. Home is an affective fact, a hollow that magnetizes worldings of potential and threat.[24] The strange temporality of home expresses itself through wayward longings and so many unanticipated phantom pains.

I take a walk in the morning. Then another in the afternoon. One more at sundown. Then it's time to leave. I breeze through airport security to much displeasure—I could've had more time amongst the twitterings of birds, the soft air, the ducks the sail down the stream, the

strangers who walk so leisurely because they have tomorrow. Minutes have become precious though just days earlier they dissolved without a care. I drag myself toward the gate. The walkway is outside. I dawdle to savor the island air even though it's full of exhaust from the Wiki Wiki Shuttles. There are no stars.

I board the plane and take my seat. An itch has grown over the years. It makes me want to leap up, to grab my things, to dash past the stares and glares and out the door with a crazed grin and the glow of achievement. Then would cascade all the daydreams of more time: absorbing the sun and the wind in the park, meandering through the night, stuffing my face with endemic delectables, wasting more time with friends because that's what we do so well. Yes, I just have to deplane, hop on the #19 bus, transfer to the #5, cross the street, and then I'm—

"The cabin door is now closed. Please turn off all major electronic devices."

Just like that, the urge vanishes. Until it returns next time, pulling me even closer to the edge of my seat.

4 | houselessness

A resplendent blue day. I head to Kaka'ako Waterfront Park, a place that evokes home. The hills of the park are so green and rolling that you'd never know they were built on a landfill. People talk story in truck beds as remote control cars zoom about the parking lot. The palm trees are curved by the trade winds that carry the salt of the sea. A promenade of smooth bricks rolls out along the ocean. Fishermen rest their poles in the cracks of the large rocks that make up the shore and gaze at the shimmering waters. Children run about as their parents and uncles and aunts soak in the day. A cruise ship sails at sunset. The couples getting their wedding photos taken savor the golden aura around all things. The sea swallows the sun and then the light. The park empties. The nights are quiet, save for the brushing of waves against the large rocks and the hum

of the occasional airplane overhead.

Memories rise up through the park.[25] Memories like gliding down the grassy hills on cardboard boxes. The rainy day when sea and sky merged in the hidden horizon. The night when my camera was stolen. The picnic before I moved to Baltimore, when a friend tagged a pole with our friendship. Roaming the hills and listening to the waves with a close friend on the first day of her first trip to Hawaiʻi. The clouds ablaze with pink at sundown. All the summer nights bursting with shooting stars. Gazing up in wonder with friends or slowly falling asleep, lulled by the gentle breeze flowing through the palm trees.

At some point in time, tents began to appear on the sidewalks leading to the park. Just a few dots at first. Then lines. The tent cities seemed to have grown each time I returned to Honolulu, until they were gone. Razed by cops on orders of the city to keep paradise pretty for business and tourists. As Kakaʻako gentrifies with shiny new high rises, the houseless have received increasing hostility from the public and politicians. The comments section of *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* articles on homelessness brim with vitriol. The law forbids sitting or lying on sidewalks in Waikīkī. Its draconian reach has recently expanded to other areas of the island. Many bus stop benches have been updated with metal partitions to prevent people from lying down. A local representative takes his sledgehammer to the houseless's shopping carts. The public cheers. The houseless have become choice targets of violence in the night. Meanwhile, the state's neglect of hundreds or thousands of the houseless on the Waiʻanae Coast, a predominantly Native Hawaiian and impoverished area of Oʻahu, gives body to "out of sight, out of mind."

Memories of the houselesss unfold. The times when I, as a kid, thought that the other families on the beaches of Waiʻanae were just camping too. Or, years earlier, when I watched a man sift through a dumpster while I ate a donut that tasted like guilt. The slow gait of the weighty woman who lugs her shopping cart down King Street. The flipping-up of a half-open

hand of the woman with frizzy hair who talked to ghosts. The tuxedoed man who has walked

through the valley for decades. The thud in my stomach when I saw that the man to whom I

offered my apples had no teeth. The man on the bridge into Waikīkī who was a statue with a

hand held out. He became animated with my approach and asked if I had any change to spare. I

gave him my leftover pizza and left, unable to give him the change that he *didn't* ask for.[26]

What would be required for that change to happen? What kind of losses would need to be

incurred? Would my attachments to home be spared?

Displacement meets dispossession. Home becomes weighty, more a question mark than a

confirmation. Half-formed ethical and political issues loom up and haunt it with the cold breath

of possible loss.

 5 | impasse

Something is in the air. Vague, but palpable. It perturbs the habits of smooth sailing. It pulls

attention toward horizons that haunt ordinary life. Into a dim sentience amidst nascent forms.

Into a loom of ghostly histories that breathe open the present. Hard-won attachments unravel.

The senses get caught up in a swarm of dizzying forces. Mixed feelings stir about. Half-formed

thoughts spark up amongst what is enigmatic yet compelling. The architecture of action and

reaction hangs in suspense. Worlds are unmoored and carried through fog on tangents and

surges. On waves of threat and potentiality that might induce tender moments of watching and

waiting.

Red-eye flight, before take-off. The cabin is warm. The air is fuzzy. The white noise of

the engine is soothing. I drift, drift to sleep.

Sounds of soda cans snapping open snap me awake. They snap on. The cabin acoustics

amplify their aggression. I try to return to sleep. Turns out that the time between boarding and

the beverage service is the perfect power nap. Great. And there's coughing all around. There's a baby wailing (there always is). There's the person behind me who knees my chair once, twice. Who pulls my chair down with all their weight to hoist themselves up. Thanks. I sigh.

A hand full of irritation turns on my light. Flips through the airline magazine and rips out the page of sudoku puzzles. They don't help. Reading doesn't help. Restlessness grows. No room to move. The cabin is cramped, not only with people but with worlds.

An airplane ride can be mired in stuckness. Or it can brim with still lifes. "A still is a state of calm, a lull in the action. But it is also a machine hidden in the woods that distills spirits into potency through a process of slow condensation."[27]

No thoughts come in the dark. Then they do. They phase in and out of consciousness.[28] They wander. They don't amount to anything at first. Then they do. They shuffle through lists of what needs to get done. The errands. The chores. All the reading and writing. The labor of reacclimating to a partly alienating place.

I then puzzle over missing a home that is a thicket of memories and yearnings—more of an affective atmosphere than a solid, polished thing.[29] Over what the carbon footprint of a feeling might be. Over the comforts of being a racial majority in Honolulu. They had become apparent only after I moved to Baltimore, where I feel unwelcome often enough. Like the time when the white middle-aged stranger thought it was good form to open conversation with "Are you Indian or white?" and proceeded to detail his yearly summer trips to India. Or when the two white men addressed me sharply through some made-up Asian dialectic on an empty street late at night. Or when the drunk white guy screamed "brief coat wearing fag!" before rushing in my direction. And then, there's all the *gawking*. The streets are full of stares that just won't go away whether or not I return eye contact. I wonder what it means when a sense of home is built on stolen lands, built on houselessness. That returning home is returning to the scene of a crime. How to live in a

home filled with the air of dispossession and ghosts of the unmourned.[30]

Impasses are pockets on the side of the road. People get caught up there in something enigmatic and compelling. Life becomes mired in a swamp-like situation. Aspirations hit road blocks. Or pipe dreams branch out wildly. Whispers from the ruins hint at the weightiness of attachments that can only be lived ambivalently, if at all. Numbness and disbelief set in when what seemed to be assured no longer holds a toe of promise. Things that bottled so much potency fall flat. Latencies rise up as unfriendly forces. The undead past looms up in the flickering present. Time grows overlapping, entangled, patchy. Ordinary life trembles between stuckness and movement. An impasse is a brush with the end of a world, and one just doesn't know what to do about it.

 6 | decolonial mood work

Critiques of Asian settler colonialism have rehearsed a story of local identity in which cross-cultural exchanges and immigrant solidarities overcame white oppression on plantations.[31] Local identity primarily designates a cultural way of life defined by food, love of the land, the temporalities of laid-backness, and pidgin ("Hawaiʻi Creole English"). Statehood sealed the ties between local identity and the promise of US multicultural liberalism while aligning Asian interethnic alliances with American Dreams of minority inclusion. Asians, primarily Japanese, have enjoyed socioeconomic and political salience in part through the historical amnesia that grounds local identity. Those critiques maintain that subscriptions to local identity tend to be claims to Hawaiʻi. Native Hawaiians can be local but locals cannot claim indigeneity.

Important as these critiques may be, they remain pitched at the level of representation and ideology. They might better appreciate how local identity forms through the singularities of attachments, which are not reducible to a few nameable characteristics. While there are

13

patternings that make local identity into an intelligible thing, a pattern is not an attachment. Attachments throw themselves together from an expanse of materialities in a process that is barely sensible. Attachments cannot be fully demystified. They cannot be shaken by arguments against ideology alone. They do not fit a linear narrative of unfolding. Criticisms of local identity tend to miss the complexity of attachments that bind Asians to coloniality.

Perhaps some mood work could better engage settler attachments. Jennifer Carlson and Kathleen Stewart write that "the challenge of writing mood while intentionally attending to mood work lies in constantly attuning to the force of things, events, bodies and situations, their social physics."[32] For them, mood is not about nameable emotions but the vibrancy of matter in self-organizing scenes of ordinary life. Mood work does not filter experience to fit disciplinary molds. Instead, it is the difficult, uncomfortable, painstaking effort of keying in to the diffuseness of what converges but remains ungathered. It strives to register impacts and happenings that are barely graspable but forceful.

While mood work is usually the labor of becoming sentient to something throwing itself together, the mood work of impasses follows the fading of sentience. An impasse is palpable only at the fringe of experience, in nagging feelings and fuzzy tones. In perturbations of ordinary life. It is felt in forces that descend on the senses. In dark zones of perception and sensation. In still lifes. It is felt in ghostly moments or reveries. In rhythms that are now so rickety. In the mind adrift or caught in a web. In the flickering of consciousness.[33] In palpitations of the heart. In the sensation of being dragged down by phantom hands.[34] But also in the sense that the sliver of a new world may be peeping just over the horizon.

The autoethnographic writing of impasses can be a mood work that uses the self to register the breakdown of worlds. It might be the leaping into expressivity of a cluster of fragilities, resiliences, blockages, and tiny openings. It registers encounters with what is enigmatic

14

yet captivating, the gestures that haunt one's memory, the ambivalences that snake through attachments, the murk of threat and promise, the jumpiness and agitation of bodies, all the outbreaks of the nerves, the scrambles to patch things up and the leaps of faith into something half-formed, the bouts of nostalgia for better, safer times which may never have been, the daydreams and nightmares that seep into one's anxious waking hours.

Mood work might contribute to decolonial politics by generating impasses in settler attachments to home. Berlant cautions that "shifts in affective atmosphere are not equal to changing the world."[35] On the other hand, Jane Bennett observes that political change depends upon an appropriate mood in place.[36] Presumptions of a causal relationship between mood and political change aside, decolonial politics needs an affective component. As Bianca Isaki writes, "decolonization involves a shift in sensation... The idea is that undoing (not just historicizing) affective, corporeal, felt dimensions of attachments that keep us engrossed in broken political systems, like a US-occupied Hawai'i, might allow us to remake those attachments."[37] While Isaki attends to circuits of settler affect amongst history, family, law, community, sexuality, reproductivity, and domesticity, I trace them through vibrant materialities strewn across space and time. She follows attachments to home that have formed largely within Hawai'i; I have expanded Hawai'i beyond its geographical specificity to track home through displacements and transits. And while Isaki advises that home be undone, maybe it just needs to be decolonized—an attachment to Hawai'i could be one of the main relays for settler subjects to support decolonization. It is for me. Neither of these approaches is superior to the other. Their contrasts attest to the complexity of attachments to home, elicit greater attentiveness to the singularity of settler subjectivities, and urge that efforts toward decolonization be subtle rather than sweeping. Isaki and I suggest turning of home into an impasse and have both employed autoethnography to that end. Decolonial mood work on settler attachments may form one productive component of

15

a broader decolonial strategy.

7 | political impassivity: watching and waiting, not concluding

This essay does not try to establish what autoethnography as political theory should be or how it should be conducted. Less a direct critique than a creative detour, the essay performs a different style of political inquiry. It has sought to invite critical reflection upon the genres of political theory while modestly expanding their range through autoethnography.

Michael D. Jackson writes that "Ethnography forces the life of the mind from contemplation to experimentation." It cultivates a "practical and social involvement" in the lifeworlds of others by following "a method of displacing ourselves from our customary habitus."[38] Autoethnography might take oneself as other to experiment with refashioning the gaps between a life lived and a life that could be. While autoethnography proceeds through an "I," autoethnography of an impasse takes place when that "I" is falling apart. Its self is less a prism than cracked glass. Impasses shift knowledge into more intuitive registers as the anchors of knowing and feeling are shaken.

Political theory might register the unfinishedness of ordinary life, which is felt so acutely in impasses, before issuing pronouncements. Berlant suggests that we might "dedramatiz[e] the performance of critical and political judgment so as to slow down the encounter with objects of knowledge that are really scenes we can barely get our eyes around."[39] Stewart also aspires to "slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique long enough to find ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects that fascinate because they literally hit us or exert a pull on us."[40] I too want to pause the reach to the conventional tools of political theory —not necessarily to retire them but to fashion a sensibility that tends more generously to ordinary life in its unfinishedness and charge.

Impassivity might be one such sensibility. Though the term usually designates a state without emotion, a state of unfeeling, it could be read as the enlivening of the senses by the affects of a deteriorating world.[41] Stewart writes that impassivity is a "watching and waiting, a living through, an attunement to what might rind up or snap in place. The subject finds itself in a situation. Events and outcomes are immanent, unknown but pressing."[42] Impassivity is an attunement to becomings and happenings, a magical state that is keyed to hauntings. It calibrates attention to swarming forces and nascent forms. It hones in on the openings made by the reanimated past.

Political impassivity is a sensibility of watching and waiting to see how the political might arise (or not). It might be cultivated through an autoethnographic alertness to all sorts of inconsequentials and half-formed feelings that seem to have nothing political about them. Stewart writes that "Politics starts in the animated inhabitation of things, not way downstream in the various dream boats and horror shows that get moving."[43] It might also be the case, as hinted at throughout this essay, that the political lies in the contingency of the future anterior—in a will-have-been that is presently a might-not-become. Only after a long process of gathering and accretion does the political take form. The political is of a fugitive temporality. Political theory in the form of autoethnography might document the materialities, happenings, and affects through which the political *might* emerge. Or specific political problems might transport it into regions of memory that become reanimated in the present.[44] The temporality of those leaps is strange. It could be the present filtering the past to ascribe a teleology to the political. Or it could be the past throwing itself into a political form in the present.

Autoethnography that registers the weird temporalities of an emergent, unfinished political might not serve a merely proto-philosophical purpose. Biehl is rightly worried that the richness of ethnography might be stripped down to evidence that substantiates the claims of other

17

disciplines.[45] Nonetheless, the strange temporal relationship between politics and ordinary life lends value to sensing power on the verge of congealing in nefarious ways, to documenting what has come to count as political even if it had been irrelevant as it unfolded. I am not advocating a hermeneutics of suspicion or a paranoid reading that would seek power under every rock or intensity; neither practice treats the unfinishedness of ordinary life well. An autoethnographic political theorist tends to fragilities and resiliences in ordinary life, patiently and curiously.

Political theory in the key of autoethnography allows all sorts of details and abstractions to find expression, whether or not they fall in line with a political narrative. Slowing the jump to representation, evaluation, and prescription admits that embodied, situated knowledge matters, especially in a largely disembodied discipline. Political sensibilities could become more poetic in both an attentiveness to what is vague but compelling and forms of writing that are more expressive than representational. Political claims might then become more modest. They would no longer be able to wield disciplinary knowledges and methods as blunt weapons in turf battles. Political engagements might then be guided by what William Connolly has elaborated as "agonistic respect."[46] They might treat attachments critically but gently. They might also tend more generously to ordinary life by dwelling in and dilating on the many forces (some human, others not) that typically pass for big systems (such as dispossession, racism, orientalism, homophobia, urbanization, ecology, privatization). Political engagement might view those systems as patterns and viscosities while cultivating greater sensitivity to emergence, incipience, becoming, dispersion. A better grasp of the intricacies of the political might follow. So too might a political stance that does not merely respond to the powers that be but anticipates the accretion of power through creative activity.[47]

What political theory could then become remains to be seen. Regarding impasses, it might affirm that "The barer the life became, the more its worldings proliferated and accrued."[48]

An autoethnographic political theory of impasses tracks the crumbling away of a world while still maintaining some footing in it. It registers the lag between what's happening and a life that is being chipped away. It locates the complexity of power differentials in attachments that could be remade. And it leads us astray from the worlds that have accrued so much damage, so many ghosts, and follows the half-formed lines of incipient worldings that might become possible with a bit of gentleness, a bit of generosity, and a bit of watching and waiting for what we usually aren't looking for...

1   Kathleen Stewart, "The Achievement of a Life, a List, a Line" in *The Social Life of Achievement*, eds. Nicholas J. Long and Henrietta Moore (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 42.

2   Lauren Berlant, "Starved," *South Atlantic Quarterly* Vol. 106, No. 3 (Summer 2007), 434.

3   Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 4.

4   Kathleen Stewart, "Tactile Compositions" in *Objects and Materials: A Routledge Companion*, eds. Penny Harvey, Elearnor Conlin Casella, Gillian Evans, Hannah Knox, Christine McLean, Elizabeth B. Silva, Nicholas Thoburn, and Kath Woodward (London: Routledge, 2013), 119.

5   Stewart, "An Autoethnography of What Happens" in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, eds. Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2013), 661.

6   João Biehl, "Ethnography in the Way of Theory," *Cultural Anthropology* Vol. 28, No. 4 (2013), 575.

7   Stewart, "An Autoethnography of What Happens," 667.

8   The sources not cited in this essay include: *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), "Cultural Poesis: The Generativity of Emergent Things," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 1015-30, "Precarity's Forms," *Cultural Anthropology* Vol. 27, No. 3 (2012), 518-25, "Road Registers," *Cultural Geographies* Vol. 21, No. 4 (2014), 549-63, and "Weak Theory in an Unfinished World," *Journal of Folklore Research* Vol. 45, No. 1 (2008), 71-82.

9   Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (eds.), *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008); Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Politics Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Mel Y. Chen, *Aniamcies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); William E. Connolly, *A World of Becoming* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) and "Steps towards an Ecology of Late Capitalism," *Theory & Event* Vol. 15, No. 1 (2012); Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (eds.), *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Jasbir K. Puar, "'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess': Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory," *philoSOPHIA* Vol. 2, No. 1 (2012), 49-66 and *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); and Arun Saldanha, *Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) and "Re-ontologising Race: The Machinic Geography of Phenotype," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* Vol. 24 (2006), 9-24

10 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (London, UK: Routledge, 2004) and *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), *The Female Complaint*, and "Thinking about Feeling Historical," *Emotion, Space and Society* Vol. 1 (2008), 4-9; Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); José Esteban Muñoz, "Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho's *The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs)*," *Theatre Journal* Vol. 52, No. 1 (2000), 67-79; Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); John Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling; Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003

11 Berlant, "Starved," 435.

12 In 1893, a group of white businessmen with the help of the United States Military forced Queen Liliʻuokalani to surrender her throne. The wrongness of the overthrow was concluded by an investigation by Congressman James Blount and confirmed by then-President Grover Cleveland. Nonetheless, an oligarchy of white plantation owners ruled Hawaiʻi until it was annexed by the US in 1898 despite widespread opposition by Native Hawaiians. In 1959, Hawaiʻi became the fiftieth state through a ballot that erased independence as an option by restricting voter choice to remaining a territory or becoming a state. On the one hundredth anniversary of the overthrow, the US Congress acknowledged that Native Hawaiians never relinquished their claims to sovereignty. The so-called "Apology Resolution" has not, however, amounted to any substantive legal claims to 1.8 million acres of ceded lands. Meanwhile, what few institutions there are to protect Native interests have been susceptible to legal attacks on the grounds that Native Hawaiians are a race rather than a nation. At the same time, efforts for Native sovereignty have pursued many avenues, from federal recognition to international law.

    Although the overthrow was conducted by whites, settler colonialism in Hawaiʻi since 1954 has largely benefited Asians, especially those of Japanese and Chinese ancestry. The controversial term "Asian settler colonialism" highlights that Asians, whether they are privileged or not, are not indigenous to Hawaiʻi. While the distinction between Natives and non-Natives would group together Asians with whites and members of other races, "Asian settler colonialism" emphasizes that Asians constitute the majority in Hawaiʻi.

    I adopt "Asian settler colonialism" as a term not only because I believe it has so far withstood critique but because I

find it politically important to identify as an Asian settler. Here, Asian settler colonialism is less an unambiguously nameable phenomenon than a set of effects produced by the refraction of my life through autoethnographic fragments.

      For a sample of readings that trace these dynamics, see Jodi A. Byrd, "Satisfied with Stones: Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization and the Discourses of Resistance" in *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 147-83; Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura (eds.), *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawaiʻi* (Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2008); Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, Ikaika Hussey, and Erin Kahunawaikaʻala Wright (eds.), *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Lisa Kahaleole Hall, "'Hawaiians at Heart' and Other Fictions," *The Contemporary Pacific* Vol. 17, No. 2 (2005), 404-13; J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "Colonialism in Equality: Hawaiian Sovereignty and the Question of US Civil Rights," *South Atlantic Quarterly* Vol. 107, No. 4 (2008), 635-50, "Diasporic Deracinations and 'Off-Island' Hawaiians," *The Contemporary Pacific* Vol. 19, No. 1 (2007), 137-60, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), and "Precarious Positions: Native Hawaiians and US Federal Recognition," *The Contemporary Pacific* Vol. 17, No. 1, 1-27; Judy Rohrer, "Attacking Trust: Hawaiʻi as a Crossroads and Kamehameha Schools in the Crosshairs," *American Quarterly* Vol. 62, No. 3 (2010), 437-55 and "'Got Race?' The Production of Haole and the Distortion of Indigeneity in the *Rice* Decision," *The Contemporary Pacific* Vol. 18, No. 1 (2006), 1-31; Dean Itsuji Saranillio, "Colliding Histories: Hawaiʻi Statehood at the Intersections of Asians 'Ineligible to Citizenship' and Hawaiians 'Unfit for Self-Government," *Journal of Asian American Studies* Vol. 13, No. 3 (2010), 283-309 and "Why Asian Settler Colonialism Matters: A Thought Piece on Critiques, Debates, and Indigenous Difference," *Settler Colonial Studies* Vol. 3, Nos. 3-4 (2013), 280-94; Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Ty P. Kāwika Tengan, *Native Men Remade: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Hawaiʻi* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); and Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaiʻi* (Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 1999).

13   Michael J. Shapiro contrasts the macropolitical, as the domain of official political channels and institutions, with the micropolitical, or the worldings of subjects in the textures and rhythms of ordinary life. See *Deforming American Political Thought: Ethnicity, Facticity, Genre*.

14   Kathleen Stewart, "An Autoethnography of What Happens," 667.

15   Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

16   Stewart, "Tactile Compositions," 121.

17   Gilles Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), xx-i.

18   Kathleen Stewart, "More from *The Hundreds*," *Tag*, http://cargocollective.com/tagyoureit/3-SHEEN-STEWART-DOLACK. Accessed on 15 March 2015.

19   "Regionality" is the term given by Stewart to places that attain a consistency by pulling together various bits of matter: "This place hangs together as a thing, then—a recognizable entity with qualities, lived modalities, and a history of its social production and uses—not because its elements are coherent imprints or effects of something else but because they have qualities and affects. They shift or roll. They can accrue, sediment, unfold, wear out, or go flat. There are stake sin the elements of a place as living forms that generate a zone of connectivity not because of what they are but literally because of what they do, the machinery they provide" (Stewart, "Regionality," *The Geographical Review* Vol. 103, No. 2 [2013], 279).

20   Stewart, "Regionality, 276.

21   As Berlant notes, no specific affect necessarily attends attachments. See *Cruel Optimism*, 2.

22   Stewart, "An Autoethnography of What Happens," 661.

23   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari write that "A fiber stretches from a human to an animal, from a human or an animal to molecules, from molecules to particles, and so on to the imperceptible. Every fiber is a Universe fiber" (*A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987], 249).

24   Brian Massumi, "The Future Birth of the Affective Fact" in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 52-70.

25   According to Deleuze, memory is not lodged in brains but worlds.

26   Not all of these people are Native Hawaiian. Houselessness in Hawaiʻi is not reducible to dispossession, but the two are largely related. Laura E. Lyons convincingly links the two by identifying that the houselesss are disproportionately Native Hawaiian ("From Indigenous to Indigent: Homelessness and Settler Colonialism in Hawaiʻi" in *Studies in Settler Colonialism: Politics, Identity and Culture*, eds. Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011], 140-52). Importantly, Lyons observes that a biopolitics of cultural memory divides the houselesss into those who are worthy of state protection and those who are unworthy and left to die. Because the line is defined by the esteemed place of agricultural labor in Hawaiʻi's historical imaginary, the condition of valuable houseless life is tied to dispossession and settlement. One might say that Native houselessness is partly the product of Asian settler colonialism.

27   Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 18.

28   For Deleuze, thought flits about the penumbras of consciousness. It is the product of encounters rather than the voluntary effort of brains. As a result, they arise as question marks rather than as what is already known. See Deleuze,

Difference & Repetition, 139.

29   See Ben Anderson, "Affective Atmospheres," *Emotion, Space and Society* 2 (2009), 77-81; Derek P. McCormack, "Engineering Affective Atmospheres on the Moving Geographies of the 1897 Andrée Expedition," *Cultural Geographies* 15 (2008), 413-430 and *Refrains for Moving Bodies: Experience and Experiment in Affective Spaces* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Kathleen Stewart, "Atmospheric Attunements," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29 (2011), 445-53.

30   Jodi Byrd forcefully argues that Native lives are merely lamentable and not grievable when decolonization is not heeded as a legitimate future possibility (*Transit of Empire*, 38).

31   See especially Haunani-Kay Trask, "Settlers of Color and 'Immigrant' Hegemony: 'Locals' in Hawai'i" in *Asian Settler Colonialism*, 45-65. See also Candace Fujikane, "Foregrounding Native Nationalisms: A Critique of Antinationalist Sentiment in Asian American Studies" in *Asian American Studies after Critical Mass*, ed. Kent A. Ono (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 73-97 and "Introduction: Asian Settler Colonialism in the US Colony of Hawai'i" in *Asian Settler Colonialism*, 1-42; Karen K. Kosasa, "Sites of Erasure: The Representation of Settler Culture in Hawai'i" in *Asian Settler Colonialism*, 195-208; Jonathan Y. Okamura, "Constructing Ethnic Identities, Constructing Differences" in *Ethnicity and Inequality in Hawai'i* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 91-124.

32   Jennifer D. Carlson and Kathleen Stewart, "The Legibilities of Mood Work," *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* Vol. 82 (2014), 133.

33   Alfred North Whitehead writes "Consciousness flickers; and even at its brightest, there is a small focal region of clear illumination, and a large penumbral region of experience which tells of intense experience in dim apprehension" (*Process and Reality* [New York, NY: The Free Press, 1978], 267).

34   "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" (Stewart, "Atmospheric Attunements," 447).

35   Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* Vol. 17, No. 5 (2006), 35.

36   "There will be no greening of the economy, no redistribution of wealth, no enforcement or extension of rights without human dispositions, moods, and cultural ensembles hospitable to these effects" (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, xii).

37   Bianca K. Isaki, "Re-archiving Asian Settler Colonialism in a Time of Hawaiian Decolonization, or, Two Walks along Kamehameha Highway" in *Transnational Crossroads: Remapping the Americas and the Pacific*, eds. Vamilla Fojas and Rudy P. Guevarra Jr. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 281. Isaki's work on Asian settler affect also includes "A Decolonial Archive: The Historical Space of Asian Settler Politics in a Time of Hawaiian Nationhood" (doctoral dissertation, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2008), "HB 645, Settler Sexuality, and the Politics of Local Asian Domesticity in Hawai'i," *Settler Colonial Studies* Vol. 2, No. 1 (2011), 82-102, and "This Trouble is a Woman Who Talks too Much Sometimes": Gender and Asian Structures of Feeling in Hawai'i's Plantation Pasts" (unpublished manuscript).

38   Michael D. Jackson, "Where Thought Belongs: An Anthropological Critique of the Project of Philosophy," *Anthropological Theory* Vol. 9, No. 3 (2009), 241.

39   Berlant, "Starved," 434.

40   Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 4.

41   There can be a plenitude of affect but not emotion. The two are not synonymous; as Massumi has argued, whereas affect is intensity, emotion is intensity qualified by sociolinguistic markers. See "The Autonomy of Affect" in *Parables for the Virtual*, 23-45.

42   Kathleen Stewart, "Pockets," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2012), 365. Stewart is ventriloquizing Berlant, who writes of a "wandering absorptive awareness and hypervigilance" that emerges in the enigmatic and captivating intensities of impasses (*Cruel Optimism*, 4).

43   Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 15-6.

44   Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 51-72 and *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, 52-66.

45   Biehl, "Ethnography in the Way of Theory," 573-597.

46   See William E. Connolly, *Identity\Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) and *Pluralism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

47   A genealogy of affirmative political stances runs through Nietzsche, Foucault, Deleuze, Connolly, and Bennett. Brian Massumi is one of the latest to affirm the virtual field of emergence as a critical site of politics for the left given its engagement by neoconservatives and neoliberals. See "After the Long Past: A Retrospective Introduction to the History of the Present" in *Ontopower* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015; forthcoming).

48   Stewart, "Atmospheric Attunements," 447.