



## Reading the War on Terror through fear and hope? Affective warfare and the question of the future

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**Abstract:** In critical theories of security, it is often claimed that the governance of life operates by the production of fear, an emotion marked by its political character, working as to arrest bodies in the present. Simultaneously, hope is often announced as fear's binary opposite, as the condition of possibility of a future beyond the present. Hope is thereby rendered as an ethical imperative, opposed by default to both power and politics. Through a reading of contemporary affective theoretical critique, this paper questions the role of this analytical binary in masking the articulation of hope as a political concept of governance and power, central as hope arguably has been in the creation of the liberal subject. As such, this paper interrogates whether not the analytical distinction between hope and fear rather is political, functioning as to confirm rather than challenge the affective, temporal and political framing of the War on Terror – thereby disallowing from the outset a reading of fear and hope as simultaneous modes of governance, hailing bodies into place by offering both the dream and fear of another world.

### Introduction

In January 2011 we were told that we could win the future. Importantly, we were told, it was not only our own futures that were at stake, our biological existence, but perhaps more importantly, the ontological existence of *a* future, if not *the* future. Indeed as US President Barack Obama declared in his State of the Union Address (25 January 2011), the future is not a gift, and as such it should not be taken for granted. Rather, Obama continued, it is an achievement. It has to be created. In the final instance, it has to be secured, otherwise there will be no future, only the continuation of the present.

So announced, what is to be secured is not a given future per se, the contents of which would be known: a secure, developed and peaceful world of free liberal states as is so often

promised in humanitarian security discourse.<sup>1</sup> To the contrary, Obama's statement radically inverted this commonly pronounced promise. Rather than replacing a contingent, uncertain and hence dangerous present with a given, secure future, it was a static present that Obama urged us to overcome. By this reading, what was and is to be won was hence not something given, a secure society, the end of history, what Ernesto Laclau has called a "purely ontological society" (1996: 69), but rather what arguably had been terrorised by such universalistic promises:<sup>2</sup> history itself. History as unknown, as contingent, as exceeding our knowledge and control. Or in other words: history as a site of hope. Indeed, we were told, if we lose this hope, if we arrive at the end of history, we lose not only our hope, but the "moral compass", "sense of possibility" and "human progress", the condition of possibility of which is an open future, as Obama emphasised in his Nobel Lecture (10 December 2009). Earlier, such characteristics were described by Obama as the definition not only of America, but of the universal liberal subject (2006: 421), rendering contingency not a threat but a "freedom to" (Duffield, 2012: 478) act *in time*.<sup>3</sup>

As this paper will argue, such a stipulation put Obama's temporal philosophy in line with a strand of critique directed against the biopolitical<sup>4</sup> aspects of the US security regime in the wake of the attacks of 9/11 2001, a critique that in various modes have read the War on Terror as arresting us in the present by governing through fear. As claimed by Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, fear has now become a "generative principle of formation" (2009: 86), one Brian Massumi sees as ingrained into the very fabric of contemporary life (2005: 31). Following Giorgio Agamben (1998), this life is increasingly depicted as *bare*, devoid of both cupidity (Dillon and Reid, 2009: 31) and hope, as noted by Anthony Burke (2011: 101). Such descriptions often define hope as the possibility of change and resistance, an affective and temporal critique Susan McManus has called the "hope project" (2011), calling attention to how hope has been seen as a "utopian mode of affirmative affect [nourishing] oppositional

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Jabri (2006; 2007); Behnke (2004; 2008); Burke (2006). See also the US National Security Strategy of 2002 (White House) for an explicit articulation of this promise, the pronounced idealism of which is analysed in detail by Berenskoetter (2005).

<sup>2</sup> The power of such universalism, led Andreas Behnke to call the War on Terror a "politics of the graveyard" (2008), a description that would align it with Jacques Derrida's framing of liberal theological universalism as a "crime against the possibility of politics, against man qua political animal" (2005: ix).

<sup>3</sup> See Duffield (2012) and O'Malley (2010) for a discussion on the promise of contingency and its role in the biopolitical production of resilient subjects.

<sup>4</sup> See Foucault (1997/2003) and Agamben (1998).

consciousness and political praxis” (ibid.) within both the academia and the political left<sup>5</sup> – a critique that calls us to seek not the foreclosure of contingency, to not fear nor regulate it, but to embrace it: to *feel* contingency differently, thereby granting the present the gift of the future.

This paper will probe this affective critique; problematising and analysing the politics of employing affective binaries such as hope and fear, in the study of anticipatory logics of governance. How do we understand an affective future? What epistemological terrain is it located in? Can its status as not-yet having materialised be defined in advance as either power (fear) or resistance (hope)? And is this distinction necessarily one between paralysis and change? Between present and future? Or are such distinctions impossible to maintain? Questions like these will be addressed by identifying the meaning given to hope and fear within critical analyses of the US post 9/11 security regime. This reading will depart with a discussion of Jacques Derrida’s calling to hope for the impossible, issued with emphatic urgency in the immediacy of 9/11, questioning Derrida’s conflation of hope with the democratic promise. It will then proceed to interrogate the appearances of fear and hope in critical analyses of contemporary security practices, highlighting the perception of power, resistance and political time that emerge through the definition of and the distinction produced between these concepts. In this article this literature is primarily represented by the works of Brian Massumi and Sara Ahmed, key to the discussion on affect’s role in the production of the political body.

The motivation for this interrogation is a concern whether not the frequent projection of hope as a force of change, arguably (re)produced by its ontological separation from fear, is not in itself an expression of power, rather than a position of resistance by default – a reading that would portray the ontological separation between fear and hope as not analytical, but rather political<sup>6</sup> and performative. The aim of this reading is thus to question the limits of power, as

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<sup>5</sup> See also Duggan & Muñoz (2009: 275) for a similar description of the contemporary critique, some key examples of which will be analysed in this paper. Others include: Negri quoted in Brown et al (2002: 200-201); Zournazi (2002); Matušík (2004); Skrimshere (2008).

<sup>6</sup> In order to distinguish ‘politics’ from ‘the Political’, Chantal Mouffe employs Heidegger’s distinction between the ontic and the ontological level: “politics refer to the ‘ontic’ level while ‘the political’ has to do with the ‘ontological’ one. This means that the ontic has to do with the manifold practices of conventional politics, while the ontological concerns the very way in which society is instituted” (2005:8-9). As such, ‘the political’ concerns the very possibility of articulating new political imaginaries and boundaries. Through this reading, calling the distinction between hope and fear political would claim that the affective distinction *itself* is a boundary-drawing practice of conceptual kind on an ontological level.

they are currently defined, as well as to open up the concept of hope to political analysis. Because could it not be, as noted by Ben Anderson (2007; 2010a), that it is not only our fears, but also our hopes that are governed, and that one manner in which this operation functions today is through hope and fear's ontological and temporal separation? Does such a description not disallow the study of hope *as* power as well as of hope's role in the production of life, reproducing rather than challenging significant underpinnings of the affective and temporal framing structuring the War on Terror?

### **Terrorising the future: The democratic hope as the only hope?**

As is well known, shortly after 9/11 Jacques Derrida, as if to assure us that deconstruction in no way could serve as an apology to the attacks, underlined that what was most unacceptable with this "unleashing of violence without name" was not the material havoc caused by, nor the "disregard for human life" (2003: 113) showed by al Qaeda. No, Derrida stressed, above all, it was "the fact that such actions and such discourse *open onto no future and, in my view, have no future*" (2003: 113, original emphasis). There is, he continued in words whose sentiment was later repeated by both the Bush and Obama administrations,<sup>7</sup> "nothing good to be hoped for from that quarter" (Derrida, 2003: 113, original emphasis). Moreover, according to Derrida, it is this hopelessness that forever will distinguish al Qaeda from those swearing allegiance to the (democratic) international community. Because, Derrida explained, "even in its most cynical mode", the politics acting "in the name" of such grand concepts like democracy and international law "still lets resonate within it an invincible promise" (Derrida, 2003: 114).

As stated by Derrida, it is the *discourse* of bin Laden that holds no future. This stipulation is important, and should be read, I contend, not strictly as a critique of the given contents of bin Laden's discourse, but more importantly as to signify terror as the mastery of language over the world. Discourse is here described as that which reduces the polysemy of the world to one. Terror and discourse (or perhaps terror *as* discourse, or possibly even *discourse* as terror) are here placed solely on the level of actuality, a pure present, a pure word, whereas the

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<sup>7</sup> Think for instance of the commonly asserted framing of the War on Terror as one between an "ideology of hope" and an "ideology of hatred" (Crumpton, 13 June 2006) and Obama's incessant proclamation that the "future belongs to those who build and not [those who] destroy" (Obama, 23 September 2009).

promise of the future, experienced as hope, is located in a potentiality beyond language – in what may come, and what will always remain to-come.

Such defined, hope appears as the ontological opposite of terror on a temporal level, emerging as the very standard by which we can evaluate ‘different’ discourses, ethics and politics from another. To understand how radical this transformation of hope is, I would argue that we must first understand the pivotal role hope plays in Derrida’s oeuvre,<sup>8</sup> a discussion that will point to how the heralded radicality of hope is appropriated by this politics of distinction, arguably allowing hope to serve as to construct and maintain borders of formation rather than to deconstruct them, rendering hope, I would argue, as distinctly democratic, if not liberal, in the process.

Elsewhere however, Derrida has expressed the relation between actuality (discourse) and potentiality (hope) as paradoxical rather than oppositional, not even on a temporal level. To be sure, the potential, this future and hope, is described as already here (if by ‘here’ we mean an unterrorised context) in the actual word. As already experienced and activated by every discursive articulation, always allowing the possibility to move beyond the confines of the present. The promise of potentiality is hence not located in what is normally considered the future (a temporal stage succeeding the present) but rather *within* the present; in the most immediate immediacy, expressed by Derrida as a “singular event of engagement”, a messianic moment in the “here and now” (1996: 83). As such, the future is paradoxically the most present, seeing as it is an experience of potentiality beyond the confinements and predictability of linear time. The future signifies a deferral of the actual, a moment “without presence” (1996: 83) instilling the actual with potentiality – with a language not-yet having been given shape. “‘It can come’ (‘ça peut venir’). There is the future” (1996: 83). A future within the present, a present without presence – an experience made possible by the actual’s impossibility to contain the world by its word.

As we shall see, this aporia of actuality and potentiality is seen by Derrida as the very definition of democracy, making democracy the opposite of a political regime, alive only as promise (Derrida, 2003: 121). A promise, which Derrida elsewhere has assured us, “bears every hope” (2005: XV), given that it “presupposes, more radically still, more originally, a

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<sup>8</sup> See Stavrakakis (1999:110-12); Matušík (2004) and Horner (2010) for descriptions of Derrida’s body of work as engulfed in an ethic of hope.

freedom of play, an opening of indetermination and indecidability *in the very concept* of democracy” (2005: 25, original emphasis), indeed such is hope’s relation to language that it cannot be defined other than as a ”concept without a concept” (2005: 32), or alternatively as an ”essence without essence” (2005: 32), an aporetic experience of language that simultaneously hides and gives access to democracy. As such, the concept of democracy simultaneously reduces and produces the promise of democracy. To name democracy, to represent it, is to limit its potentiality, yet precisely because such an act is a limitation, each representation also entails a necessary deferral of the meaning of democracy, allowing hence a possibility to re-present the concept anew. The promise of democracy is thereby re-inscribed in the very act of trying to capture it, making the naming democracy an experience of aporia; of simultaneous excess and reduction. Indeed, despite all efforts to regulate, institutionalise and define democracy once and for all, the promise will remain. The hope of democracy to-come will survive, a hope that cannot ever amount to the “calculation of a program” (Derrida, 2006: 212). This much we know, this much is necessary, otherwise there would be no need to discuss democracy. Nor any hope for it.

However, even though Derrida elsewhere has claimed that there is “no language without the performative dimension of the promise” (1996: 82), and even though he has argued that the very logic of ‘legitimate sovereignty’ is inherently indistinct from the ‘terrorist rogue’ (2005: 102), highlighting the aporetic and indeed violent relationship between sovereignty and democracy, what emerges in Derrida’s response to 9/11, but arguably not exclusively there, is a particular relationship between democracy and hope. Indeed otherwise there would be no need to urge us to recognise hope, nor plead that we adhere to the promise and imperfectability of democracy in order for this promise to remain. It should not even require the faith to it, a faith that Derrida has claimed “must govern all our decisions” (Derrida, 2003: 115), in order for the promise to nonetheless guide our actions. Elsewhere, we read that this promise is engendered in part by the institutionalisation of an “endless process of improvement and perfectibility”, through the elections, freedoms of speech and of the press that in Derrida’s words characterises popular democracy (2005: 5).<sup>9</sup> Through such words, I contend, the aporetic opposition between the democratic promise and the democratic regime collapses, making the promise of democracy an effect of, indeed made possibly by, *democracy-as-regime*. A framing that arguably positions hope as an effect of the present,

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<sup>9</sup> See also Fritsch (2002) for a similar discussion on Derrida’s possible equation of formal democracy with the promise of to-come.

rather than its subversion, and which, I argue, supports rather than interrogates the temporal distinction between terror and hope, arguably underpinning the affective framing of the war on terror.<sup>10</sup> Read as such, the establishment of this distinction appears performative rather than analytical, paradoxically calling attention to the politics of maintaining it.

I will now turn my focus onto how this concern for hope and for the future has been upheld within the critical literature examining US security post 9/11, thereby laying bare the essential similarities between the concept of fear employed by it and Derrida's notion of terror<sup>11</sup> in terms of both temporality as well as hope's relation to language, politics and power. I will then turn to how this distinction dissolves in the very literature that seeks to uphold it, complicating the radical border of exteriority established between the concepts and politics of democracy and terror, between fear and hope, in order to question this distinction's political character.

### **Paralysing the present? The temporal battle between fear and hope**

In her elaboration of fear as a political concept, Sara Ahmed urges us to pose the future as a question. Such a question, she claims, is not only ethical, illustrating the "desire that the future should not simply repeat the past" (Ahmed, 2004: 183), echoing a now familiar temporal logic, it is also affective: "It is a question of hope for what we might yet be" (2004: 184). As such, much like Obama's pledge to win the future, it presupposes the possibility of not having a future, of surrendering to the confinements of the present. To be sure, this future, this political hope, is now portrayed as increasingly under threat. Not only from the terrorist Other, but perhaps more importantly from those operating in the name of democracy. Indeed, as asked by Ahmed, "can we maintain hope when 'the war on terror' is justified as an ethical right" (2004: 184), a concern echoed by Butler's claim that what is at stake in the War on

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<sup>10</sup> Importantly, Derrida's analysis of democracy reminds us again of the moral discourse of Obama, in which the idea of democracy is similarly articulated as a performative call from the future (see for instance Obama, 21 May 2009). It is not the adherence to a given institutionalisation of democracy that should govern our actions, but allegiance to its promise, a promise that is universal and inclusive in its scope, yet arguably particular and exclusionary in its utterance.

<sup>11</sup> In his immediate response to 9/11, Derrida supports an initial distinction between fear and terror, basing it as he does on fear's historic relation to democracy. Indeed, Derrida frames fear as a founding concept of sovereign power, of the social contract, as well as the democratic authority of the law, a tradition emanating from the legacy of Machiavelli and Hobbes (Derrida, 2003: 102; see also Foucault, 2003; Robin, 2004). This framing of fear as situated on the side of the future (i.e. democracy) equates Derrida's view of fear with hope on a temporal level, an ambiguous conceptual indistinction to which I will return below.

Terror is not only the “fate of constitutional and international law, but also the very ways in which the future may or may not be thought” (Butler, 2004: 92).

Importantly, in accounts such as these, fear plays an active role in the containment of history to the present. As Ahmed claims, “fear works to secure the relationships between [...] bodies” (2004: 63) operating as to preserve the subject in its present identity. It “involves shrinking the body” (2004: 69), restricting “its mobility precisely insofar as it seems to prepare the body for fight” (Ibid.). Importantly, this fear does not operate on an individual level, rather it is a strictly social logic of affect – it collects nations together, assembles bodies into formation, be it those that are perceived as insecure or those identified as potential threats (Ahmed, 2004: 64, 77). It has moreover been claimed that fear both unites and divides; uniting the nation against a common enemy, following a Schmittian logic of sovereign power, and dividing the nation by consolidating internal stratification, a combination that has been taken to make fear into a “rational, moral emotion” (Robin, 2004: 162) invested in power, particularly descriptive of US security politics. Importantly, Ahmed claims, fear is also sticky, in the sense that it can, seemingly without logic, move from body to body, from one threatening object to another, sticking words like “‘terrorist’ and ‘Islam’ together” (2004: 76), associations that stick not despite their arbitrary relations but because of them: because their interrelation is feared rather than known (Ahmed, 2004: 76).<sup>12</sup> The representations of this feeling, it is said, is now heard and seen everywhere, “in real time, all the time” (Der Derian, 2005: 26), produced and channelled by an official US discourse of fear (Debrix, 2005; Bleikner & Hutchinson, 2008; Loseke, 2009; Royal, 2011).

Above descriptions locate fear on the level of ideology. Much like Derrida’s conceptualisation of terror as leaving no room for the future, by the mastery of language over the world, fear in above accounts works in similar ways, presuming as it does the same binary between the actual and the potential. Through this temporal lens, Massumi defines the distinction between hope and fear as one between an affective intensity and its emotional stabilisation, a temporal distinction that places affect in the unregulated order of the potential while locating emotion on the level of semantics and consciousness, in the “sociolinguistic

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<sup>12</sup> See Durodié (2007) for a further discussion on how fear allowed the terrorists of 7/7 2005 to be linked to Islam, rather than to what Durodié sees as more plausible explanatory factors such as ‘individualism’, ‘the erosion of society’ and the ‘rise of risk perception’ in a post-political UK, factors which would make the act of 7/7 “seem more akin to the Columbine high-school massacre” (Ibid.: 434) than so called Islamic radicalisation, terrorist networks and anti-civilisationalism.



fixing of the quality of an experience” (2002a: 28) – a distinction that situates hope, as will be shown, outside the realm of intelligibility and politics.

Much like Derrida’s notion of the future as already being here in a messianic moment of hope, affective intensities upset the linearity of time. Massumi talks of this affective experience as a “temporal sink, a hole in time, as we conceive it and narrativize it” (2002a: 26), a pause that should not be read as passivity, rather time is moving even faster because of it. It is an “expectant suspension” (2002a: 27), which, Massumi writes, “is not yet activity, because the motion is not of the kind that can be directed” (2002a: 27). It is a movement that has not yet passed into action, a motion-without name, a future within the present.

Similar to Derrida’s location of hope as not outside language, but beyond it, Massumi describes the relationship between these binaries, between emotion and affect, as one not of exteriority but of aporia (2002a: 24). As soon as one tries to signify this intensity it is necessarily reduced. Simultaneously however, such significations always produce an excess, invoking the existence of “two languages, two dimensions of every expression, one superlinear, the other linear” (Massumi, 2002a: 26). In that sense, every emotion, like fear, which inevitably belongs to the order of the actual, involves a “capture” of this paradoxical experience, a hailing into place of the experienced intensity. Yet all cannot become actual, something always eludes representation, which is why, Massumi states “all emotion is more or less disorienting” (2002a: 35). Importantly, this necessary escape from capture “cannot but be perceived [...] For it is nothing less than the *perception of one’s own vitality*, one’s sense of aliveness, of changeability” (Massumi, 2002a: 36, original emphasis). Indeed, as later explained by Massumi, there is a name for this intensity, for this escape, and its name is hope (2002b: 212). At stake in this moment, what is engendered by this hope, is nothing short than the possibility of the New. Nothing less than the future.

Hence, while the meaning of terror and fear can be obtained, located on the level of language as they are (indeed closing language completely in the case of terror according to Derrida), then hope is that which language can never tame. It is what forever escapes capture. Making it also impossible to study hope as a political concept on the level of discourse and/or emotion, at least not from this framework of analysis, seeing as hope is situated beyond representation, experienced, but never understood rationally. A logic that portrays hope as the unspeakable *a* of the Derridean *differance*, present yet without presence. In other words, as the very

definition of deconstruction, as that which deconstructs, but is never deconstructed. So framed, hope forever escapes our analysis. It is the blind spot of power, defined in advance as power's opposite, making resistance appear as pure potentiality and power by contradiction into the reduction of potentiality into actuality.

### **Living in the future? The affective battle between fear and hope**

However, in an emerging literature focussing on biopolitical techniques of anticipatory governance, it is often claimed that fear in the contemporary world finds its rationale by a threatening unknown, rather than through the production of a given *object* of fear, the production of which arguably is necessary in order to maintain fear's location in a known present, as per Massumi's location of fear on the emotive level. This object is now commonly acknowledged to have lost its once assured place in politics of security, concerned as they increasingly are with the all-embracing threat of the unpredictable Event, be it in the guise of catastrophe or violence,<sup>13</sup> hence disallowing the calculation and prediction characterising traditional security techniques.<sup>14</sup> As this convincing account informs, what we fear is hence not a given Other, but our abysmal lack of knowledge (and/or imagination<sup>15</sup>) of what may (come to) threaten us. As argued by Ahmed, it is the loss of the object of fear that is the most fearful event, seeing as it would render the "world itself a space of potential danger" (Ahmed, 2004: 69) – a loss that the liberal subject of security now arguably have suffered. It is now claimed that liberal fear is so all-embracing, so self-referral, that life itself has come to be seen as the ultimate threat to life (Dillon and Reid, 2009: 31). Indeed, 'every-body' is now perceived as holding the potential of "becoming-dangerous" (Dillon and Reid, 2009: 31). In this account fear does not concern the stabilisation of meaning in the actual but thrives rather in the undecidability and uncertainty of the potential. Consequently, this complicates the equation of power with the reduction of life to actuality given above, seeing as life is now portrayed as governed by potentiality, placing fear, as we shall see, in the same temporal and epistemological terrain as hope.

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<sup>13</sup> See for instance Dillon (2003; 2007a; 2007b); Massumi (2007); Dillon & Reid (2009); Anderson (2010b); Aradau & Van Munster (2011).

<sup>14</sup> See also Daase & Kessler (2007); Aradau & van Munster (2007) and Burgess (2011) for an analysis of the War on Terror's (previous?) fascination with securing knowledge.

<sup>15</sup> See de Goede (2008) for an overview of how security's increasing focus on imagining all possible futures rather than on knowing *the* future. A logic of premeditation that provides the rationale for scenario based exercises, exercises that not only strive to prepare for the event, but also to experience it affectively before its arrival (Mallard & Lakoff, 2011: 369-70).

To repeat, in this account, fear does not operate on the level of discourse, as a strict emotion to return to Massumi's terminology, given that the discursive stabilisation of meaning affords the subject with a sense of certainty and control, however false it may be. Rather, fear, it is claimed, is activated at the affective limits of discourse. As stated by Derrida, what makes you tremble in fear is the secret (1995: 53). It is not a specific threat, a given Other, but rather what you cannot know, what because of this state of not knowing *can* come. If it were not, it would not be a threat, it would in Massumi's words be a "situation [...] and a situation can be handled" (2005: 35).

By this description, fear is an experience of the future as *only* threat, unknown, without having the capacity to name, nor tame, this experience. It is to live in the face of a "future that cannot be anticipated; anticipated but unpredictable" (Derrida, 1995: 54). Massumi's analysis of the color-coded alert system established in the US in 2002 vividly exemplifies this argument. Indeed, the alerts carried no other information than the imperative to fear, they gave, in Massumi's words, "simply nothing to identify with or imitate. [They] presented no form, ideological or ideational and, remaining vague as to the source, nature, and location of the threat, bore precious little content" (2005: 32). So described, to live in fear is to be trapped in a present beyond language, it is to live *in* the future – a position strangely similar the one given to hope – making fear prior to meaning and uncertainty our primary state. In the end, we are told, it is not that we have been or are affected by something or someone unidentifiable that causes our trembling, but the very fact that we can be affected (Derrida, 1995: 56).

Despite Derrida's initial definition of terror as signifying the ultimate mastery of language over the world, above description renders fear into a synonym to terror. To be sure, as Derrida later informs us, the act of terror functions as to instil Being with an open wound (2003: 97). In that sense, 9/11 did not happen only once, or rather, it is still happening. Since the attack came from the unknown, it is still coming, perhaps more so *after* it happened than *when* it actually happened. The wound never closed, because it came from the secrets of the unknown, a secret that remains secret to us, meaning, however paradoxical it may seem, that the attacks came (back) from the future, "by the *to come*, by the threat of the worst *to come*, rather than by an aggression that is 'over and done with'" (Derrida, 2003: 97, original emphasis). As such, the "semantic instability" (Derrida, 2003: 105) brought upon us by

terrorism, is indeed that which characterises a state of terror, an instability that, it is claimed, is self-escalating, becoming in the end the only thing we are able to feel.

This affective mode of being is now seen to characterise life fully in the post 9/11 world of international security, a world described by Massumi as a “wonderland world in which the startle can come without the scare” (2005: 44) and elsewhere as “not so much threatening as threat-generating: threat-o-genic” (Massumi, 2007). Life governed, but not by the confinement of life to the present, but rather by producing a state of living affectively within the all-embracing potentiality of the future. A structure Massumi holds to be completely unfalsifiable (2010b: 55), seeing as that which is secret to us, that which we do not know, always, at least potentially, knows more about us than we about it. As such, the secret does not simply hide itself from us – it exposes us.

Importantly however, to live fearfully in the future, so described, is not to be propelled forward, but to be arrested in the moment. It is to be paralysed (Massumi, 2005: 36), unable to appear in actuality, caught in a moment of immobility beyond language, thereby circumscribing and deferring action – a radical inversion of the concept of power, previously defined as a totalising actuality (yet equally paralyzing). Elsewhere, Massumi has described this mode of being as the very opposite of Agamben’s ‘bare life’, interpreted as a fully *present* life “stripped of its human content, its vitality reduced to the physical minimum” – rather the fearful life is “*bare activity*” (Massumi, 2010a: original emphasis), a life caught in the instant, in the affective moment “without determinable content” (Massumi, 2010a). Framed as such, this paralysis makes another future impossible, yet not by dictating its content to be the same as the present, but precisely by reducing its capacity to take shape, to appear with a given content,<sup>16</sup> thus begging the question: When the present *is* the future, what possibility is there for another futurity to arise? Which future propels us forward? Which renders us immobile? When power is the future, how do we resist it?

The advice given to us by Massumi is *not* to think outside fear (2005: 43). This task he claims is impossible, given the necessary reductive character ideology plays in his theoretical framework. No, we are told, reason can never counter affect. On the contrary, the only possibility left to us is not to think. To allow affect to “pass *unfelt*” (2005: 43, original

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<sup>16</sup> This mode of politics is described by Dillon and Reid as operating in and on the life processes of bodies’ becoming (2009: 85)

emphasis), not turning it into an emotion, which would leave the potential threat unrepresented by the mind, arguably an advice not easily operationalised into a politics of resistance and change. Alternatively, yet perhaps equally impossible, he advises us to feel *differently*; to fight the battle “on the same affective ontogenetic ground on which it itself operates” (2005: 47). Fighting in other words in the lived future of the present, in the arrested moment before the future is materialised. Such described, there is only one alternative affect left to us, one equally thriving in this moment of being in the present without Presence. And this affect, if we recall Derrida’s identification of the future as already in the present, is of course hope.

Yet how to distinguish hope from fear, when that which separates the two are increasingly blurred? When their relation to language and time appear to both Derrida and Massumi as the same? Indeed, in relation to time, as theorised by Ernst Bloch (1995: 12), is not the opposite to hope not fear, but memory? Does this not mean that Massumi’s state of ‘bare activity’ may function as an equally valid description of both a fearful *and* a hopeful life? To my mind, this similarity raises a series of questions of conceptual and political character to the study of security, power and political time respectively. Because if both fear and hope thrive in, rest in, indeed demand the indeterminacy of the potential, then how do we distinguish them analytically, given the necessary indeterminacy of every affective experience of potentiality? How do we claim their allegiance to different ethical modes, to different politics, without essentialising the difference between them? How do we strike affectively, with the hope of a certain outcome, when affect in itself cannot be determined? Can one do so, or is the issuance of that task, given to us by Derrida, Massumi as well as by the liberal project, as defined by Obama, political in itself?

### **The political indistinction between fear and hope: Studying Hope as Power?**

In order to probe above questions, I wish first to make clear once more that the boundary and the limits of power is no longer easily drawn between the actual and the potential, seeing as power, as per above discussion, is now seen to rest in, rather than to oppose, potentiality, making the equation of affective excess with deconstruction impossible to maintain. Indeed, as Anderson asks, “how to be political when the excess of affect – its expressive and differential power – is imbricated with the excessive workings of power?” (2010b: 164), when

one no longer can assume that the possibilities of ethics are located 'safely' and necessarily within the promise of the future? How to approach ethically and epistemologically a future that is so undecidedly indeterminate in its own ontology?

To my mind, the problem with maintaining the conceptual distinction between fear and hope now emerge as twofold, leading both to an analytical and political acceptance of the temporal and affective boundaries framing the War on Terror, thus making the establishment of these very boundaries located outside the reach of critique. Analytically, the problem this distinction produce is its stipulation of affects as dictating politics already in their formation, already in their taking place, meaning that the kind of affect that occurs, promise or threat, determines the political effect of that affective experience. We are offered no way of theorising why certain intensities, why certain affects, lead to security regimes of fear and which ones produce the hope allegedly necessary to transgress our contemporary paralysis. In Massumi's terminology, I contend, this would be to treat affects as emotions – making thus the heralded unappropriable force of affects, the intense experience of excess they are defined by, contained from the outset in a pre-given form. A treatment that would make affect not only predictable but also calculable, essentialising both hope and fear in the process.

Yet if there truly is a limit to power, affect can never be bound fully to the present. Nor can the body become paralysed forever in *one* virtual affective state. By this logic, the rendering of the future (i.e. potentiality) as *only* threat necessarily entails a reduction of said potentiality. Threat as a future cause, I would thus argue, does not cause only fear, seen as the arrest of life in a paralysed state of potentiality, as stated by Massumi, but also the simultaneous actualisation of hope,<sup>17</sup> a claim that confounds the affective distinction between fear and hope. Indeed, if one did not experience fear, what would one hope to overcome? And does not the call to reclaim the future as a site of hope not in itself produce the threat, fear and possibility of losing this hope? Through this reading, the articulation of one inscribes from the outset the articulation of the other, otherwise it would not be fear or hope, but certainty. As such, to live with the secret of the to-come as neighbour, is to live life exposed, not only to

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<sup>17</sup> See Anderson (2010b: 782) for a description of security as a practice which balances between seeing uncertainty as both threat and promise as well as de Goede (2008) for a view of contemporary security in which uncertainty is defined as not only threat but also as a "spur to creativity (Ibid.: 159). See also Anderson (2010a) for an empirical analysis of this ambiguous coexistence of threat and promise in the production and targeting of public morale as a weapon of war.

threat, but also to promise, making fear and hope simultaneous, not opposite experiences.<sup>18</sup> The task, as I see it, is thus not to separate different affects in advance, but to treat every such distinction as inherently ambiguous (McManus, 2011) and, I would claim, thoroughly political.

Politically, maintaining the distinction between fear and hope risk, in my reading, to reproduce the boundaries upon which the War on Terror is waged, accepting thereby the separation of political projects on temporal and affective grounds. Following Derrida's definition of hopeless terror, this would arguably make hope into a strictly democratic promise, one depicted as threatened not only by the fundamentalist Other, but also, as we have seen, by particular US presidencies. Not only does this framing arguably tame the alleged radical force of hope, making it an effect of the present, it also, I would suggest, risk leaving a significant part of the (liberal) democratic project out of the sight of critique, seeing as its epistemological design remains inherently tied up with the political structure it seeks to analyse and criticise.

Such a strategy would indeed pose the future as a question, following Ahmed's seemingly acute advice, yet it would not question the temporal structure of the War on Terror, projecting as it does a future increasingly surrounded by a question mark, be it in the form of threat or hope. The dream of another world may thereby be appropriated, an operation arguably achieved by positioning this dream outside of the present political condition, as located outside of power rather than as being imbricated with it. Because is it not, as indicated by Agamben, that the true political decision is "precisely the decision concerning whether a fact or kind of thing is apolitical" (1998: 173)? In this logic, to position hope outside of politics would be the most political act. A reading that would depict the separation of fear and hope as a political project of bringing the future into a virtual present? Of striving to regulate contingency not only by arresting bodies in fear, but by simultaneously heralding the promise of undefined change. Arresting people *in* contingency, not by the promise of establishing a given future, but by the production, indeed achievement, of the future as a site of hope?

To question this affective binary, I would claim, is to make the concept of hope and the power invested in it available for interrogation. Not to condemn its political possibilities once and

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<sup>18</sup> See also Derrida (1995: 53, 71) for a portrayal of fear as making possible the future.

for all, but to question the limits of hope *in* our present, subjecting the power activated by the present's incessant reminder that the future is ours to win, change is possible, hope is alive, to analysis. It is to analyse not what is done *to* hope by the present (or by the Other), but what is done to the present *by* hope. In other words, it is to ask what is done to contingency by the promise of contingency. To deconstruction? It is to invite the discussion of whether not the instalment of this promise may not serve as to replace the desire for realising it? Whether not the effect of this promise-without-content may not be the production of a vitalising potentiality, as is promised us, but rather a static, yet futural, life of im/potentiality? A life always remaining as promise, as potentiality, yet never appearing into actuality, potentially turning the hope-inspiring *can* of Obama's "yes, we can" into a paralysing, yet ironically and paradoxically even more hopeful, *cannot*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Agamben has called this indistinction between the can and the cannot a pure potentiality, an im/potentiality, shining light on the inherent immobility in the promise of potentiality, requiring as it does an indefinite postponal (1999: 181-84). See also Hage (2002: 151) for a description of hope as passive endurance, achieved by contra-distinction to a Spinozan ethics of joy.



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