Where does our current "politics of volatility" come from? The immediate backdrop is the black-swan events of 9/11 and the Great Recession of 2008, which continue to infuse contemporary politics with overtones of risk, uncertainty, and volatility culminating in last election's contrasting images of Trump as the volatile but charismatic deal-maker and Clinton as the prudent risk-manager. These images draw upon a complicated history that goes back to at least the early seventies when changes in the global economy provided the backdrop for the coeval development of derivative finance and postmodernism, and the onset of neo-liberalism. 1989's one-dimensional optimism about "alternative modernities" and the possibility of a global civil society has been replaced by the anxiety about the volatility of competing capitalisms that are rapidly undoing the neoliberal consensus on globalization. But what is volatility and how is it different from our earlier concerns about risk and uncertainty? Is there any relationship between the volatility that derivative finance seeks to access and price and the volatility of feelings and emotions whose investigation lies at the heart of contemporary affect theory? Bergson and Deleuze's work on intensity seem to prefigure some of the contemporary discussion of volatility; the mathematics of finance has captured its quantitative dimension in notions such as standard deviation and spread, while affect theory has emphasized the qualitative modulation of intensity. In Bergson, the quantitative and qualitative dimensions are opposed, which Deleuze tried to overcome in his cinema books by adding Peirce's semiotics to the mix. Who are the theorists who provide us with an understanding of where affect, finance, and volatility meet? Spinoza's theory of affect? Bergson's duration? Deleuze's crystal image? Peirce's abduction? Whitehead's process philosophy? Or current thinkers such as Lauren Berlant, Benjamin Lee, Erin Manning, Brian Massumi, Robert Meister, and Sianne Ngai?
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