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John Protevi,
Towards
Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic,
University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2009.

The harsh debate between the advocates of social determinism, on one side, and genetic determinism, on the other, sets the basis of the claim that philosophy today is totally distanced from the achievements of natural sciences. In this book, an attempt is made to overcome the limitations which arise from the opposite claims of these two key theories. By connecting Deleuze's ontology with the results of the latest research in biology, Protevi makes a synthesis of the seemingly opposing arguments with which the social and genetic determinists operate. It can be said that in *Political Affect*, Protevi shows that these two theories of human nature can be quite complementary, which at first can seem a little strange.

The author John Protevi is a professor of French Studies at Louisiana State University. His early interests in Heidegger and Derrida are supplemented with the specialisation of Deleuze, cognitive sciences and biology. The main issues in his lectures are the theories of Foucault, Bergson and Badiou. *Political Affect* represents an addition of his book *Political Physics: Deleuze, Derrida and the Body Politic* in which Protevi uses the notion of

self-management of material systems, known in complexity theory, along with the critique of hylomorphism that Deleuze and Guattari develop in relation to this idea as a readers pattern for certain episodes of the history of Western philosophy. As Protevi himself claims, this book explores the connection of the social and the somatic, or how our bodies, minds and social settings are intricately and intimately connected. In creating the hypothesis, Protevi uses arguments from philosophy, science, and politics, and he calls his perspective "political physiology." With this term, Protevi not only indicates the mix of intellectual resources, but also the bypassing of subjectivity in favour of a direct link between the social and the somatic. Following his line of thought, Protevi creates three basic concepts which he names "bodies politic," "political cognition," and "political affect." With the concept of bodies politic he captures the embodied, embedded and extended character of subjectivity, or how the production, bypassing, and surpassing of subjectivity is found in the interactions of social and somatic systems. In this analysis, he makes three compositional scales of bodies politic – personal, group, and civic and three

temporal scales – short-term, mid-term, and long-term. Borrowing this concept from Deleuze’s ontology, in the first chapter of the book, Protevi explains how on all these compositional and temporal scales we see the events as a product of differential relations that structure a dynamic bio-social-political-economic field. On the personal scale of political physiology, we can see the formation of the somatic bodies politic, the patterns and triggers of the bodily action and reaction. On the group compositional scale, we can see the short-term events of the concrete social perception and action that eventually form bodies politic. On the highest scale of the political physiology, we can see the formation of the bodies politic in a classical sense, or what Protevi calls “civil bodies politic” - the patterns and triggers of institutional action.

In the third part of the book, Protevi takes a look of three case studies of contemporary instances of a politically formed and triggered affective cognition as concrete intersections of the social, physiological and psychological. Those three cases are Terri Schiavo, the Columbine High School massacre and the natural disaster caused by the Hurricane Katrina. Protevi develops a different emotional focus for every case – love in the case of Schiavo, rage in the case of Columbine and fear in the case of Katrina. To create continuity throughout the analysis, Protevi concentrates on empathy as an important instance of the affective cognition. The empathy as an important emotional connection between all of the corporal beings is biologically widespread between the primates, as well as between humans. Even though it’s widespread, Protevi thinks that empathy needs an appropriate development – it needs a genetic background and a social environment. That’s why empathy is not present in

everyone with the same intensity. If the proto-empathic identification is present, it is triggered most easily by the ones that are found in the in-group which is concerned with the case, and its transfer to the others is weak and it can be overcome by the social factors which manipulate with the thresholds of rage and anger such as political indoctrination and military training. The proto-empathic identification is an aspect of the political physiology. It is biological, but it’s submitted to political manipulation.

In the conclusion of the book, Protevi claims that political physiology may be useful in political theory in understanding the notion of sovereignty. The capability of “the forces of order” to kill in a planned and systematic manner is the key of sovereignty conceived as the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within the borders of a certain territory. He says that we have to take into consideration the techniques with which we can overcome the proto-empathic identification and its inhibition of violence. To understand terrorism as political violence, we must have a clear understanding if the intersection between the political rhetoric, affective neuroscience and the act of killing. In other words, Protevi claims that we need a way of thinking of humans as collective and emotional, but also as individual and emotional beings. The need for political physiology to study the political affect is evident, because the negative affects of panic and rage, as well as the weaker forms of fear, anger, anxiety and sadness, represent emotions which are the easiest for political manipulation. Protevi says that all of the affects are not negative, but we have to rethink the focus of political physiology over the rational subject not just in panic and rage, but also in love and empathy, or what Aristotle calls “*philia*.”

Even though Protevi himself admits that this is a book that is synthetic, and in some instances speculative, because it uses arguments from various scientific fields, it still represents interesting theoretical research that uses strong arguments in the discovery of the intersections of the somatic, on one side, and the social field, on the other, in which every human being lives.