
Brian Massumi’s *What Animals Teach Us About Politics* does exactly what the title says – it outlines what animals teach us about politics. This text does not turn to nature to tell us how to structure our human politics, however. So, if you are looking for a David Attenborough-esque narration of how humans can learn from the political hierarchies of sub-Saharan lion prides, or the social structures of honeybee colonies, then this book is not for you. No, *What Animals Teach Us About Politics* delves into the very heart of affectivity to envision a different politics ‘one that is not a human politics of the animal, but an integrally animal politics, freed from the traditional paradigms of the nasty state of nature’ (p. 2). It is about enactive politics, not structural politics.

*What Animals Teach Us About Politics* shows that the human and the animal co-exist on the same continuum, one that does not polarise difference but celebrates difference’s creativity in the space in-between, in the middle. Indeed much of the book revolves around the concept of mutual inclusion, stressing that the undifferentiated middle is where the magic of life happens; it is where instinct turns to improvisation and improvisation turns to creativity. It is where creativity becomes supernormative, and supernormativity creates the new. *What Animals Teach Us About Politics* is a book about the affirmation of generic difference ‘that interpenetrates without losing its distinction’ (p. 49).

Massumi frames his arguments about mutual inclusion and animal politics by looking at animal play at the start of the book. He argues that in play-fighting two different logics – the logic of combat and the logic of play – entwine in a performative zone of indiscernibility (p. 6). By exploring what happens in this zone of indiscernibility where two modes of being occupy the same space and time, Massumi shows how surplus-value of life (or in other words, ‘the new’) is created through improvisation and variation (p. 18). Massumi views play not as an attempt to normalise gesture, but to invent the new, for the normalized gesture is a predictable one:

> A gesture whose form is modeled as a function of a recognized instrumental end is one that is normalized in advance of its deployment. A normalized gesture is a predictable gesture. If learning were limited to modeling the form of an instinctive act in advance of its instrumental deployment, it would be dangerously maladaptive. It would model its pupils to death (p. 12).
Using the cuckoo chick as an example, Massumi injects animal politics with a sizeable dose of affectivity. Alfred Whitehead’s notion of ‘appetition’ and Raymond Ruyer’s concept of ‘auto-conduction’ are used to show how affective impulses, or ‘enthusiasm of the body’, pull action towards supernormal variation. In this way, affective impulses express a positive desire for variation (p. 20), thus affectivity – framed by Massumi as both categorical and vital – express an affirmative potentiality inherent to play and mutual inclusion. Massumi shows that politics is thus not reducible to structural representation but is affective and un-representable; it is relational and processual. Taking the lead from Guattari’s ethico-aesthetic paradigm of natural politics (p. 38) What Animals Teach Us About Politics is an attempt to construct a natural politics that is a lived expression of processes, not a hierarchical organisation of beings.

In a section entitled ‘Propositions: what Animals Teach Us about Politics (Preliminary Sketch, to Be Filled in According to Appetite)’ Massumi proposes seventeen things that animals teach us about politics. While these, for the most part, clarify the discussion from earlier in the book they are slightly repetitive. For example, the propositions that politics is a process, is mutually inclusive, affective and creative are reiterated on a number of occasions. That being said, each explanation of these propositions focuses on a different aspect of how or why animal politics teaches these things.

Following this section, Supplement 1: ‘To Write Like a Rat Flicks its Tail’ explores the Deleuzeo-Guattarian concept of becoming-animal in relation to writing in an effort to distinguish becoming-animal from nonhuman animal play (p. 55). Massumi notes two differences between becoming-animal and nonhuman animal play. The first is that becoming-animal ‘is entered upon by necessity’; one enters into becoming-animal in order to escape normalisation and de/reterritorialise oneself, ‘creativity and survival are one’ (p. 55). The second difference is that the deterritorialisation of becoming-animal is absolute (p. 57). In other words, becoming-animal means entering into the ‘never before seen, the never done or previously felt’ (p. 57). Using Kafka’s cockroach Gregor from Metamorphosis, the white whale from Moby Dick, and Deleuze and Guattari’s rat (1987) this section explains how writing-animal is not an anthropomorphic expression of animality; it is supernormality at its limit. Writing becoming-animal is an affirmative gesture of the new.

1 For example, Gregor is written between two limits – the limit of animality on one side and the limit of human affectivity on the other. Gregor exists in space and time as singular and specific to the limits between which his cockroachity is written, therefore writing-animal is the pure expression of an integral animal. Thus writing-
Supplement 2: ‘The Zoo-ology of Play’ broaches the subject of spectatorship as integral to thinking becoming-animal or animal politics. Massumi uses the example of the zoo to show that human politics creates structure in order to avoid lived abstraction, to avoid the creation of the new, by framing the human and the animal as oppositional. Massumi uses zoo-ology to show how the double framing that takes place in zoos demonstrates our human politics of sovereignty – that is, it is about determining what is excluded and how it is excluded.

Supplement 3: ‘Six Theses on the Animal to Be Avoided’ briefly outlines some major pitfalls we should steer clear of when thinking becoming-animal. While it is beyond the scope of this review to go into these in much depth, the theses warn, in broad terms, against categorically separating the human from the animal – a project that is unwittingly undertaken with the adoption of ‘post’-ing (posthuman, postanimal, etc.). Massumi’s warnings are meant to show how we must avoid, in a very Deleuzeo-Guattarian sense, making assumptions, presumptions, generalisations and typologies that anchor the processual; there is no individual, only the transindividual; there are no clear dividing lines between the human, the animal, consciousness and life; the subject is not given, but is rather an always-changing product of the creative act.

Be warned: this book is not for the idle reader. Familiarity with Latour, Deleuze, Guattari, Bergson and Whitehead is recommended before attempting to read this book. What Animals Teach Us About Politics is clearly intended for readers who are already acquainted with Deleuze studies, posthumanism and animal studies, among a number of other theories including affect theory, play theory, speculative theory and aesthetics. The book is not an ‘explainer’ or introductory text; it is an active book aimed at establishing a new understanding of politics. It is thus useful for anyone who wants to approach politics from a new perspective, one that does not limit the political to that which is already given, but one that opens politics up to creative potentialities and affectivity.

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animal shows that ‘becoming-animal is a real participation against nature, following nature’s own supernormal tendency, supercharged in a movement to the absolute limit’ (p. 62).