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Passionate space: the philosophy of affect in Gabriel Josipovici's *Hotel Andromeda*

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Abstract. Since the 1990's the study of affect and emotion has been a major growth area in such disciplines as psychology, psychoanalysis, neurobiology, social studies and the humanities. On the basis of Baruch Spinoza's and Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of affect, this article propounds an affect diagram whose aim is to illustrate the essentials of the elusive and transient workings of affect on both the intra- and interpersonal level and thus to refer to the dynamic correspondence between the mind and the body as well as passions and actions. This diagram is further used as a methodological tool for the interpretation of Gabriel Josipovici's latest fiction *Hotel Andromeda* (2014) into which it has been symbolically inscribed to signal the protagonist's major struggle. The same diagrammatic structure can be also discerned in Joseph Cornell's peculiar box construction "Hotel Andromeda" from which the title of the novel derives.

Key words*:* Affect, body, mind, Spinoza, Deleuze

1. INTRODUCTION

What came to be known as a "linguistic", "pictorial" or "cultural turn" in the twentieth century marked a shift in scholarly interest towards language, image as well as issues of identity, power relations and the social construction of knowledge. Before this intellectually vibrant century drew to an end, a new tendency in academic research emerged and was labeled "an affective turn." The first texts appeared in the 1990's but the real outburst of studies was observed in the first decade of this century with the publications of Brian Massumi, Sara Ahmed, Patricia Ticineto Clough, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and others. Currently, affect features as a prominent issue in the humanities and social sciences as well many other disciplines such as psychology, psychoanalysis and neuroscience. Beyond doubt, however, it is the philosophical context that inspired the contemporary interest in affect.

There is one particular line of thinking about affect that interests me in the philosophical discussion, the one which runs from the 17th century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza to the 20th century French thinker Gilles Deleuze. Directly or indirectly, Spinoza's views on affect inspired most of the contemporary work in this field. The most consequential was his distinction between two Latin terms *affectio* and *affectus*, both often wrongly translated as affection and consequently equaled with emotion. Affection (*affectio*) is defined in Spinoza's Ethics (1994) as a state of a body insofar as it is a subject to actions of another body whereas affect (*affectus*) is explained as affections of a body "by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained and, at the same time, the ideas of these affections" (154). In the contemporary discourse affect is understood as "a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another" (Massumi 2005a, xvii) or a potentiality which in its inevitable embodiment can produce perceptible emotions, passions or sensations. Massumi (2002, 28) conceives of affect as essentially different from emotion and explains the latter in the following way: "An emotion is a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized." Unlike ideas, which in Spinoza's philosophical system are representational as they always refer to elements of reality, affects are non-representational, not yet formed or realized, an abstract and sheer potentiality or, according to Mieke Bal (2015, 35), "a semantically empty intensity." What is crucial in Spinoza's philosophy is the continuous interaction of bodies and how these, what he calls encounters, can increase or diminish the body's power to act. Affect arises thus in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacity to act and be acted upon (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 1). In the foreword to the seminal collective publication *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, Michael Hardt (2007, ix-xi) aptly summarizes Spinoza's approach to affect:

> First, the mind's power to think and its developments are, he proposes, parallel to the body's power to act. This does not mean that the mind can determine the body to act, or that the body can determine the mind to think. On the contrary, Spinoza maintains that mind and body are autonomous but that they nonetheless proceed or develop in parallel. . . . Spinoza, secondly, proposes a correspondence between the power to act and the power to be affected. This applies equally to the mind and to the body: the mind's power to think corresponds to its receptivity to external ideas; and the body's power to act corresponds to its sensitivity to other bodies. The greater our power to be affected, he posits, the grater our power to act. . . . In his terms, affects can be actions, that is, determined by internal causes, or passions, determined by external causes. On the one side we have reason, actions of the mind, along with actions of the body . . . on the other side are the passions both of the mind and the body. . . . The affects straddle these two divides: between the mind and body, and between actions and passions.

Spinoza's views were advanced by Gilles Deleuze to actually in a large degree shape his entire philosophical system in which the nomadic subject is characterized by constant movement and interaction in the process of becoming. A philosopher of change and difference, Deleuze is also considered the twentieth century's most spatial philosopher. He contributed a plethora of new concepts to engage space such as smooth and striated, nomadic and sedentary, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, the fold, as well as many others. The spatial relations he wants us to think with are indissolubly related to the continuous flow of intensities that affect entails. The choice of the contrastive qualities deployed in Deleuze's philosophy (smooth vs. striated, etc.) seems to be conditioned by the nature of affect, briefly defined as "persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations" (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 1). Space in Deleuze's philosophy appears thus as fluid, vibrant and dynamic, trafficking with affective resonances: "Flows of intensity, their fluids, their fibers, their continuums and conjunctions of affects, the wind, fine segmentation, microperceptions, have replaced the world of the subject. Becomings, becomings-animal, becomings-molecular, have replaced history, individual or general" (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 162). Massumi calls Deleuzian space promiscuous though the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus* prefer to think of it in terms of revolution (2005b, xv).

Since it is possible to view the spatial qualities prevailing in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze as inspired by the nature of affect, his entire perspective can be briefly summarized as affective thinking about space. Yet in this article I would like to suggest a different approach – a spatial thinking about affect in the shape of the following diagram:

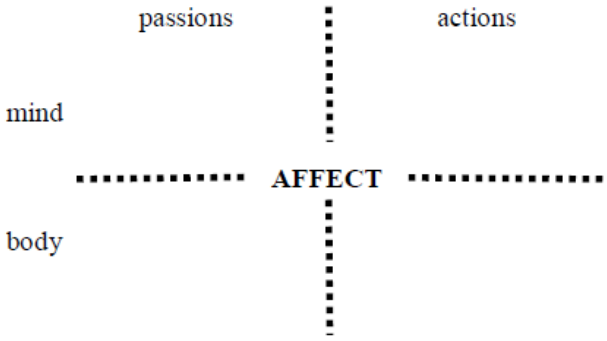

Figure 1. An affect diagram.

This diagram is an attempt to present the essentials of the elusive and transient workings of affect on both the intra- and interpersonal level. It can also be interpreted as a schematic illustration of Hardt's views on Spinoza's understanding of affect. The "spatial" vocabulary he deploys in the passage quoted above ("on the one side", "on the

other side", "straddles these two divides") calls for a visual representation. The central position of affect signals its decisive impact on interpersonal relations on the level of both the mind and the body (the vertical line) as well as on the intra-personal complexities of the body-mind correspondence (the horizontal line). Placed at the crossroads of the main divides, affect appears also as an elusive and transitive force, not belonging to either side but operating medially in between the two. Separating, though not tightly and completely, the area of the body and the mind as well as actions and passions, the dashed lines point to the dynamic nature of space in Deleuze's philosophy where the constant interaction of bodies or, in Spinoza's terms, a series of encounters is what defines and determines human life: "The texture of the self is a membrane, not a thing but a capture of another thing. . . . Everyone may therefore say 'I am the world, or a piece of the world,' to the precise extent that spirit only realizes or individuates itself upon encountering the world, beyond which it does not exist, or exists only potentially" (Zourabichvili 1997, 197). The diagram will aid the discussion on what is the ultimate objective of this article – the study of Gabriel Josipovici's latest fiction *Hotel Andromeda* (2014).

2. THEORY INCARNATE – THE WORKINGS OF AFFECT IN GABRIEL JOSIPOVICI'S *HOTEL ANDROMEDA*

Affecting various disciplines, the affect theory opened also some new perspectives and new possibilities of analysis and interpretation for literature. The study of affect in literary texts most frequently centers on what literature is able to embrace, represent or discuss, namely emotions, either those governing the behavior of the characters or those evoked by the text in the reader. There is, however, an exceptional case of Josipovici's novel *Hotel Andromeda*, which seems to be strongly engaged in the affective debate but in a distinct way. Josipovici's approach to affect in his book is very theoretical, not to say definitional or schematic. Such a manner is not surprising in the case of a writer who apart from fictional works (novel, short story or drama) publishes also critical commentaries and theoretical studies. His publication entitled *Touch* and released in 1996 makes him coincide both temporarily and ideologically with the affective turn. This longish essay betrays Josipovici's interests in the body and its influence on human experience. He formulates his views in the following way:

> We think . . . of other people as occupying an objective space in front of us, and of our knowledge of them as being derived from our ability to see. But this is not in fact how we apprehend others. At least part of what enters into an apprehension of them is our common bodily and kinaesthetic reaction to a physical world which we both inhabit. For we are embodied, and it is our bodies which give us common access to the physical world; in other words we are participators, not spectators, and it is through embodiment that we participate. (1996, 6)

In her interview with Josipovici, Victoria Best (2015) characterizes his fiction as concerned with the depiction of distance between people "as a space that is vibrant with unspoken feeling." This statement comes very close to Deleuze's thinking about affect

and its capacity for energizing space. Taking recourse once again to Hardt's words that the parallelism between the mind and the body "does not in any way resolve the question of the relation of body and mind; rather it poses it as a problem or mandate for research" (2007, x), it seems that Josipovici makes his novel a literary reaction to this "mandate for research" appeal and structures his story according to the tensions inherent in the affective debate. As I will try to demonstrate, Josipovici virtually translates theoretical issues into a fictional story by inscribing the affect diagram into his novel. What is more, an identical diagrammatic intersection of lines, followed by analogous interpretative implications, can be discerned in "Hotel Andromeda" - one of Joseph Cornell's famous box constructions which gives the title to Josipovici's novel. Hence, it is not only the ontological space of the characters that is vibrant with unspoken feeling in Josipovici's latest book, but such vital yet elusive issues as the body-mind correspondence are communicated through spatial relations, symbolic and artistic, both apparently ensuing from the diagrammatic illustration of affect.

Hotel Andromeda is a story of a London art historian, Helena, who struggles with her self-appointed task of writing a book about the eccentric American artist, Joseph Cornell, a creator of bizarre collage-boxes. Her greatest problem, however, concerns her relation with her sister, Alice, working in an orphanage in Chechnya. Helena is deeply convinced that in the context of wartime atrocities her preoccupation with art deserves nothing but contempt. She instinctively feels, however, that her work cannot be easily relinquished. Through a series of dialogues with her neighbors, Ruth and Tom, as well as Alice's friend, Ed, Helena strives to define herself and justify her luxurious lifestyle against the highly idealized image of her altruistic sister.

All the secondary characters in *Hotel Andromeda* make an impression of being complete and unwavering whereas the main heroine seems to be a character in the making, in the process of becoming, as if questioning herself: "What is the other to which I am related, which I pursue and in relation to which my life is played out (becoming)" (Zourabichvili 1997, 189). In the absence of her sister, Helena negotiates her self in relation to her neighbors. Written almost entirely in dialogue, the novel becomes a perfect example of the correspondence between form and content in a literary text as the dialogue style is the best way to stress the self-search process. In the context of intersubjectivity, dialogue is perceived "as not just being helpful in revealing the self to others but as necessary to the very discovery of that self and to its expression" (Bronwen 2012, 62). What Mikhail Bakhtin (1984, 252) notes about Dostoyevsky's fiction seems to bear relevance also to *Hotel Andromeda*: "Dialogue here is not the threshold to action, it is the action itself. It is not a means for revealing, for bringing to the surface the already ready-made character of a person; no, in dialogue a person not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time that which he is – and, we repeat, not only for others but for himself as well." *Hotel Andromeda* resonates with voice, presence and the body. The dialogue form – a quick interchange hardly aided by narrator's remarks – becomes symptomatic of the underlying dynamism of encounters and interactions among the characters of Josipovici's novel. In this way, all the definitional conditions of Deleuzian space are met: "A place . . . becomes space only when it becomes a site of existential engagement among living agents who mark it with their activities or affiliate with dialogue and active perception" (Conley 2005, 258).

The underlying logic of Josipovici's fictional compositions is to embrace contrastive characters which could be placed at opposite ends of a spectrum. *Hotel Andromeda* fully conforms to this rule. Helena and her sister Alice are positioned at such distant poles with the former concerned primarily with the mind and intellectual work and the latter associated with feelings and the body. The opposition could be otherwise symbolically represented by the house in which Helena lives. She occupies a flat right above Tom, a professional writer, who constantly teases her with the following pleas: "Give me a kiss" (Josipovici 2014, 34) or "Come and sit on my lap" (Josipovici 2014, 15). Ruth, who stands for elderly wisdom, lives in a flat at the top of the house. The space in the middle is assigned to Helena, symbolically stuck in between these two extremes: Ruth's sagacity and Tom's sexual attraction, the mind and the body. Thus arranged, the house corresponds to the schematic representation of affect where the body-mind axis is one of the basic divisions. It shows also strong resemblance to Deleuze's Baroque house described by Hélène Frichot (2005, 65-66) in the following words: "We can observe in the upstairs apartment of Deleuze's Baroque house the folds of the soul, and below, on the ground floor, the pleats of matter. . . . The event, restless inhabitant of this house, is that which neither the material nor the immaterial, neither the ground nor upper apartment, can entirely account for. The event wanders about, ghost-like, ungraspable, in-between floors, surveying the flexible membrane that has been developed by Deleuze and Leibniz." As it will become clear further in this study, the dual structure of the house welcoming events, or affective happenings, is closely reflected in Cornell's eponymous box construction.

Helena's fascination with Cornell's art reaches beyond her professional commitment: "Cornell attracted me in the first place because he obscurely spoke to something in me" (Josipovici 2014, 81-82). As they are both plagued with a similar inadequacy, Helena instantly detects it in the artist. She notes in her diary that Joseph Cornell appears to lack any sort of materiality: "The world seemed simply unaware of him and his needs" (Josipovici 2014, 110). Cornell's explicit denial of his own immanence and bodiliness can be explained by the complex family situation he found himself in after his father's premature death. Unable to provide for his overbearing mother and the mentally disabled brother, he begins to perceive the hard earthly existence merely as a temporary necessity. In a desperate attempt to attune the mind and the body both Helena and Cornell become compulsive writers of books and diaries which neither attract wide audience nor record momentous events. The value of this persistent scribbling lies first of all in the physicality of the written word which can supplant the corporeality of the authors. Since, however, the solidity of writing proves insufficient to reconnect the mind and the body, Helena and Cornell, an art historian and a creator of bizarre box constructions, become fascinated with something more obviously material – the visual arts.

Collected from the streets or obtained from garage sales, the elements of Cornell's compositions are used to create unique images or scenes. The eponymous "Hotel Andromeda" is Helena's favorite design, the one she finds most appealing:

> The whole image exudes a powerful sense of both human and cosmic balance. Are we in heaven, then, among the myths of antiquity . . . or in a seedy French provincial hotel? The box is profoundly ambiguous [and] it is impossible to say which triumphs,

> the seediness evoked by the notepaper or the wonder evoked by the name Andromeda. . . . It is the ambiguity of the box that so draws me, and the ambiguity is never resolved but forces us to move, as in a Möbius strip, perpetually from the one to the other. (Josipovici 2014, 38-9)

The whole series of boxes which Cornell did in the fifties and of which "Hotel Andromeda" is a significant representative was related to hotels and stars. For this group of box installations Cornell used Renaissance images and diagrams of constellations, cut out from the color reproductions he found in nineteenth-century popular astronomy books, particularly those of Camille Flammarion, and pasted them onto notepaper issued for old French provincial hotels. Divided horizontally by a high rope on which Andromeda is sitting, the scene seems to make a reference not only to the old diagrams of constellations but also to the affect diagram where the horizontal line delineates the body-mind fission. In a similar way, Helena's favorite composition combines contrastive qualities: "the sordid and the heavenly, reality and the ideal" (Josipovici 2014, 38), the body and the mind, indissolubly united and enclosed in the limited space of the box.

By means of his peculiar compositions, Cornell thematizes what has been his lifetime struggle: the correlation of the mind and the body. In her critical evaluation of Cornell's art Helena goes even further and claims that the therapeutic potential of the process of art-making in the case of Cornell lies not only in the symbolic reworking of his inner tensions but primarily in the fact that art-making engages both the mind and the body. She explains Cornell's art as an extension of his body and a projection of his anxieties: "If you cannot speak then it seems to be a law of nature that your body will speak for you" (Josipovici 2014, 57). With this statement she echoes Josipovici's conviction that there are "things we cannot say, but our body knows" (Best 2015) as well as shares his fascination with "the mysteries of our relation to our bodies, of the way the body knows better, as it were, than the mind or the soul, and of the way we, as sentient and rational beings, are always at a loss to make sense of our bodies" (Josipovici 1999, 178). Helena's conclusion emerges in the context of a broader discussion on silent movie in which Cornell evinced deep interest. The films she concentrates on share a similar motif. Both the 1924 adaptation of *The Hands of Orlac* by Robert Wiene and Fritz Lang's *M* released seven years later feature a man whose murderous inclinations arise from a peculiar quality of his hands which simply "cannot hold back" (Josipovici 2014, 56). Helena finds Cornell's situation similar except that the inclinations are not criminal but artistic. Cornell's hands seem to possess their own logic, grammar, or what Hardt (2007, x) calls "corporeal reason." Helena's simple commentary resonates with Spinoza's famous passage in the *Ethics*: "For indeed, no one has yet determined what the body can do – that is, experience has not yet taught anyone what the body can do from the Laws of Nature alone, insofar as Nature is only considered to be corporeal, and what the body can do only if it is determined by the mind" (1994, 155-6). These words were closely repeated by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*: "We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects" (2005, 257).

Helena's intellectual struggle to grasp the meaning of Cornell's art and thus find an organizing principle for her book is accompanied by the underlying analysis of her

relations with her sister – her distant other, and indirectly also with her own body. Helena's road to harmonize the mind and the body differs from Cornell's. While it is definitely true that the dual construction of Cornell's boxes makes them an object of Helena's deep interest and enduring fascination, the art does not work the same wonders for her as it does for the artist. In a picture taken when he was in his seventies, Cornell is described by Tom in the following words: "He's just feeling the sun on his face" (Josipovici 2014, 7). When Helena insists that Tom specifies what the artist is thinking of at the moment, he replies succinctly and decidedly: "Nothing" (Josipovici 2014, 7). Cornell's mother and brother are dead and he does not do the boxes any longer. He seems at peace, finally also with his body.

Even the fact that "the simultaneous engagement of sensory and symbolic processes is a hallmark of aesthetic experience" (Cupchik 2013, 76) and as such a communion-like fusion of the mind and the body, Helena's process of repossessing her own body does not stop at contemplating art. Before the body-mind unison actually occurs in her life, the reader may observe how Helena's body slowly awakens: "Gradually, as she swims out towards the clearer water, her body starts to warm up" (117). This happens largely due to the presence of Ed, a Czech photographer who has just returned from Chechnya where he befriended Alice. His English is broken so that Helena's conversations with the unexpected guest are limited to a very basic exchange of information. Still, these simple talks suffice to give Helena a glimpse of her sister's reality and everyday struggle. The moment Helena and Ed become lovers, Helena's dream vision of her sister's closeness seems finally fulfilled: "I was trembling but at the same time I could still feel the warmth of her body all down my right-hand side" (96). In the long run, however, the substitution of Alice's presence for Ed's proves ineffective and the affair comes to an abrupt end.

The question of the body does not disappear from the pages of Josipovici's novel. On the contrary, it keeps returning in the conversations between Helena and Ruth. In one of them the women discuss a mysterious murder of a Chinese man whose dead body was hidden in a car boot in the close vicinity of the house. The way they speculate about the motifs behind the crime gives *Hotel Andromeda* a comical taint: "- It must have been an awfully big car, Helena says. - Chinamen are pretty small, Ruth says. You'd be hard put to it to bundle a Swede into the boot of a car. -You think that's why they chose a Chinaman? Helena says. Because of his size?" (Josipovici 2014, 120). No matter how amusing the whole scene may seem, the image of the *dead* body impresses Helena to such an extent that she is ready to make her final decision – she succumbs to Tom's unyielding pleas and they become lovers. Interestingly, right after the event Helena is finally able to comprehend the underlying complexities of Cornell's bizarre box constructions. She begins to conceive of Cornell's art as reflecting his longing for the carefree youth he used to be before his father's death, his desire to become thus again, his fascination with youthful bodies and, supposedly resulting from all this, his suppressed pedophilic drives.

In her diary Helena writes: "There are many forms of desire and it may be that the physical is only an instance of something larger, more inclusive" (Josipovici 2014, 135). The question arises then what is her love-making to Tom inclusive of and how can we account for the illuminating consequences? The idea that Simone de Beauvoir pursues in her novel *She Came to Stay* is that love between man and woman can be understood as a

kind of mystical union in which all divisions between two beings are overcome (Hollywood 2002, 121). Moreover, she treats eroticism and mysticism as linked in that both express human being's desire to be everything (Hollywood 2002, 121), to become, following Bernard Clairvaux's understanding of mysticism, total harmony of intellect, will and emotion (Jantzen 1989, 306). If the meaning of ecstasy is to "stand out of the self and open oneself to the other" (Hollywood 2002, 72), apart from the literal erotic encounter of bodies, the act of love-making becomes also a symbolical merging of the opposites Helena struggles with: the mind and the body.

Deleuze (1978) tackles a similar series of questions in his lecture on Spinoza's philosophy: "Someone who becomes good in Latin at the same time that he becomes a lover . . . What's it connected to? How does someone make progress?" These queries can only be considered with reference to the vertical axis separating passions and actions on the affect diagram. In Spinoza's philosophy passions hold us passive "when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial cause" (Spinoza 1994, 154). If properly reworked, however, they turn into active emotions thereby increasing our power of living, the power to affect and be affected. This passage from passivity to activity happens via understanding: "Through understanding the affects, replacing the inadequate ideas they initially involve with more adequate ones, we do not simply retreat from the turmoil of passion into a realm of thought. The affect itself is transformed from a passion—an inadequate idea of a transition to a greater or lesser state of activity—to an active rational emotion, incorporating an adequate idea" (Lloyd 1994, 86). Two things happen to Helena towards the end of the novel: she gains greater awareness of her own body as well as the knowledge of how it can be affected by others. It might be said that things finally fall into place in her life. In consequence, she is also able to fathom the essence of Cornell's art as well as envisage the preliminary structure of her book. In this way, Josipovici makes his story complacent with the ethical and political dimension of Spinoza's project which involves "a constant effort to transform passions into actions, to replace encounters that result from external causes, which may be joyful or sad, with encounters determined by internal causes, which are necessarily joyful" (Hardt 2007, x). The affects of joy, Deleuze (1978, n. p.) adds, "are like a springboard, they make us pass through something that we would never have been able to pass if there had only been sadness." The chain dividing Cornell's box vertically is hanging loose, no longer constraining Andromeda's body. Like the mythical heroine in Cornell's composition, Helena gradually metamorphoses into a complete and discerning individual.

3. CONCLUSIONS

One of the most salient points of Spinoza's thought about emotions is the abandonment of Descartes' declaration of the absolute dominion of the mind over the body, of any teleological opposition between the inferior and the superior, the perfect and the imperfect (Mack 2010, 36). However, despite Spinoza's efforts to stress the value of bodily experience, affect remains an elusive concept, often described in terms of shimmers (Barthes 2005, 101; Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 2) or by means of neologisms,

such as *in-between-ness*, accumulative *beside-ness* or *this-ness* of a world and a body (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 2, 3). In order to make affect more accessible, Massumi (2002, 3) argues, another oppositional framework needs to be reconsidered, the one which embodies movement and stasis, passage and positioning, indeterminacy and definitional precision. Instead of binarism, he prefers to conceive of the body in terms of "passing into" or "emergence", and thus as a dynamic unity of two diametrically opposed poles (2002, 8). In a similar way, Josipovici's aim in *Hotel Andromeda* is not to explicate the inchoate nature of affect and sensation but rather to demonstrate their dynamic presence and indispensability in human existence. Such are the implications of the final words of this extraordinary novel: "- Unless what I say is true, Helena says, passion is an entirely negative quality. - I'm not so sure about that, the old lady says" (Josipovici 2014, 137).

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