

## Path Dependence: Affect, Practice, and Indigenous Self-Determination

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Path dependence proposes that the continued “doing” of a practice is shored up by what has been done before. If, as Sara Ahmed moves, words become paths, can explanatory forces direct material and affective intensities? Both Ruth Leys and Margaret Wetherell contend that the “affective turn” in cultural and political theory (whether circling the Tomkins/Sedgwick or Deleuze/Massumi “path”) assumes pre-personal, asignifying, or visceral intensities precede semiosis and that joy, rage, shame, or other so-called subcortical affect programs can be explained on universal evolutionary or genetic grounds. If, as Leys and Wetherall propose, intensities and the production of meaning are entangled (affective-discursive), then the catalog of affective states and “beings”—sentient or insensate—who act and are acted upon are mediated by the beings and knowledges built into bodies of knowledge and made accessible to philosophical, political, and theological projects. If affect is to sidestep psychobiological, evolutionary, or theological determinisms, intensities must be thought alongside metaphysics and take into account the entanglements of being, knowing, doing, and feeling. Another salient entanglement might be the folding-together of two turns: the “affective turn” in the humanities and the “ontological turn” in the social sciences. While affect opens theory to sensation and movement, ontology, taken up by science studies (STS) theorists and ethnographers like John Law and Annemarie Mol, opens theoretical accounts to the non-

human and provides a means to coordinate between versions of reality enacted in heterogeneous practices.

Much of affect is taken up as a means of “playing God”—exerting an explanatory force to animate the non-human; affect and theology are not so far apart. I contend that, whether theorist or theologian, playing God is a question of warrants, of establishing authority and permissibility, and of determinism contra self-determination. I propose an examination of the relationship between language and material agencies—a reappraisal of affect through material semiotic method. Where language and affect meet, one encounters the production of beings- and knowledges-multiple and, thus, a politics of what is possible in a world. Instead of a reimagining of theological language, I propose increased accountability for Christian-colonial linguicide (the “civilizing” of “animist” languages); engaging Indigenous theorists Robin Kimmerer (Anishinaabe), Leroy Little Bear 1 of 2 (Blackfoot), and Ryan Heavy Head (Blackfoot), I offer an affective-discursive sketch of knowledge-practices in support of the revitalization of Indigenous languages, the self-determination of Indigenous peoples, and the self-determination of all forms of life and non-life.