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Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event

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The essay to follow takes as its literary archive two novels that are, in some strong sense, about the US: Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* (1998) and William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* (2003). However, it claims no interest in contributing to “American Literary History,” insofar as that project sees the US as the protagonist of its own story or even as the magnet that organizes

stories about it, however chaotically. Rather, this essay takes on the linked problem of writing the history of the present and the literary history of the present. It sees this problem as a problem of affect, a problem of apprehending heightened moments in which certain locales become exemplary laboratories for sensing or intuiting contemporary life.

Sometimes such locales can be national—for example, the nation can be seen as one of...

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