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**Mary Zournazi\***: I'd like to think about hope and the affective dimensions of experience – what freedoms are possible in the new and 'virtualized' global and political economies that frame our lives. To begin, though, what are your thoughts on the potential of hope for these times?

**Brian Massumi**: From my own point of view, the way that a concept like hope can be made useful is when it is not connected to an expected success – when it starts to be something different from optimism – because when you start trying to think ahead into the future from the present point, rationally there really isn't much room for hope. Globally it's a very pessimistic affair, with economic inequalities increasing year by year, with health and sanitation levels steadily decreasing in

\* Interview by Mary Zournazi (2001)

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many regions, with the global effects of environmental deterioration already being felt, with conflicts among nations and peoples apparently only getting more intractable, leading to mass displacements of workers and refugees... It seems such a mess that it can be paralyzing. If hope is the opposite of pessimism, then there's precious little to be had. On the other hand, if hope is separated from concepts of optimism and pessimism, from a wishful projection of success or even some kind of a rational calculation of outcomes, then I think it starts to be interesting – because it places it in the present.

**Mary Zournazi:** Yes – the idea of hope in the present is vital. Otherwise we endlessly look to the future or towards some utopian dream of a better society or life, which can only leave us disappointed, and if we see pessimism as the natural flow from this, we can only be paralysed as you suggest.

**Brian Massumi:** That's right, because in every situation there are any number of levels of organization and tendencies in play, in co-operation with each other or at cross-purposes. The way all the elements interrelate is so complex that it isn't necessarily comprehensible in one go. There's always a sort of vagueness surrounding the situation, an uncertainty about where you might be able to go and what you might be able to do once you exit that particular context. This uncertainty can actually be empowering – once you realize that it gives you a margin of manoeuvrability and you focus on that, rather than on projecting success or failure. It gives you the feeling that there is always an opening to

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experiment, to try and see. This brings a sense of potential to the situation. The present's 'boundary condition', to borrow a phrase from science, is never a closed door. It is an open threshold – a threshold of potential. You are only ever in the present in passing. If you look at it that way you don't have to feel boxed in, no matter what horrors are afield and no matter what, rationally, you expect will come. You may not reach the end of the trail but at least there's a next step. The question of which next step to take is a lot less intimidating than how to reach a far-off goal in a distant future where all our problems will finally be solved. It's utopian thinking, for me, that's 'hopeless'.

**Mary Zournazi:** So how do your ideas on 'affect' and hope come together here?

**Brian Massumi:** In my own work I use the concept of 'affect' as a way of talking about that margin of manoeuvrability, the 'where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do' in every present situation. I guess 'affect' is the word I use for 'hope'. One of the reasons it's such an important concept for me is because it explains why focusing on the next experimental step rather than the big utopian picture isn't really settling for less. It's not exactly going for more, either. It's more like being right where you are – more intensely. To get from affect to intensity you have to understand affect as something other than simply a personal feeling. By 'affect' I don't mean 'emotion' in the everyday sense. The way I use it comes primarily from Spinoza. He talks of the body in terms of its capacity for affecting or being affected. These are not two different capacities – they

always go together. When you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than you might have been the moment before. You have made a transition, however slight. You have stepped over a threshold. Affect is this passing of a threshold, seen from the point of view of the change in capacity. It's crucial to remember that Spinoza uses this to talk about the body. What a body is, he says, is what it can do as it goes along. This is a totally pragmatic definition. A body is defined by what capacities it carries from step to step. What these are exactly is changing constantly. A body's ability to affect or be affected – its charge of affect – isn't something fixed.

So depending on the circumstances, it goes up and down gently like a tide, or maybe storms and crests like a wave, or at times simply bottoms out. It's because this is all attached to the movements of the body that it can't be reduced to emotion. It's not just subjective, which is not to say that there is nothing subjective about it. Spinoza says that every transition is accompanied by a feeling of the change in capacity. The affect and the feeling of the transition are not two different things. They're two sides of the same coin, just like affecting and being affected. That's the first sense in which affect is about intensity – every affect is a doubling. The experience of a change, an affecting-being affected, is redoubled by an experience of the experience. This gives the body's movements a kind of depth that stays with it across all its transitions – accumulating in memory, in habit, in reflex, in desire, in tendency. Emotion is the way the depth of that ongoing experience registers personally at a given moment.

**Mary Zournazi:** Emotion, then, is only a limited expression of the ‘depth’ of our experience?

**Brian Massumi:** Well, an emotion is a very partial expression of affect. It only draws on a limited selection of memories and only activates certain reflexes or tendencies, for example. No one emotional state can encompass all the depth and breadth of our experiencing of experiencing – all the ways our experience redoubles itself. The same thing could be said for conscious thought. So when we feel a particular emotion or think a particular thought, where have all the other memories, habits, tendencies gone that might have come at the point? And where have the bodily capacities for affecting and being affected that they’re inseparable from gone? There’s no way they can all be actually expressed at any given point. But they’re not totally absent either, because a different selection of them is sure to come up at the next step. They’re still there, but virtually – in potential. Affect as a whole, then, is the virtual co-presence of potentials.

This is the second way that affect has to do with intensity. There’s like a population or swarm of potential ways of affecting or being affected that follows along as we move through life. We always have a vague sense that they’re there. That vague sense of potential, we call it our ‘freedom’, and defend it fiercely. But no matter how certainly we know that the potential is there, it always seems just out of reach, or maybe around the next bend. Because it isn’t actually there – only virtually. But maybe if we can take little, practical, experimental, strategic measures to expand our emotional register, or limber up our thinking, we can access

more of our potential at each step, have more of it actually available. Having more potentials available intensifies our life. We're not enslaved by our situations. Even if we never have our freedom, we're always experiencing a degree of freedom, or 'wriggle room'. Our degree of freedom at any one time corresponds to how much of our experiential 'depth' we can access towards a next step – how intensely we are living and moving.

Once again it's all about the openness of situations and how we can live that openness. And you have to remember that the way we live it is always entirely embodied, and that is never entirely personal – it's never all contained in our emotions and conscious thoughts. That's a way of saying it's not just about us, in isolation. In affect, we are never alone. That's because affects in Spinoza's definition are basically ways of connecting, to others and to other situations. They are our angle of participation in processes larger than ourselves. With intensified affect comes a stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life – a heightened sense of belonging, with other people and to other places. Spinoza takes us quite far, but for me his thought needs to be supplemented with the work of thinkers like Henri Bergson, who focuses on the intensities of experience, and William James, who focuses on their connectedness.

**Mary Zournazi:** When you were just talking about Spinoza and the way you understand affect, I don't want to put a false determination on it, but is it a more primal sense of the capacity to be human and how we feel connections to the world and others? That's almost natural to a certain extent...

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**Brian Massumi:** I wouldn't tend to say it's primal, if that means more 'natural'. I don't think affective intensity is any more natural than the ability to stand back and reflect on something, or the ability to pin something down in language. But I guess that it might be considered primal in the sense that it is direct. You don't need a concept of 'mediation' to talk about it. In cultural theory, people often talk as if the body and its situatedness on the one hand, and our emotions, thoughts and the language we use for them on the other, are totally different realities, as if there has to be something to come between them and put them into touch with each other. Theories of ideology are designed for this. Mediation, in whatever guise it appears, is the way a lot of theorists try to overcome the old Cartesian duality between mind and body, but it actually leaves it in place and just tries to build a bridge between them. But if you define affect the way we just did, then obviously it includes very elaborated functions like language. There's an affect associated with every functioning of the body, from moving your foot to take a step to moving your lips to make words. Affect is simply a body movement looked at from the point of view of its potential – its capacity to come to be, or better, to come to do. It has to do with modes of activity, and what manner of capacities they carry forward.

Like I said, the directness I'm talking about isn't necessarily a self-presence or self-possession, which is how we normally tend to think of our freedom. If it's direct, it's in the sense that it's directly in transition – in the body passing out of the present moment and the situation it's in, towards the next one. But it's also the

doubling of the body in the situation – its doubling over into what it might have been or done if it had contrived to live that transition more intensely. A body doesn't coincide with itself. It's not present to itself. It is already on the move to a next, at the same time as it is doubling over on itself, bringing its past up to date in the present, through memory, habit, reflex and so on. Which means you can't even say that a body ever coincides with its affective dimension. It is selecting from it, extracting and actualizing certain potentials from it. You can think of affect in the broadest sense as what remains of the potential after each or every thing a body says or does – as a perpetual bodily remainder. Looked at from a different angle, this perpetual remainder is an excess. It's like a reserve of potential or newness or creativity that is experienced alongside every actual production of meaning in language or in any performance of a useful function – vaguely but directly experienced, as something more, a more to come, a life overspilling as it gathers itself up to move on.

**Mary Zournazi:** What immediately comes to mind is something like anger. It's a very strong bodily experience, a heat-of-the-moment intensity – it doesn't seem to have a positive charge in some ways, you know, because it is often a reaction against something...

**Brian Massumi:** I think affective expressions like anger and laughter are perhaps the most powerful because they interrupt a situation. They are negative in that sense. They interrupt the flow of meaning that's taking place: the normalized interrelations and interactions that are happening and the functions that are



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being fulfilled. Because of that, they are irruptions of something that doesn't fit. Anger, for example, forces the situation to attention, it forces a pause filled with an intensity that is often too extreme to be expressed in words. Anger often degenerates into noise and inarticulate gestures. This forces the situation to rearray itself around that irruption, and to deal with the intensity in one way or another. In that sense it's brought something positive out – a reconfiguration.

There's always an instantaneous calculation or judgement that takes place as to how you respond to an outburst of anger. But it's not a judgement in the sense that you've gone through all the possibilities and thought it through explicitly – you don't have time for that kind of thing. Instead you use a kind of judgement that takes place instantly and brings your entire body into the situation. The response to anger is usually as gestural as the outburst of anger itself. The overload of the situation is such that, even if you refrain from a gesture, that itself is a gesture. An outburst of anger brings a number of outcomes into direct presence to one another – there could be a peace-making or a move towards violence, there could be a breaking of relations, all the possibilities are present, packed into the present moment. It all happens, again, before there is time for much reflection, if any. So there's a kind of thought that is taking place in the body, through a kind of instantaneous assessment of affect, an assessment of potential directions and situational outcomes that isn't separate from our immediate, physical acting-out of our implication in the situation. The philosopher C.S. Peirce had a word for thought that is still couched in bodily feeling, that is still fully bound up with unfolding sensation as it goes into

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action but before it has been able to articulate itself in conscious reflection and guarded language. He called it ‘abduction’.

**Mary Zournazi:** Right, right. Oh, that’s like a kind of capture...

**Brian Massumi:** Yes, I think you could say that sensation is the registering of affect that I referred to before – the passing awareness of being at a threshold – and that affect is thinking, bodily – consciously but vaguely, in the sense that is not yet a fully formed thought. It’s a movement of thought, or a thinking movement. There are certain logical categories, like abduction, that could be used to describe this.

**Mary Zournazi:** I think of abduction as a kind of stealing of the moment. It has a wide range of meanings too – it could be stealing or it could be an alien force or possession...

**Brian Massumi:** Or it could be you drawn in by the situation, captured by it, by its eventfulness, rather than you capturing it. But this capture by the situation is not necessarily an oppression. It could be...

**Mary Zournazi:** It could be the kind of freedom we were just talking about...

**Brian Massumi:** Exactly, it could be accompanied by a sense of vitality or vivacity, a sense of being more alive. That’s a lot more compelling than coming to ‘correct’ conclusions or assessing outcomes, although it can also

bring results. It might force you to find a margin, a manoeuvre you didn't know you had, and couldn't have just thought your way into. It can change you, expand you. That's what being alive is all about.

So you can't put positive or negative connotations on affect. That would be to judge it from the outside. It would be going in a moralizing direction. Spinoza makes a distinction between a morality and an ethics. To move in an ethical direction, from a Spinozan point of view, is not to attach positive or negative values to actions based on a characterization or classification of them according to a pre-set system of judgement. It means assessing what kind of potential they tap into and express. Whether a person is going to joke or get angry when they are in a tight spot, that uncertainty produces an affective change in the situation. That affective loading and how it plays out is an ethical act, because it affects where people might go or what they might do as a result. It has consequences.

**Mary Zournazi:** Ethics, then, is always situational?

**Brian Massumi:** Ethics in this sense is completely situational. It's completely pragmatic. And it happens between people, in the social gaps. There is no intrinsic good or evil. The ethical value of an action is what it brings out in the situation, for its transformation, how it breaks sociality open. Ethics is about how we inhabit uncertainty, together. It's not about judging each other right or wrong. For Nietzsche, like Spinoza, there is still a distinction between good and bad even if there's not one between good and evil. Basically the 'good' is affectively defined as what brings maximum potential and

connection to the situation. It is defined in terms of becoming.

**Mary Zournazi:** This makes me think of your idea of ‘walking as controlled falling’. In some ways, every step that we take works with gravity so we don’t fall, but it’s not something we consciously think about, because our body is already moving and is full of both constraint and freedom. I found it interesting because, in some other ways, I’ve been trying to think about another relationship – between perception and language – and it seems to me that ‘affect’ and this notion of body movement can provide a more integrated and vital way of talking about experience and language.

**Brian Massumi:** I like the notion of ‘walking as controlled falling’. It’s something of a proverb, and Laurie Anderson, among others, has used it. It conveys the sense that freedom, or the ability to move forward and to transit through life, isn’t necessarily about escaping from constraints. There are always constraints. When we walk, we’re dealing with the constraint of gravity. There’s also the constraint of balance, and a need for equilibrium. But, at the same time, to walk you need to throw off the equilibrium, you have to let yourself almost go into a fall, then you cut it off and regain the balance. You move forward by playing with the constraints, not avoiding them. There’s an openness of movement, even though there’s no escaping constraint. It’s similar with language. I see it as a play between constraint and room to manoeuvre. If you think of language in the traditional way, as a correspondence between a word with its established meaning on the one

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hand and a matching perception on the other, then it starts coagulating. It's just being used as a totally conventional system for pointing out things you want other people to recognize. It's all about pointing out what everyone can agree is already there. When you think about it, though, there's a unique feeling to every experience that comes along, and the exact details of it can never be exhausted by linguistic expression. That's partly because no two people in the same situation will have had exactly the same experience of it – they would be able to argue and discuss the nuances endlessly. And it's partly because there was just too much there between them to be completely articulated – especially if you think about what was only there potentially, or virtually. But there are uses of language that can bring that inadequation between language and experience to the fore in a way that can convey the 'too much' of the situation – its charge – in a way that actually fosters new experiences.

Humour is a prime example. So is poetic expression, taken in its broadest sense. So language is two-pronged: it is a capture of experience, it codifies and normalizes it and makes it communicable by providing a neutral frame of reference. But at the same time it can convey what I would call 'singularities of experience', the kinds of affective movements we were talking about before that are totally situation-specific, but in an open kind of way. Experiencing this potential for change, experiencing the eventfulness and uniqueness of every situation, even the most conventional ones, that's not necessarily about commanding movement, it's about navigating movement. It's about being immersed in an experience that is already under way. It's about being

bodily attuned to opportunities in the movement, going with the flow. It's more like surfing the situation, or tweaking it, than commanding or programming it. The command paradigm approaches experience as if we were somehow outside it, looking in, like disembodied subjects handling an object. But our experiences aren't objects. They're us, they're what we're made of. We are our situations, we are our moving through them. We are our participation – not some abstract entity that is somehow outside looking in at it all.

**Mary Zournazi:** The movement in language is important and it opens another door or window to perception. But I suppose, as intellectuals, there is the problem of the codification of language within critical discourse and theoretical writing – where that language can stop movement and it can express everything in particular terms or methods that cut off the potential of understanding freedom or experience...

**Brian Massumi:** 'Critical' practices aimed at increasing potentials for freedom and for movement are inadequate, because in order to critique something in any kind of definitive way you have to pin it down. In a way it is an almost sadistic enterprise that separates something out, attributes set characteristics to it, then applies a final judgement to it – objectifies it, in a moralizing kind of way. I understand that using a 'critical method' is not the same as 'being critical'. But still I think there is always that moralizing undertone to critique. Because of that, I think, it loses contact with other more moving dimensions of experience. It doesn't allow for other kinds of practices that might not have so much to do

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with mastery and judgement as with affective connection and abductive participation.

**Mary Zournazi:** The non-judgemental is interesting, you know, because you are always somehow implicated in trying to make judgements... To not make judgements in critical thought is a very hard thing to do. It takes a lot of courage to move in that direction, because otherwise...

**Brian Massumi:** Well, it requires a willingness to take risks, to make mistakes and even to come across as silly. Critique is not amenable to that. And it suffers as a consequence. A critical perspective that tries to come to a definitive judgement on something is always in some way a failure, because it is happening at a remove from the process it's judging. Something could have happened in the intervening time, or something barely perceptible might have been happening away from the centre of critical focus. These developments may become important later. The process of pinning down and separating out is also a weakness in judgement, because it doesn't allow for these seeds of change, connections in the making that might not be activated or obvious at the moment. Being attuned to these possibilities requires being willing to take risks. In a sense, judgemental reason is an extremely weak form of thought, precisely because it is so sure of itself. This is not to say that it shouldn't be used. But I think it should be complemented by other practices of thought, it shouldn't be relied on exclusively. It's limiting if it's the only or even the primary stance of the intellectual.

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A case in point is the anti-globalization movement. It's easy to find weaknesses in it, in its tactics or in its analysis of capitalism. But if you wait around for a movement to come along that corresponds to your particular image of the correct approach, you'll be waiting your life away. Nothing is ever that neat. But luckily people didn't wait around. They jumped right in and started experimenting and networking, step by step. As a result, new connections have been made between people and movements operating in different regions of the world, on different political levels, from the most local grassroots levels up to the most established NGOs, using different organizational structures. In a very short period of time the entire discourse surrounding globalization has shifted. Actually, not only surrounding it but inside its institutions also – it's now impossible for an international meeting to take place without issues of poverty and health being on the agenda. It's far from a solution, but it's a start. It's ongoing. That's the point: to keep on going.

**Mary Zournazi:** The idea of 'controlled walking' is a good example of what you were just talking about in terms of the limitations on the self and the freedoms that are possible. But I am also thinking about it as relating to the idea of 'societies of control' – which you have written about. We now live in societies of control, so how do control and power in this new age also offer the possibility of freedom?

**Brian Massumi:** In physics there is a very famous problem that heavily influenced the development of chaos theory. It's called the 'three-body problem',



where you have completely deterministic trajectories of bodies constrained by Newtonian laws. For example, if you have two bodies interacting, through gravity for example, everything is calculable and foreseeable.

If you know where they are in relation to each at one moment, you can project a path and figure out where they were at any given moment in the past, or at a time in the future. But if you have three of them together what happens is that a margin of unpredictability creeps in. The paths can't be accurately determined after a point. They can turn erratic, ending up at totally different places than you'd expect. What has happened? How can chance creep into a totally deterministic system? It's not that the bodies have somehow broken the laws of physics. What happens is interference, or resonation. It's not really discrete bodies and paths interacting. It's fields. Gravity is a field – a field of potential attraction, collision, orbit, of potential centripetal and centrifugal movements. All these potentials form such complex interference patterns when three fields overlap that a measure of indeterminacy creeps in. It's not that we just don't have a detailed enough knowledge to predict. Accurate prediction is impossible because the indeterminacy is objective. So there's an objective degree of freedom even in the most deterministic system. Something in the coming-together of movements, even according to the strictest of laws, flips the constraints over into conditions of freedom. It's a relational effect, a complexity effect. Affect is like our human gravitational field, and what we call our freedom is its relational flips. Freedom is not about breaking or escaping constraints. It's about flipping them over into degrees of freedom. You can't really escape the constraints. No body can

escape gravity. Laws are part of what we are, they're intrinsic to our identities. No human can simply escape gender, for example. The cultural 'laws' of gender are part of what makes us who we are, they're part of the process that produced us as individuals. You can't just step out of gender identity. But just maybe you can take steps to encourage gender to flip. That can't be an individual undertaking. It involves tweaking the interference and resonation patterns between individuals. It's a relational undertaking. You're not acting on yourself or other individuals separately. You're acting on them together, on their togetherness, their field of belonging. The idea is that there are ways of acting upon the level of belonging itself, on the moving together and coming together of bodies per se. This would have to involve an evaluation of collective potential that would be ethical in the sense we were talking about before. It would be a caring for the relating of things as such – a politics of belonging instead of a politics of identity, of correlated emergence instead of separate domains of interest attracting each other or colliding in predictable ways. In Isabelle Stengers's terms this kind of politics is an ecology of practices. It's a pragmatic politics of the in-between. For me, it's an abductive politics that has to operate on the level of affect.

**Mary Zournazi:** So what does this political ecology involve?

**Brian Massumi:** To move towards that kind of political ecology you have to get rid of the idea as power or constraint as power over. It's always a power to. The greatest power of the law is the power to form us. Power

doesn't just force us down certain paths, it puts the paths in us, so by the time we learn to follow its constraints we're following ourselves. The effects of power on us are our identity. That's what Michel Foucault taught us. If power just came at us from outside, if it was just an extrinsic relation, it would be simple. You'd just run away. In the 1960s and 1970s that's how a lot of people looked at it – including myself. Drop out, stop following the predictable, straight-and-narrow path, and things like sexism will just disappear. Well, they didn't. It's a lot more complicated than that. Power comes up into us from the field of potential. It 'in-forms' us, it's intrinsic to our formation, it's part of our emergence as identified individuals, and it emerges with us – we actualize it, as it in-forms us. So in a way it's as potentializing as what we call freedom, only what it potentializes is limited to a number of predictable paths. It's the calculable part of affect, the most probable next steps and eventual outcomes. As Foucault says, power is productive, and it produces not so much repressions as regularities. Which brings us to the 'society of control' and to capitalism...

**Mary Zournazi:** I was just going to ask you about that...

**Brian Massumi:** It is very clear that capitalism has undergone a major reconfiguration since the Second World War, and it's been very difficult to think through what that has been. For me the most useful way of thinking about it comes from the post-Autonomia Italian Marxist movement, in particular the thought of Antonio Negri. The argument is that capitalist powers

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have pretty much abandoned control in the sense of ‘power over’. That corresponds to the first flush of ‘disciplinary’ power in Michel Foucault’s vocabulary. Disciplinary power starts by enclosing bodies in top-down institutions – prisons, asylums, hospitals, schools and so on. It encloses in order to find ways of producing more regularity in behaviour. Its aim is to manufacture normality – good, healthy citizens. As top-down disciplinary power takes hold and spreads, it finds ways of doing the same thing without the enclosure. Prisons spawn halfway houses, hospitals spawn community clinics and home-care, educational institutions spawn the self-help and career retooling industries. It starts operating in an open field. After a certain point it starts paying more attention to the relays between the points in that field, the transitions between institutions, than to the institutions themselves. It’s seeped into the in-between. At this point it starts to act directly on the kinds of interference and resonance effects I was just mentioning. It starts working directly on bodies’ movements and momentum, producing momentums, the more varied and even erratic the better. Normality starts to lose its hold. The regularities start to loosen. This loosening of normality is part of capitalism’s dynamic. It’s not a simple liberation. It’s capitalism’s own form of power. It’s no longer disciplinary institutional power that defines everything, it’s capitalism’s power to produce variety – because markets get saturated. Produce variety and you produce a niche market. The oddest of affective tendencies are OK – as long as they pay. Capitalism starts intensifying or diversifying affect, but only in order to extract surplus-value. It hijacks affect in order to intensify profit potential. It

literally valorizes affect. The capitalist logic of surplus-value production starts to take over the relational field that is also the domain of political ecology, the ethical field of resistance to identity and predictable paths. It's very troubling and confusing, because it seems to me that there's been a certain kind of convergence between the dynamic of capitalist power and the dynamic of resistance.

**Mary Zournazi:** For me, this raises a question about the way capitalism does capture potential and organizes itself. There are two issues I want to address: firstly, in relationship to the question of hope – human aspirations and hopes are directly related to capitalism today. The natural or 'potential of hope' is seized upon and is tied very much to a monetary system, economic imperatives or questions of ownership. Secondly, the relationship between hope and fear in capitalism. I think that hope and fear are part of the same equation...

**Brian Massumi:** I think they definitely are. It would help to try to talk a little bit more about the change in capitalism and what that constitutes, and then go back to that question. Thinkers like Negri say that the products of capitalism have become more intangible, they've become more information- and service-based. Material objects and physical commodities that were once the engine of the economy are becoming more and more peripheral, in profit terms. For example, the cost of computers keeps plummeting. It's difficult to make a profit from their manufacture because there's a mass of basically identical versions from different companies, and they're all pretty interchangeable.

**Mary Zournazi:** Is that mass production in a sense or a different notion of mass production?

**Brian Massumi:** It is a mass production but it leads to a different kind of production, because what can someone sell if they can't make a profit from the object? What they can sell are services around the object and they can sell the right to do the things you can do through the object. That's why copyright is such a huge issue. The capitalist product is more and more an intellectual property that you buy a right to use, not an object you buy outright. If you buy a software package, often you're not supposed to even make copies of it for yourself, like one for your desktop and one for a laptop. If you buy a book, you own an object. You can resell it, or lend it, or rebind it, or photocopy it for your own use. If you buy a software package, you're not so much buying an object, you're buying a bundle of functions. You're buying the right to use those functions, with all sorts of strings attached. You're basically buying the right to be able to do things, ways of affecting and being affected – word-processing capacities, image-capture and -processing capacities, printing capacities, calculation capacities... It's at the same time very potentializing, and controlled. The 'cutting edge' products are more and more multivalent. 'Convergence' is the buzzword. When you buy a computerized product, you can do a lot of different things with it – you use it to extend your affective capacities. It becomes a motor force of your life – like a turbo charge to your vitality. It enables you to go farther and to do more, to fit more in. The way even older-style products are sold has something to do with this. You don't just buy a car, the dealers tell

us, you buy a lifestyle. When you consume, you're not just getting something to use for a particular use, you're getting yourself a life. All products become more intangible, sort of atmospheric, and marketing gets hinged more and more on style and branding...

**Mary Zournazi:** More meaningless?

**Brian Massumi:** Possibly, possibly but not necessarily, because, if you think of style or branding, it is an attempt to express what we were talking about before as the sense of vitality or liveliness. It is a selling of experience or lifestyles, and people put themselves together by what they buy and what they can do through what they can buy. So ownership of things is becoming comparatively less important. The centrality of 'conspicuous consumption' belongs to an earlier phase. It's this enabling of experience that is taking over. Now, that enablement of experience has to be tended. Companies work very hard to produce brand loyalty. 'Fidelity programmes' involving things like rewards points are everywhere. The product becomes a long-term part of your life, you're brought into a relationship with the company through fidelity programmes, service networks, promises of upgrades, etc. The way you use the product is also more and more oriented towards relationship – the most seductive products produce possibilities of connection. 'Connectability' is another buzzword. When we buy a product, we're buying potential connections with other things and especially other people – for example, when a family buys a computer to keep in touch by email, or when you get a computer for work and end up joining online communities. What's being

sold more and more is experience, social experience. The corporation, the capitalist company, is having to create social networks and cultural nodes that come together around the product, and the product gets used more and more to create social networks that radiate out from it. 'Networking' was the buzzword in the 1980s, when this new kind of capitalist power was just coming into its own. Marketing itself is starting to operate along those lines. There is a new kind of marketing called viral marketing where specialized companies will surf the web to find communities of interest that have spontaneously formed. It started in the music industry, around fan networks for bands. They find a group of people who have a very strong affective attachment to a band or a performer that is very central to how they see themselves and to what they perceive as the quality of their life. They will network with them, offer them tickets or inside information, or special access, and in return the members of the group will agree to take on certain marketing tasks. So the difference between marketing and consuming and between living and buying is becoming smaller and smaller, to the point that they are getting almost indistinguishable. On both the production side and the consumption side it is all about intangible, basically cultural products or products of experience that invariably have a collective dimension to them.

**Mary Zournazi:** So as consumers we are part of the new networks of global and collective exchange...

**Brian Massumi:** Individual consumers are being inducted into these collective processes rather than being



separated out and addressed as free agents who are supposed to make an informed consumer choice as rational individuals. This is a step beyond niche marketing, it's relational marketing. It works by contagion rather than by convincing, on affect rather than rational choice. It works at least as much on the level of our 'indeterminate sociality' as on the level of our identities. More and more, what it does is hitch a ride on movements afoot in the social field, on social stirrings, which it channels in profit-making directions. People like Negri talk about the 'social factory', a kind of socialization of capitalism, where capitalism is more about scouting and capturing or producing and multiplying potentials for doing and being than it is about selling *things*. The kind of work that goes into this he calls 'immaterial labour'. The product, ultimately, is us. We are in-formed by capitalist powers of production. Our whole life becomes a 'capitalist tool' – our vitality, our affective capacities. It's to the point that our life potentials are indistinguishable from capitalist forces of production. In some of my essays I've called this the 'subsumption of life' under capitalism.

Jeremy Rifkin is a social critic who now teaches at one of the most prestigious business schools in the US (talk about the capture of resistance!). Rifkin has a description of capitalism that is actually surprisingly similar to Negri's. And he's teaching it to the next generation of capitalists. It centres on what he calls 'gate-keeping' functions. Here the figure of power is no longer the billy club of the policeman, it's the barcode or the PIN number. These are control mechanisms, but not in the old sense of 'power over'. It's control in Gilles Deleuze's sense, which is closer to 'check mechanism'.

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It's all about checkpoints. At the grocery store counter, the barcode on what you're buying checks the object out of the store. At the automatic bank teller, the PIN number on your card checks you into your account. The checks don't control you, they don't tell you where to go or what to be doing at any particular time. They don't lord it over you. They just lurk. They lie in wait for you at key points. You come to them, and they're activated by your arrival. You're free to move, but every few steps there's a checkpoint. They're everywhere, woven into the social landscape. To continue on your way you have to pass the checkpoint. What's being controlled is right of passage – access. It's about your enablement to go places and do things. When you pass the checkpoint you have to present something for detection, and when you do that something registers. Your bank account is debited, and you and your groceries pass. Or something fails to register, and that's what lets you pass, like at airport security or places where there's video surveillance. In either case what's being controlled is passage across thresholds.

Society becomes an open field composed of thresholds or gateways, it becomes a continuous space of passage. It's no longer rigidly structured by walled-in enclosures, there's all kinds of latitude. It's just that at key points along the way, at key thresholds, power is tripped into action. The exercise of the power bears on your movement – not so much you as a person. In the old disciplinary power formations, it was always about judging what sort of person you were, and the way power functioned was to make you fit a model, or else. If you weren't the model citizen, you were judged guilty and locked up as a candidate for 'reform'. That kind of

power deals with big unities – the person as moral subject, right and wrong, social order. And everything was internalized – if you didn't think right you were in trouble. Now you're checked in passing, and instead of being judged innocent or guilty you're registered as liquid. The process is largely automatic, and it doesn't really matter what you think or who you are deep down. Machines do the detecting and 'judging'. The check just bears on a little detail – do you have enough in your bank account, do you not have a gun? It's a highly localized, partial exercise of power – a micro-power. That micropower, though, feeds up to higher levels, bottom up.

**Mary Zournazi:** And this power is more intangible because it has no 'real' origin...

**Brian Massumi:** In a way the real power starts after you've passed, in the feed, because you've left a trace. Something has registered. Those registrations can be gathered to piece together a profile of your movement, or they can be compared to other people's inputs. They can be processed en masse and systematized, synthesized. Very convenient for surveillance or crime investigation, but even more valuable for marketing. In such a fluid economy, based so much on intangibles, the most valuable thing is information on people's patterns and tastes. The checkpoint system allows information to be gathered at every step you take. You're providing a continuous feed, which comes back to you in advertising pushing new products, new bundlings of potential. Think of how cookies work on the internet. Every time you click a link, you're registering your tastes and

patterns, which are then processed and thrown back at you in the form of flip-up ads that try to get you to go to particular links and hopefully buy something. It's a feedback loop, and the object is to modulate your online movement. It's no exaggeration to say that every time you click a link you're doing somebody else's market research for them. You're contributing to their profit-making abilities. Your everyday movements and leisure activities have become a form of value-producing labour. You are generating surplus-value just by going about your daily life – your very ability to move is being capitalized on. Deleuze and Guattari call this kind of capitalizing on movement 'surplus-value of flow', and what characterizes the 'society of control' is that the economy and the way power functions come together around the generation of this surplus-value of flow. Life movements, capital and power become one continuous operation – check, register, feed-in, processing, feedback, purchase, profit, around and around.

**Mary Zournazi:** So how do the more 'traditional' forms of power operate? I mean they don't disappear – they seem to gather more momentum?

**Brian Massumi:** Yes, this situation doesn't mean that police functions and the other old disciplinary forms of power are over and done with. Disciplinary powers don't disappear. Far from it. In fact they tend to proliferate and often get more vehement in their application precisely because the field that they are in is no longer controlled overall by their kind of power, so they're in a situation of structural insecurity. There are no more

top-down state apparatuses that can really claim effective control over their territory. Old-style sovereignty is a thing of the past. All borders have become porous, and capitalism is feeding off that porosity and pushing it further and further – that's what globalization is all about. But there have to be mechanisms that check those movements, so policing functions start to proliferate, and as policing proliferates so do prisons. In the US they're being privatized and are now big business. Now policing works more and more in the way I was just describing, through gatekeeping – detection, registration and feedback. Police action, in the sense of an arrest, comes out of this movement-processing loop as a particular kind of feedback. Instead of passing through the gate, a gun is detected by the machine, and a police response is triggered, and someone gets arrested. Police power becomes a function of that other kind of power, that we were calling control, or movement-based power. It's a local stop-action that arises out of the flow and is aimed at safeguarding it. The boom in prison construction comes as an offshoot of the policing, so you could consider the profits made by that new industry as a kind of surplus-value of flow. It's a vicious circle, and everyone knows it. No matter how many prisons there are, no matter how many people they lock up, the general insecurity won't be lessened. It just comes with the territory, because for capitalism to keep going, things have to keep flowing. Free trade and fluidity of labour markets is the name of the game. So no matter how many billions of dollars are poured into surveillance and prison building, the threat will still be there of something getting through that shouldn't. Terrorism is the perfect example.

**Mary Zournazi:** Yes. In thinking about this now – after our initial conversation and in this revision of it, post-September 11 – it adds another dimension to this surveillance.

**Brian Massumi:** All the September 11 terrorists were in the US legally. They passed. How many others might have? With this stage of capitalism comes territorial insecurity, and with territorial insecurity comes fear, with fear comes more checkpoint policing, more processing, more bottom-up, fed-back ‘control’. It becomes one big, self-propelling feedback machine. It turns into a kind of automatism, and we register collectively as individuals through the way we feed that automatism, by our participation in it, just by virtue of being alive and moving. Socially, that’s what the individual is now: a checkpoint trigger and a co-producer of surplus-values of flow. Power is now distributed. It trickles down to the most local, most partial checkpoint. The profits that get generated from that don’t necessarily trickle down, but the power does. There is no distance any more between us, our movements and the operations of power, or between the operations of power and the forces of capitalism. One big, continuous operation. Capitalist power has become operationalized. Nothing so glorious as sovereign, just operational – a new modesty of power as it becomes ubiquitous.

At any rate, the hope that might come with the feeling of potentialization and enablement we discussed is doubled by insecurity and fear. Increasingly power functions by manipulating that affective dimension rather than dictating proper or normal behaviour from on high. So power is no longer fundamentally normative,

like it was in its disciplinary forms, it's affective. The media have an extremely important role to play in that. The legitimization of political power, of state power, no longer goes through the reason of state and the correct application of governmental judgement. It goes through affective channels. For example, an American president can deploy troops overseas because it makes a population feel good about their country or feel secure, not because the leader is able to present well-honed arguments that convince the population that it is a justified use of force. So there is no longer political justification within a moral framework provided by the sovereign state. And the media are not mediating any more – they become direct mechanisms of control by their ability to modulate the affective dimension.

This has all become painfully apparent after the World Trade Center attacks. You had to wait weeks after the event to hear the slightest analysis in the US media. It was all heart-rending human interest stories of fallen heroes, or scare stories about terrorists around every corner. What the media produced wasn't information or analysis – it was affect modulation, affective pick-up from the mythical 'man in the street', followed by affective amplification through broadcast and diffusion. Another feedback loop. It changes how people experience what potentials they have to go and to do. The constant security concerns insinuate themselves into our lives at such a basic, habitual level that you're barely aware how it's changing the tenor of everyday living. You start 'instinctively' to limit your movements and contact with people. It's affectively limiting. That affective limitation is expressed in emotional terms – remember we were making a distinction between affect

and emotion, with emotion being the expression of affect in gesture and language, its conventional or coded expression. At the same time as the media helps produce this affective limitation, it works to overcome it in a certain way. The limitation can't go too far or it would slow down the dynamic of capitalism. One of the biggest fears after September 11 was that the economy would go into recession because of a crisis in consumer confidence. So everyone was called upon to keep spending, as a proud, patriotic act. So the media picks up on fear and insecurity and feeds it back amplified, but in a way that somehow changes its quality into pride and patriotism – with the proof in the purchasing. A direct affective conversion of fear into confidence by means of an automatic image loop, running in real time, through continuous coverage, and spinning off profit. Does anyone really believe Bush stands for state reason? It doesn't matter – there are flags to wave and feel-good shopping to do. Once the loop gets going, you've got to feed it. You can only produce more pride and patriotism by producing more fear and insecurity to convert. At times it seemed as though US government officials were consciously drumming up fear, like when they repeatedly issued terrorist attack warnings and then would withdraw them – and the media was lapping it up.

**Mary Zournazi:** Yes.

**Brian Massumi:** Affect is now much more important for understanding power, even state power narrowly defined, than concepts like ideology. Direct affect modulation takes the place of old-style ideology. This is not



new. It didn't just happen around the September 11 events, it just sort of came out then, became impossible to ignore. In the early 1990s I put together a book called *The Politics of Everyday Fear*.<sup>1</sup> It dealt with the same kind of mechanisms, but it was coming out of the experience of the 1980s, the Reagan years. This directly affective media power has been around at least since television matured as a medium – which was about when it took power literally, with the election of Reagan, an old TV personality, as head of state. The functions of head of state and commander-in-chief of the military fused with the role of the television personality. The American president was not a statesman any more, like Woodrow Wilson or Franklin Roosevelt were. He was a visible personification of that affective media loop. The face of mass affect. Now, the internet is taking up where television left off. With the internet, the affective conversion loops becomes more diffuse and distributed – and all the more insidious. What was once mass affect has now entered into the micropolitical realm, where it proliferates. This allows it to mutate more readily into new variations, but also for some of those variations to spike virally.

**Mary Zournazi:** It is really important to understand affect 'after a society of ideology'. Ideology is still around but it is not as embracing as it was, and in fact it does operate. But to really understand it you have to understand its materialization, which goes through

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<sup>1</sup>Brian Massumi, ed., *The Politics of Everyday Fear* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

affect. That's a very different way of addressing the political, because it is having to say that there is a whole range of ideological structures in place. Then there is that point you were talking about, the transitional passages that you pass through that capitalism is part of and manipulating – but it does have the possibility of freedom within it. It seems to me that to express how those affective dimensions are mobilized is the main ethical concern now...

**Brian Massumi:** It seems to me that alternative political action does not have to fight against the idea that power has become affective, but rather has to learn to function itself on that same level – meet affective modulation with affective modulation. That requires, in some ways, a performative, theatrical or aesthetic approach to politics. For example, it is not possible for a dispossessed group to adequately communicate its needs and desires through the usual channels. It just doesn't happen. It wasn't possible for marginal interest groups like the anti-globalization movement before the Seattle demonstration (1999) to do that simply by arguing convincingly and broadcasting its message. The message doesn't get through, because the public discourse doesn't function on that level of the rational weighing of choices. Unfortunately the kind of theatrical or performative intervention that is the easiest and has the most immediate effect is often a violent kind. If windows hadn't been broken and cars hadn't been overturned in Seattle, most people wouldn't have heard of the anti-globalization movement by now. That outburst of anger actually helped create networks of people working around the world trying to address the increasing

inequalities that accompany globalization. It was able to shake the situation enough that people took notice. It was like everything was thrown up in the air for a moment and people came down after the shock in a slightly different order and some were interconnected in ways that they hadn't been before. Dispossessed people like the Palestinians or the people in Irian Jaya just can't argue their cases effectively through the media, which is why they're sometimes driven to violent guerrilla tactics or terrorism, out of desperation. And they're basically theatrical or spectacular actions, they're performative, because they don't do much in themselves except to get people's attention – and cause a lot of suffering in the process, which is why they spectacularly backfire as often as not. They also work by amplifying fear on all sides, which then gets converted into group pride or resolve. The resolve is for the in-group and the fear for everybody else. It's as divisive as the oppression it's responding to, and it feeds right into the dominant state mechanisms.

The September 11 terrorists made Bush president, they created President Bush, they fed the massive military and surveillance machine he's now able to build. Before Bin Laden and al-Qaeda, Bush wasn't a president, he was an embarrassment. Bin Laden and Bush are affective partners, like Bush Senior and Saddam Hussein, or Reagan and the Soviet leaders. In a way, they're in collusion or in symbiosis. They're like evil twins who feed off of each other's affective energies. It's a kind of vampiric politics. Everything starts happening between these opposite personifications of affect, leaving no room for other kinds of action. It's rare that protest violence has the kind of positive organizing

power it did in Seattle. The anti-globalization movement had already lost that power by the time it reached Genoa (2001), when people started to die. The violence was overused by certain elements of the movement and under-strategized – it got predictable, it became a refrain, it lost its power.

The crucial political question for me is whether there are ways of practising a politics that takes stock of the affective way power operates now, but doesn't rely on violence and the hardening of divisions along identity lines that it usually brings. I'm not exactly sure what that kind of politics would look like, but it would still be performative, and it would resist personification in peak individuals. In some basic way it would be an aesthetic politics, because its aim would be to expand the range of affective potential – which is what aesthetic practice has always been about. It's also the way I talked about ethics earlier. Félix Guattari liked to hyphenate the two – towards an 'ethico-aesthetic politics'.

**Mary Zournazi:** For me the relationship you were discussing earlier, between hope and fear in the political domain, is what gets mobilized by the Left and Right. In some ways the problem of more leftist or radical thinking is that it doesn't actually tap into those mobilizations of different kinds of affects, whether it be hope, fear, love or whatever. The Left are criticizing the Right and the Right are mobilizing hope and fear in more affective ways. The Right can capture the imagination of a population and produce nationalist feelings and tendencies, so there can be a real absence of hope to

counter what's going on in everyday life, and I think the Left have a few more hurdles to jump...

**Brian Massumi:** The traditional Left was really left behind by the culturalization or socialization of capital and the new functioning of the mass media. It seems to me that in the United States what's left of the Left has become extremely isolated. So there is a sense of hopelessness and isolation that ends up rigidifying people's responses. They're left to stew in their own righteous juices. They risk falling back on rectitude and right judgement, which simply is not affective. Or rather, it's anti-affective affect – it's curtailing, punishing, disciplining. When this happens, it's really just a sad holdover from the old regime – the dregs of disciplinary power. It seems to me that the Left has to relearn resistance, really taking to heart the changes that have happened recently in the way capitalism and power operate, and learning from the successes and failures of the anti-globalization movement.

**Mary Zournazi:** In a way, this conversation makes me think about the relation of 'autonomy and connection' that you've written about. There are many ways of understanding autonomy, but I think with capitalism's changing face it is harder and harder to be autonomous. For instance, people who are unemployed have very intense reactions and feelings to that categorization of themselves as unemployed. And, in my experience, I'm continually hounded by bureaucratic procedures that tend to restrict my autonomy and freedom – such as constant checks, meetings and forms to fill out. These

procedures mark every step you take... So to find some way to affirm unemployment that allows you to create another life, or even to get a job, is increasingly more difficult and produces new forms of alienation and 'disconnection'...

**Brian Massumi:** It is harder to feel like getting a job is making you autonomous, because there are so many mechanisms of control that come down on you when you do have a job. All aspects of your life involve these mechanisms – your daily schedules, your dress, and, in the United States, it can even involve such invasive procedures as being tested for drugs on a regular basis. Even when you are not on the job, the insecurity that goes with having a job and wanting to keep it in a volatile economy – where there is little job security and the kind of jobs that are available change very quickly – requires you to constantly be thinking of your marketability and what the next job is going to be. So free time starts getting taken up by self-improvement or taking care of yourself so that you remain healthy and alert and can perform at your peak. The difference between your job life and off-job life collapses, there are no longer distinctions between your public and private functions. Being unemployed creates an entirely different set of challenges, constraints and controls, but it is not necessarily completely disempowering. For example, a lot of creative work gets done by people who are unemployed or underemployed.

**Mary Zournazi:** Yes, but it is also the intensity of those experiences that get categorized in one particular way

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– you either work or don't work. But the way it's lived out isn't like that at all. I'm not just thinking of myself here and my experience of unemployment. The feeling of despair doesn't have a way of being expressed in our cultures, except with the feeling that you're not doing the right thing, or you're not part of the society. It is about the relationship to commodities, really, because in a sense you are no longer in a position to market yourself or consume.

**Brian Massumi:** There is definitely an imperative to have a job and to be able to consume more and consume better, to consume experiences that in-form you and increase your marketability for jobs. There's definitely an imperative to participate, and if you can't you're branded, you don't pass any more, you can't get by the most desirable checkpoints.

**Mary Zournazi:** Yes, like getting a credit card – or simply having money in your bank account.

**Brian Massumi:** But what I was trying to say is that there is no such thing as autonomy and decisive control over one's life in any total sense, whether you have a job or whether you don't. There are different sets of constraints, and, like we were saying before, freedom always arises from constraint – it's a creative conversion of it, not some utopian escape from it. Wherever you are, there is still potential, there are openings, and the openings are in the grey areas, in the blur where you're susceptible to affective contagion, or capable of spreading it. It's never totally within your personal power to decide.

**Mary Zournazi:** Is that what you mean by autonomy and connection?

**Brian Massumi:** Well, there's no such thing as autonomy in the sense of being entirely affectively separate. When you are unemployed you are branded as separate, unproductive and not part of society, but you still are connected because you are in touch with an enormous range of social services and policing functions that mean you are just as much in society – but you are in society in a certain relation of inequality and impasse. It's a fiction that there is any position within society that enables you to maintain yourself as a separate entity with complete control over your decisions – the idea of a free agent that somehow stands back from it all and chooses, like from a smorgasbord platter. I think there can be another notion of autonomy that has to do more with how you can connect to others and to other movements, how you can modulate those connections, to multiply and intensify them. So what you are, affectively, isn't a social classification – rich or poor, employed or unemployed – it's a set of potential connections and movements that you have, as a function of those classifications, but always in an open field of relations. What you can do, your potential, is ultimately defined by your connectedness, the way you're connected and how intensely, not your ability to separate off and decide by yourself. Autonomy is always connective, it's not being apart, it's being in, being in a situation of belonging that gives you certain degrees of freedom, or powers of becoming, powers of emergence. How many degrees of freedom there are, and where they can lead most directly, is certainly different depending on how you are



socially classified – whether you are male or female, child or adult, rich or poor, employed or unemployed – but none of those conditions or definitions are boxes that completely contain a person’s potential. And having pity for someone who occupies a category that is not socially valorized, or expressing moral outrage on their behalf, is not necessarily what is helpful in the long run, because it maintains the category and simply inverts its value sign, from negative to positive. It’s a kind of piety, a moralizing approach. It’s not affectively pragmatic. It doesn’t challenge identity-based divisions.

**Mary Zournazi:** Well, that is the problem of charity. When you have pity for someone it doesn’t actually change the situation or give them much hope. But the other side of that is what you were talking about before, the idea of ‘caring for belonging’. There is such a focus on self-interest and the privatized idea of the individual (although this is changing through the new fields of capitalism and the economy) – the valorization of the individual against more collective struggles. This project has been trying to think about different notions of being, and collective life. In your ideas of autonomy and connection there is also another understanding or different notion of care – ‘belonging’ and our ‘relations’ to ourselves and others. It involves some other idea of being that is anti-capitalist, and also different notion of caring...

**Brian Massumi:** Well, if you think of your life as an autonomous collectivity or a connective autonomy, it still makes sense to think in terms of self-interest at a certain level. Obviously a disadvantaged group has to

assess its interests and fight for certain rights, certain rights of passage and access, certain resources – often survival itself is in the balance. But at the same time, if any group, disadvantaged or otherwise, identifies itself completely with its self-interests it's living the fiction that it is a separate autonomy. It is missing the potential that comes from taking the risk of making an event of the way you relate to other people, orienting it towards becoming-other. So in a way you are cutting yourself off from your own potential to change and intensify your life. If you think of it in terms of potential and intensified experience then too much self-interest is against your own interests. You have to constantly be balancing those two levels. Political actions that only operate in terms of the self-interest of identified groups occupying recognizable social categories like male/female, unemployed/employed, have limited usefulness. For me, if they are pursued to the exclusion of other forms of political activity they end up creating a sort of rigidity – a hardening of the arteries!

**Mary Zournazi:** Which leads to a heart attack or death, doesn't it!

**Brian Massumi:** So it seems to me there needs to be an ecology of practices that does have room for pursuing or defending rights based on an identification with a certain categorized social group, that asserts and defends a self-interest but doesn't just do that. If you do think of your life potential as coming from the ways you can connect with others, and are challenged by that connection in ways that might be outside your direct control, then, as you are saying, you have to employ a different

kind of logic. You have to think of your being in a direct belonging. There are any number of practices that can be socially defined and assert their interest, but all of them interact in an open field. If you take them all together there is an in-betweenness of them all that is not just the one-to-one conflict between pairs, but snakes between them all and makes them belong to the same social field – an indeterminate or emergent ‘sociality’. So I’m suggesting that there is a role for people who care for relation or belonging, as such, and try to direct attention towards it and inflect it rather than denouncing or championing particular identities or positions. But to do that you have to abdicate your own self-interest up to a point, and this opens you to risk. You have to place yourself not in a position but in the middle, in a fairly indeterminate, fairly vague situation, where things meet at the edges and pass into each other.

**Mary Zournazi:** That’s the ethics, isn’t it?

**Brian Massumi:** Yes, because you don’t know what the outcome is going to be. So you have to take care, because an intervention that is too violent can create rebound effects that are unpredictable to such a degree that it can lead to things falling apart rather than reconfiguring. It can lead to great suffering. In a way I think it becomes an ethic of caring, caring for belonging, which has to be a nonviolent ethic that involves thinking of your local actions as modulating a global state. A very small intervention might get amplified across the web of connections to produce large effects – the famous butterfly effect – you never know. So it takes a great deal of attention and care and abductive effort of

understanding about how things are interrelating and how a perturbation, a little shove or a tweak, might change that.

**Mary Zournazi:** Yes, and there is a relation between this ethics, hope and the idea of joy. If we take Spinoza and Nietzsche seriously, an ethic of joy and the cultivation of joy are an affirmation of life. In the sense of what you are saying, even a small thing can become amplified and can have a global effect, which is life-affirming. What are your thoughts on this ethical relationship in everyday existence? And in intellectual practice – which is where we are coming from – what are the affirmations of joy and hope?

**Brian Massumi:** Well, I think that joy is not the same thing as happiness. Just like good for Nietzsche is not the opposite of evil, joy for Spinoza (or ‘gaiety’ in Nietzsche’s vocabulary) is not the opposite of unhappy. It’s on a different axis. Joy can be very disruptive, it can even be very painful. What I think Spinoza and Nietzsche are getting at is joy as affirmation, an assuming by the body of its potentials, its assuming of a posture that intensifies its powers of existence. The moment of joy is the co-presence of those potentials, in the context of a bodily becoming. That can be an experience that overcomes you. Take Antonin Artaud, for example. His artistic practice was all about intensifying bodily potential, trying to get outside or underneath the categories of language and affective containment by those categories, trying to pack vast potentials for movement and meaning in a single gesture, or in words that burst apart and lose their conventional meaning, becoming like a

scream of possibility, a babble of becoming, the body bursting out through an opening in expression. It's liberating, but at the same time the charge of that potential can become unbearable and can actually destroy. Artaud himself was destroyed by it, he ended up mad, and so did Nietzsche. So it is not just simple opposition between happy and unhappy or pleasant or unpleasant.

I do think, though, that the practice of joy does imply some form of belief. It can't be a total scepticism or nihilism or cynicism, which are all mechanisms for holding oneself separate and being in a position to judge, deride or disqualify. But, on the other hand, it's not a belief in the sense of a set of propositions to adhere to or a set of principles or moral dictates. There is a phrase of Deleuze's that I like very much where he says that what we need is to be able to find a way to 'believe in the world' again. It's not at all a theological statement – or an anti-theological statement for that matter. It's an ethical statement. What it is saying is that we have to live our immersion in the world, really experience our belonging to this world, which is the same thing as our belonging to each other, and live that so intensely together that there is no room to doubt the reality of it. The idea is that lived intensity is self-affirming. It doesn't need a God or judge or head of state to tell it that it has value. What it means, I think, is accept the embeddedness, go with it, live it out, and that's your reality, it's the only reality you have, and it's your participation that makes it real. That's what Deleuze is saying belief is about, a belief in the world. It's not a belief that's 'about' being in the world, it *is* a being in the world. Because it's all about being in this world, warts and all, and not some perfect world beyond or a better world

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of the future, it's an empirical kind of belief. Ethical, empirical – and creative, because your participation in this world is part of a global becoming. So it's about taking joy in that process, wherever it leads, and I guess it's about having a kind of faith in the world which is simply the hope that it continue... But again it is not a hope that has a particular content or end point – it's a desire for more life, or for more to life.