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Calls of/to the Ordinary

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Calls of/to the Ordinary

Ordinary Affects tells stories of everyday happenings and practices, a collage of the mundane brought to life in brief tales told in the third person. Yet the text is other—more—than this. In one scene the book's protagonist is alone at a table in a café in a West Texas town and she—"I call myself 'she'. . . as a point of contact"¹—notices a biker couple entering. They limp. They sit, talking intently. As the solitary diner-writer leaves, she walks past their table and they ask her which way she is headed. If she's going the route they have just travelled—the west road—would she look out for bike parts? They hit a deer, they explain. Their bike was damaged; the deer more so. Others in the restaurant engage in the conversation; they tell stories of other episodes, collisions, happenings, on that road. For Kathleen Stewart, for the reader, our attention is not on these "points"—the couple, the incident, the other diners, the allied accounts—but on that which emerges, irrupts, in those moments of encounter:

The scene in the restaurant becomes an ordinary maze of inspirations and experiments. It's as if the singularity of the event has shaken things up, lightening the load of social preoccupations and social ruts. As if everyone was waiting for something like this to happen. A "we" of sorts opens in the room, charging the social with lines of potential.²

Throughout Stewart's book there are such stories: there is walking in the park, there are dogs "sleeping in fits and starts,"³ a visit to the mountains, snippets of family history, homelessness, gambling. Stewart's concern is with the *ordinary affects* that suffuse such events. Ordinary affects as life, as breath; affects that animate the everyday—surging, simmering, shuddering, flowing, creating "a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences."⁴

Stewart's book has taken hold of those of us in this special issue. We did not always know this; and it has taken us each to different places, in different

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directions. We were all at one point oblivious but we ran into each other. The book found us. Here is one version of how:

During a conversation with Jonathan in late 2014, Alecia suggested assembling a panel about the book for the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry. We wrote to others we knew who might be interested: Anne Harris, Ken Gale, Stacy Holman Jones, and Tami Spry. We wrote saying we would like them to accompany us in seeing where *Ordinary Affects* takes us—in our writing, in our theorizing, in our lives, wherever that may be. All four of them said yes. They and we—“an assemblage of disparate scenes”—presented our papers, our responses to the book, to/with an audience on the top floor of the Illini Building at the University of Illinois one Friday afternoon in mid-May 2015. Rolling between us, one to the others, one to the audience through an hour and twenty minutes, Stewart absent but she—“she”—and her work sweeping across the wooden floor and the white walls, swirling us up and around and, weeks later, gathering Patricia Ticineto Clough and Talha İşsevenler, Lisa A. Mazzei, and Susanne Gannon, who were willing to be taken up with us/this. Summoned by her own book, Stewart accepted its call and carried our essays with her to New England to see where they, in turn, led her.

That is one version, a story of the “points,” less in keeping with the ontological disposition of *Ordinary Affects* than we would like. Attention to the *lines*,⁶ to the agency of affect, would take us into how these essays fall onto the pages of this special issue, would tell of the work they do, the shape they take, the way they *charge* us. Stewart writes:

The ordinary is a thing that has to be imagined and inhabited. It’s also a sensory connection. A jump. And a world of affinities and impacts that take place in the moves of intensity across things that seem solid and dead.⁷

This may be a line the reader might follow, think with, feel with, drift with: how this collection’s authors take up Stewart’s call to imagine and inhabit the ordinary and its uncommon impacts and intensities. None of these texts of the ordinary is “neutral,” none is “immaterial” (in any sense). Rather, like Stewart’s book, each is variously provocative, striking, political. Sense how the texts make contact, touch; how they shift us as they attend to the everyday of breastfeeding, loving and longing, an office, weather, home, more; and call us to action, to theory, to writing. To action-as-theory-as-writing.

Finally, a reader might allow this collection—fittingly, here, in this journal—to offer *departures*: towards what might be possible in qualitative research, towards inquiry that pays attention to the ordinary not in order to identify, categorize, and

interpret, but in order to become immersed, lost, taken over; towards research that finds the “critical” not from the observational outside, but from a coursing within that orients us to “a mode of attunement, a continuous responding to something not quite already given and yet somehow happening.”⁸ ■

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NOTES

1. Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 5.
2. *Ibid.*, 11.
3. *Ibid.*, 9.
4. *Ibid.*, 2.
5. *Ibid.*, 5.
6. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 2nd ed., trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2002).
7. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 127.
8. *Ibid.*