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## Affect and Immediation: An Interview with Brian Massumi

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# Affect and Immediation

## An Interview with Brian Massumi

Interviewed by Jacob Ferrington, Alina Hechler, and Jannell Parsons

Brian Massumi is the author of numerous works across philosophy, political theory, and art theory. His publications include *99 Theses on the Revaluation of Value: A Postcapitalist Manifesto* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (MIT Press, 2011) and *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Duke University Press, 2002).

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**Jannell Parsons (JP):** The first question we wanted to ask you, because we know you'll be talking about immediation in your talk tomorrow, is how are you thinking about this notion of immediation in relationship to affect? Or, maybe put another way, how did thinking about affect bring you to wanting to theorize a notion of immediation?

**Brian Massumi (Massumi):** The two concerns came at the same time. My original interest in affect didn't separate affect out. It was enfolded with a number of issues, forming a kind of complex. That is why I was surprised when the term "affect theory" started being used and I found myself categorized as an affect theorist. It made no sense to me to approach it in separation, since it is a dimension of every event. What I was after, more than a theory of affect, was a philosophy of the event. In *Parables for the Virtual*, I approached the event through the question of movement, understood not as a simple displacement in space but as qualitative transformation. Affect was a way of getting at the qualitative registering, in the event, of change taking place. Affect comes flush with the event, in the immediacy of its occurring. But the registering wouldn't be of a transformation if there were not, wrapped in the affect, a sense of the state just left, as well as a sense of the shift in potential left for subsequent events to come. So immediacy couldn't be reduced to the present, figured in the traditional way as a width-less point of the present. It is, as William James said, a "saddle." It shades off in both directions into abstract, or non-present, dimensions of experience: the immediate past that is already no longer, and the future of potential that is not yet. I tried to address that inclusion of the abstract in the concreteness of experience through the concept of the virtual, highlighting the paradoxical question of how it is that the virtual – that which is real but abstract – might be actually felt. That question has stayed with me throughout my work, and became especially central in *Semblance and Event*, where I start turning to the concept of immediation in earnest. The question of immediation is: are there practices for making the potential dimension of affect more felt? This would amount to an intensification of experience, highlighting its changefulness. It requires practices of the event which take potential as their object. Which means, practices which take relation as their object, because potential, as the power to affect, is by definition relational. Changefulness, potential, relation: the question of immediation is immediately political.

This is the terrain that the research-creation lab I have worked with since 2004 has explored. The SenseLab started from the question of what makes an event, and moved explicitly toward the question of immediation, which became the concern of a years-long collective project, some of the results of which will be presented soon in two collective volumes of the SenseLab's *Immediations* book series at Open Humanities Press. My thinking about immediation has been entirely bound up with the collective practice of the SenseLab.

**JP:** So, I think since you're talking about the SenseLab here, that maybe leads to the next question. We've been reading your *The Power at the End of the Economy*, but all of your work seems to challenge the Cartesian rational/affective binaries we are so used to. You return again and again to a need to rethink "the very concept of the rational in its relation to affect" (2). Could you talk for a minute about why we continue to cling to that division and what it might take for us to begin to move past it? To understand the rational and the affective as intertwined?

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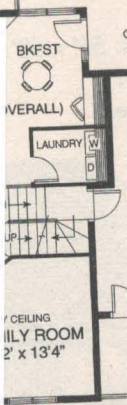
**Massumi:** The trick is to overcome the Cartesian dichotomy without throwing out the ability to make distinctions. Affirming one side of the dichotomy over the other just reproduces it, except with half of it under erasure. That makes it difficult, if not impossible, to give an account of the aspects of reality the suppressed term was trying to make thinkable. The tendency is then for the pendulum to swing back, to recover what can no longer be accounted for. The result is a sterile oscillation. The question is never "either-or." It is always a question of co-occurrence. In what distribution? With what concurrences or inferences? How does the one implicate the other? Can one become the other? If one can become the other, can they be construed as degrees on the same continuum? What kind of events contain both in germ, and how and why do they diverge from that embryonic coming-together? The capacity to diverge requires that we maintain distinctions, even that troubling Cartesian distinction between the mental and the physical. However, the co-occurrence, co-implication, and reciprocal becoming requires that we refrain from rigidifying the distinction into a dichotomy, or only operate with that distinction. What is needed is what I call a logic of differential mutual inclusion: a kind of monism of the multiple that studies how distinctions, any number of distinctions, and a proliferating count of them, come differently together. Philosophy is the art of making and multiplying distinctions. Nothing is thrown out, not even the bugbear of the rational.

What rational thought does when it strives to separate itself from affect is to judge as if it could stand aside from events and from that neutral vantage point assess the best course of action based on the most complete understanding of order and causality it can arrive at. This conveniently brackets its constitutive co-implication with affect. As Hume argued, reason can rationalize many things, but its own exercise is not one of them: it can give no ultimate reason why reason is better. That is why its use is so often the object of passionate exhortation. It has to overpower the passions – in effect, make itself prime among them. Reason, then, *is* a passion. The preachy, overbearing affective tone of contemporary champions of rationality, such as Richard Dawkins, says as much. But it is not only its birth that is affectively inflected, but also its end. Hume also pointed out that reason has nothing in its own operation that can tell it when to stop. It has a stopping problem, not unlike the halting problem in computer programming. There might always be a key consideration or bit of information that was missed but could well prove crucial. Reason is, in fact, the functional equivalent of doubt. Its ruminations, endless by right, can only be cut off by taking an affectively propelled leap into action at what is felt to be the propitious moment. This is an act of intuition. Affect is belief in the world – a noncognitive, embodied belief in the world's potential, directly felt, and no sooner felt than acted-upon. Without the corrective of doubt, affectively propelled action will often go awry. But without belief in the world, action is impossible. We are always plunging headlong into events, affect as the leading edge.

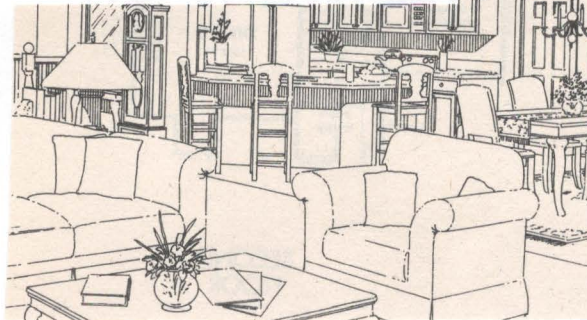
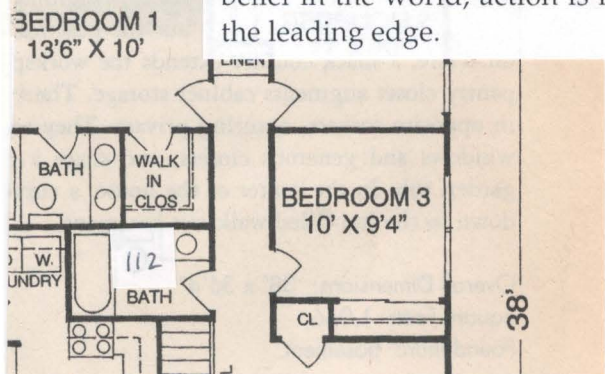
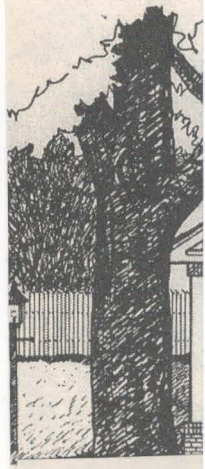
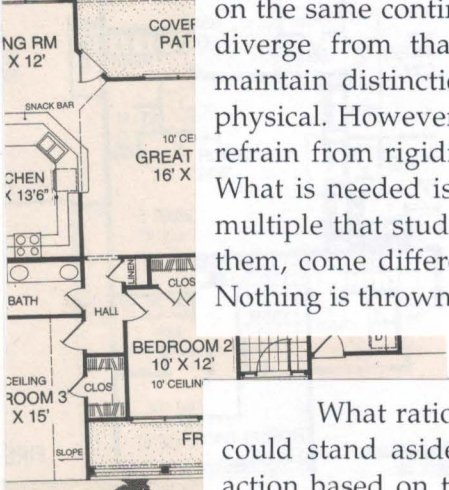
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In *The Power at the End of Economy* I develop a number of vocabularies to talk about the differential mutual inclusion of rationality and affect in the event, specifically as it relates to economic thinking. The key is to understand that thought is not all on the side of reason, making affect simply irrational or unthinking. I build on Peirce's concepts of perceptual judgment and abduction, which are modes of hypothetical thought that come flush with the event, enveloped in affect. Affect has what Whitehead would call a "mental pole" to its operation. By this he means the capacity to "prehend" novelty, or in Hume's terms, to exceed the given. This is what affect, as the feeling of capacitation and potential, contributes. Affect is not the opposite of thought. It is the movement of thought. It is the force of thought, embodied. It comes before conscious rumination, alighting it with the direct perceptual judgments that hit like fate in the incipience of every event, but already with a felt sense of potential alternatives. In this aspect, it carries a force of what I call in *The Power at the End of the Economy*, borrowing from the linguist Oswald Ducrot, presupposition. Enveloped in the affect of every dawning event is a presuppositional field, proposing action. This is a lived thinking of importance, of situational constraint and enablement. But affect's force of thought also comes at the end, pressing beyond the given into the future, in the form of abductive leaps into a hypothetical course of action whose importance has yet to play out. In this aspect, it constitutes an enactive speculation. Affect, throughout, is what I call a "thinking-feeling." It is in no way the opposite or the absence of thought. It is in fact rationality that is a limited expression of the power of thought, of which affect is the impetus and leading edge. Affect and rationality are differentially mutually included on the continuum of thought – which is coextensive with the continuum of feeling. It is often where conscious rumination is silenced that thought is most effective. Many performers, in art and sport, speak of the need to silence the "inner monologue" and refrain from "overthinking," to make their thinking coincide with their movements, rather than direct them.

In what I just said, the added distinctions of thought and feeling were added to situate the way in which rationality and affect come together, in their difference. These added distinctions are not there to eliminate or subsume the distinction between rationality and affect, but to carry their difference.

JP: So kind of continuing along in this vein of these binaries and breaking them down and thinking about them in relationship to each other, how do you think about affect in relationship to language? So for example, if we want to recenter the event, rather than bodies and subjects as I think you said to start, in our scholarship, how do we capture those affective intensities of the event via language? *Can* they be captured linguistically? *Should* we be capturing them linguistically?

**Massumi:** That's a really central question. I don't think affect can be captured by language. I don't think it can be captured by anything without a remainder. There's always something that escapes because affect has to do with potential and potential can't all actualize at one time. That is the meaning of my widely misunderstood term, "the autonomy of affect." Affect is not autonomous from thought, or from language, in the sense of being separated from them or in opposition to them. The point of the concept is that whatever the formation you are talking about, affect will pre-infuse it with importance at the incipient level, and carry over a surplus of potential at the end of the exercise of whatever mode of activity the formation's operations are dedicated to. This surplus-over, remaindered at each pulse of process, for more to come, is the autonomy of affect.

Specifically in relation to language, this means that there is an unabsorbed remainder of meaning left over after the statement is said and done. This is meaning that has yet to come to determinate expression, so it is, strictly speaking nonsense. But is not nonsense simply as the opposite of sense. It is nonsense as a surplus of sense, brewing with meanings to come. It is what Guattari, following Hjelmslev, sometimes calls "purport" – pure matter of meaning, as yet syntactically and semantically unformed, but already pragmatically preaccelerated. The purport narrows down toward determinate expression as the event of expression begins to take force. It forms, for the coming expression, a presuppositional field of the kind I was just talking about.

Another word for that field is a "proposition." A proposition, according to Whitehead, cannot be reduced to its linguistic content. To do so, he says, is the fundamental error of logic. A proposition is a pattern of contrasts delineating alternative courses of the universe, embedded in a certain juncture of history. He puts it in those terms to prevent us from saying "alternative choices." For, he says, "the proposition awaits its subject." The subject of the statement is emergent from the playing out of the expression. It is emergent and occurrent. This asignifying, asubjective dimension of this primary phase of an event where the matter of meaning begins to narrow down toward a determinate issue is not *in* language. It is in the world, immanent to the *act* of language. It is what comes to expression through language. "Prelinguistic" would be a bad terminological choice for this. It is more "prolinguistic": toward language, in an anticipatory dimension that is immanent to its exercise, but cannot be reduced to its structure and signification. In *What Animals Teach Us About Politics*, I argue that animal play sets in place the conditions for language at this level, even where language as such is absent. "Infralinguistic" is in fact a better word than "prolinguistic" for that dimension. And that dimension is affect. Affect cannot be divorced from language, even where language is absent. It is infralinguistic. Its relation to language has the paradoxical status I talk about in relation to the capitalist field in *The Principle of Unrest* and *99 Theses for the Revaluation of Value* of the "immanent outside": of it, but in it. It makes no more sense to say that an act of expression is outside language as it does to say that we can stand outside capitalism. There is no outside of either, in the spatialized sense of an external realm over against an interior realm. This in no way means that everything is "in" (capitalism, language). It's a question of modes and degrees of inclusion, anticipatorily and in fulfilment. In other words, as is always the case with affect, it is a question of potential and its playing out.

How can language capture modes of affective intensity? The more it tries to capture them, the more they slip away, following the prerogatives of the autonomy of affect. Significations and propositions in the conventional logical sense try to capture affective intensity, and fail. It is always already elsewhere before the last "i" is dotted. What language can do is *carry* affective intensities. Language can make its movement coincide with the force of thought moving through affect. It can create openings for the autonomy of affect to lead it, rather than trying to subsume affect under its own structure and enclose it in its semantic content. It can follow affective movements as *tensors* of meaning in their dynamic making. The structure of language, and its formal propositions, are then catalysts for the self-expression of affect, rather than its overlord. The affective force of language moves *across* words, carried in their rhythm. When you feel that the meaning is as much in the gaps between the words as in the words themselves, and that it continues virtually after the words have ended, in the linguistic equivalent of one those optical illusions when you turn your eye from an image and you see virtual movement spin off from it, then you are feeling the affective force of language. We tend to call expressions that make that force felt "poetic," regardless of their genre. That's just the word we reach for when language is outdoing itself affectively. A good philosophical text is "poetic" in this way, however far it is from poetry as such. It carries a conceptually complex movement of thought that wants nothing more than to keep generating more concepts, beyond where the author stopped. A text carrying affective intensity is a generative text. From the autonomy of affect it inherits the surplus-value of always having more to say than it knew how to say – forcing a continuation in the same vein of thought.

**Jacob Ferrington (JF):** Thinking about a field of potentiality as kind of collapsing into a decision, and the lived experience of somebody making a decision and sort of rationalizing or cognitively/linguistically accounting for their decisions, how does that play into this discussion of this mutually constitutive affect and cognition that it seems like you're getting to?

**Massumi:** Subjects don't make decisions – events make decisions. What we call the subject is an outcome of decision. We retrospectively own decisions. Whitehead says that decision should be taken in its etymological sense of "to cut." Decision is in the world, it's in the way the world's activity parses itself. It's in the way in which self-affirming modes of activity – tendencies, in a word – interfere and resonate with others toward a complex playing out that ends in a crossing from one threshold of consistency and co-composition to another. Decision is the cut, the cusp, of an emergent composition of forces. Whitehead also says that it is the exception, not the rule, when this happens at the conscious level of cogitation and reflection. Consciousness, he says, is the "acme of experience," underwritten by nonconscious levels of experience shrouded in the incipiency of thought and action. Consciousness follows the playing-out of those levels as they peak into an emergent composition of forces – taking "follow" both in the sense of coming after and in the sense of being in the wake of. The nonconscious level is replete with activity, of the propositional or presuppositional kind I was talking about before. It's the realm of what I call "bare activity" (an as yet asignifying, nonsubject-bound incipient working-out).

One of the things that happens at that level is "priming": the modulation of action by nonconsciously registered cues falling in the gaps of consciousness, which, again quoting Whitehead, is not continuous, but rather continuously "flickers." The importance of priming is that it forbids any notion of "raw experience." Words can prime nonconsciously. In other words, "higher functions," the results of learned behavior of great complexity, fold back into bare activity through priming. I spend a great deal of time in *The Power at the End of the Economy* and *Ontopower* developing the concept of priming and talking about the implications of it. In *Parables* I approached it under the rubric of the "feedback of higher forms." The point is that the so-called "lower" levels of forming experience are no less complex – in fact, they are in many respects more complex – than the "higher," conscious levels. And that although experience at that level is not accessible to sovereign, conscious decision, it is open to modulation, and there are techniques for that modulation. This suggests alternative modes of affect-based politics. The status of rationality must be resituated in this context. Rationality is one modulatory technique feeding back into bare activity among others. It is by no means the only one or, in our period, the most effective.

**JF:** That might be a good space for us to move into a question about the sense of, say, a voter who sees herself as an autonomous subject and when it comes to walking into the voting booth and casting a vote, how do you conceive of what we'll call the event-space of voting? So what drives a consumer to act the way a consumer acts but also a voter? The ideas we were thinking of in this situation were priming and jamming specifically and how that relational field brings about these seemingly autonomous subjects who go in and change. And also in the back of my head I'm thinking of this group of quote-unquote Obama voters who became Trump voters – what is happening there in that emergent shift?

**Massumi:** Voting is a way of individualizing co-activity. It's an activity that individuals do together – completely separately. It's a mechanism for decollectivizing activity. This makes it a power mechanism, in and of itself, and not only through its outcomes. Voting is a mass staging of individuals as – as if they were – separate autonomous willing subjects. It produces an effective feeling of this "as if." It destroys any sense of the collective as transindividual – or infraindividual (which can also be called the "dividual").

Voting primes individuals into a sense of separation, in seclusion from every other individual, literally curtained off from any collective dynamic. Here, the collective figures as the simple opposite of decision-making individual segregation. It fosters the feeling that the collective is just some kind of magma of undifferentiated – or more like it in these days of migrant panic, an uncontrollably hyperdifferentiated – humanity threatening to swamp the self and disable decision. This primes for a tendentially aggressive, even paranoid, stance toward the collective. The last thing it does is carve out a space of reflection and considered decision. Instead, it catapults the individual all the more powerfully into affective mechanisms, but in an apparent vacuum of sociality and relationality. In that vacuum, decision is no longer a matter of passing a threshold to an emergent co-composition. It is formatted as a zero-sum game, 0 or 1, yes or no, thumbs up or down. This makes decision an exercise in mutual exclusion, rather than differential mutual inclusion.



The vote in representative democracy, particularly in the age of social media, has become an accelerator of relationally unhinged affect, so much so that calls for a return to rationality ring ridiculously hollow. It's to the point that basing a decision on the reasonableness of an argument strikes voters as counterintuitive. Evidence-based thinking, or what the Bush administration criticized as "reality-based" thinking, can't compete. It is often said we are in a post-fact world. I think that where we are in is the realm of the affective fact.

A matter-of-fact in process-oriented philosophy is the finality of an emergence that plays out the consequences of a thinking-feeling pulse of bare activity, peaking in the crossing of a threshold that makes an irreversible difference. That crossing of the threshold, because it is irreversible, because it has added something to the world that can't be undone, has import that makes relating to it imperative, and that imperative is directly felt. The next pulse of process cannot not take into account toward its own peaking. The thing is that the affective aspect can come without the crossing of the threshold actually taking place. A threat, for example, produces the fear and the felt imperative to flee or fight, even in the absence of an actual danger. This is "unhinged" in the sense that threats can conjure themselves with abandon, independent of the actual conditions for their fulfilment, taking effect purely affectively. This is what I call an affective fact. An affective fact is the felt imperative of an event that did not take place, except through the feeling of the *potential* that it *might*. It is a fact because once the potential has been felt, its consequences actually expressed, for example in fear, it can't be unfelt. It's irreversible. The fear has transpired, and can recur. It remains looming. A threshold has been crossed, but without ever leaving the realm of potential. The event is purely affectively felt, in the conditional: in the might-be, or could-have-been, or would-have-been. In an increasingly chaotic, far-from-equilibrium world, individuals are buffeted, through the media and the social media in particular, by the constant barrage of threats. The world has morphed into what security analysts call the "threat environment." We are barraged by affective facts, roiling together, increasingly autonomous in their triggering. The isolated voter in the booth is hard-pressed to counter this with evidence-based reasoning.

However, in the end it's really not so much a question of fact versus affect, evidence-based rationality versus affect. In a sense, all matters-of-fact are affective facts, if we think of the genesis of every event in thinking-feeling, and the autonomy of affect running through events. It is more a question of postures toward potential, toward uncertainty and the unknown, corresponding to different valences, different modalities of affective fact: atomizing or relational; zero-sum or shaded and graded; trans/intra individual or "as if" merely individual; mutually inclusive or mutually exclusive; differential or hegemonic; positively bracing or paranoia-inducing; composing a world or exuding a threat environment; equal to the complexity of the event, or violently reductive of it in exasperated reaction to its element of uncontrollability. These are ways of rehearsing the Spinozist distinction, taken up by Nietzsche, between active and reactive forces. And it is as a function of this distinction that democracy needs to be reinvented, beyond representative democracy, in new forms of direct democracy.

I'm not at all saying that evidence-based reason and rationality have no role. In this age of complexity and environmental emergency, to argue that rational assessment and instrumental reason have no role would be self-defeating. It is just to say that there no sense in returning to the fiction of their sovereign power of decision. That is just as self-defeating. The role of rationality has always been as course-corrector for affective movements – as a feedback of higher forms that acts as a prime to modulate the playing out of affective processes. The answer is not to oppose reason and affect, but to return reason to its affective ground, and to do so strategically, in ways that prime for differential mutual inclusion and peaks of decision that actively affirm life in all its complexity. Rationality has to learn to be a catalyst, instead of a sovereign. This is a necessity of survival as we hurtle into the growing effects of climate change. The neoliberal and liberal democratic priming for the "as if" of individual decision, supposedly governed by rational deliberation, and supposedly leveraging self-interest for the general good, has had a central role in leading us to this impasse, which is an inevitable outcome of the capitalist drive for more, for quantitative increase at all costs – with which liberal democracy has always been in symbiosis, to the point that under neoliberalism the nation-state has become little more than a territorial operator-console for the capitalist process. More of the same will only yield just that – more of the same. And in this context, more of the same is global catastrophe.

**JF:** This leads me to something we've been discussing in the course, intersectionality and assemblage theory and trying to understand how that might work especially in relation to identity politics which I think reigns a little bit on the left, and I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about how that might inform this discussion.

**Massumi:** Affect theory – or as I prefer to name my own orientation, process thinking – is in many ways incompatible with identity politics. But to situate any critique of identity politics, it is crucial to start from the incontrovertible reality that the first, and still dominant, identity politics is the European identity politics of whiteness. Identity as we understand it today is an outcome of the dual genesis by which a purportedly sovereign subject mirroring at a smaller scale the sovereign nation-state to which it belongs by right arose out of the crucible of colonialism and the slave trade, issuing at the same time, as on parallel tracks, into the brutal rise of modern capitalism and the Enlightenment ideal of progress. The identity politics of oppressed and marginalized minority groups is in reaction to this ur-identity politics, in an attempt to turn its own model against it in order to oblige the dominant white society to live up to its rhetoric of progress and inclusion. The strength of this approach is that takes a known, historically validated form – that of identity – and uses it to confound the dominant usage, which has historically been for purposes of exclusion. The problem is that exclusion is written into the form of identity itself. Identity organizes itself around the self/other, in-group/out-group opposition. This is not incidental to it; it is of its essence. As a result, exclusion effects are impossible to expunge. They are just shifted down the road. You can see this when any identity-based contestation achieves a certain success, carving out a space of inclusion and recognition for itself. The identity schizzes. The success of second-wave feminism, for example, was experienced as an exclusion by lesbians and women of color. The success of the homosexual rights movement was in tension with the trans community, which had to rise up for its own account.

The fact is that people do not live in their identity, they live their differencing. I say *differencing* because it continues. Every recognition of an identity leaves out a fraction that must then affirm itself and fight for its own recognition, leading to a proliferation of subdivisions and an expanding abbreviation list, now far exceeding the original "LBG" (I'm old enough to remember a time before there was even a "T"). I commented on this cascading of difference away from the form and content of what at the time I was calling the Man-Standard of whiteness almost thirty years ago in *User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. That tendency has only accelerated since. This is as it should be: differencing is fractal. It does not stop at a convenient boundary line, however finely cut. Its movement exceeds every category, so the only way to keep up with it and approximate its scope is to keep madly multiplying the categories. But at a certain point, another logic has to set in. An individual life is not a particular case of a general identity category, however finely defined. An individual life is a singularity, and singularities come not in categories but in populations, irreducibly dynamic and with fuzzy boundaries. An individual is a fuzzy subset of a population. Individuals do not identify so much as they schizz – invent a *sui generis* variation on the population to which they dynamically and complexly belong. Society is dividual. Every population is internally diverse, and the same is true of every individual within each population. There is always something in an individual that does not fit its assigned category, and that even in utter isolation stands for what Deleuze and Guattari call a "people to come": an emergent mode of life.

Intersectionality is helpful to start getting at this complexity, realizing that identity lines cross, and everyone occupies a certain locus on the intersectional grid. But this doesn't go far enough, because it is still speaking in terms of identity, general category, and particular case. It compounds particularity, rather than fractalizing or dividualizing it, to grasp what Erin Manning calls the "diversity in diversity": the differing of difference. There's a lot of thinking in queer and decolonial thought and in the black radical tradition that go in this direction. Particularly inspiring to me have been Édouard Glissant's concept of "relation identity" and Moten and Harney's concept of the "undercommons," both of which propose a black sociality that opposes the dominant identity politics of whiteness without appealing to the traditional identity form. Although I have deep reservations about identity politics, and many aspects of its culture on the left, I see the need for it in the macro political domain, as a matter of self-defense and survival, and bristle at many criticisms of it, most especially from the right. It's a bit of a red herring to point the finger at the identity politics of the left. It is simply succumbing to media stereotypes. There is so much more to the social movements that is too complex to be meme-worthy, and so barely registers in the media. It's also a diversion from the point I started with: that the first and by far the most virulent and destructive identity politics is white identity politics.

**Alina Hechler (AH):** And I guess kind of to close up on that, or end on maybe a more positive or futuristic note, in *The Principle of Unrest* you have said that considering the limits of political reason, and these affective facts that are kind of immune to a consistent rational argument, how can we move forward? In *The Principle of Unrest* you have suggested a politics of care. So in a sense, by pure rationality or pure argument we're not going to be able to turn the tide ultimately, so how could we practice a politics of care or promote that?

**Massumi:** It's something we need to invent collectively. It's not easy. The first thing is to really let it sink in that a politics of care is not about a personal attribute. It's not about having a subjective feeling of care for someone else. That is more a politics of empathy. It doesn't work, because it is based on the face-to-face. It begins by subjectivizing the relation, upstream of any encounter. It puts the other across from the self on the outside, but then, as by a sleight of hand, includes the outside in a structure of mirroring. The mirroring is supposed to be of a commonality, of a common humanity reflected in the faces opposite each other. But this is very often more of an imposition than an invitation, because it neglects to ask the question, "commonality according to whom?" It is in fact an essential gesture of whiteness: assuming we're all the same deep down, "we're all human," so can't we all just get along? To which the answer is another question: "on whose terms?" Expressions of empathy risk doing the exact opposite of what they're meant to do because they neutralize the political, by making the political personal.

A politics of care in the way I mean it has to be a quality of the event, not of a subject. It's a question of how the conditions for events are put into place. It assumes fractalization, not facialization. It assumes that the social field is made up of differentials, not boundary lines, however crossed. It assumes incommensurability: that if you scratch the surface of the mirror, you see that we are all differencing, each in our own dividual/transindividual manner, schizzing the populations to which we would belong into renewed being, always in becoming. Commonality is a veneer of whiteness. There is no commonality across the board. But that doesn't mean we can't live together. There is a word for a dynamic cohabitation of individuals and populations in correlated becoming, always already gone-differing: ecology. A politics of care is not about political psychology, it is a political ecology. Neither does it concern itself with ideology. It concerns itself with emergent comings-together: events of differential coming-together from which no common denominator is drawn, but which precipitate a further difference. It requires techniques of the event, which is what we have been working at the SenseLab for many years. These are techniques of relation, and of collective attunement to the mix of tendencies afoot, the potentials they carry, and how they can be primed. This can be theorized in terms of a revised notion of sympathy, in contradistinction to empathy, and that is a big part of the project in *What Animals Teach us About Politics* and *The Power at the End of the Economy*.

**AH:** I had a question that I'm personally really interested in – we as fledgling academics, the academy is increasingly under siege, at least from a budgetary standpoint and everything, you know, and there seems to be a stratification that we become more and more isolated, and I have a sense that your work with the SenseLab might speak a little bit to this. What is our role in that, in creating that conditioning relational events as academics?

**Massumi:** At the SenseLab, we're looking at creating an alter-university space, parasitical to the university. We mean that also in the sense of constituting a "para-site," a site that occupies a stratum adjacent to the university, operating by a different logic, not necessarily against it frontally, but rather maintaining what Erin Manning, who founded the SenseLab, calls an "approximation of proximity," so that we can avail ourselves of what the university has positively to offer without being beholden to it. Alter-"university" is a misnomer. It won't give credit or degrees, and it won't have a traditional course structure with the usual student-teacher hierarchy. It will be self-organizing, like the SenseLab, and oriented toward emergent results embodying collective expressions. We're calling it the 3 Ecologies Institute. Experimentation in new forms of value and collective alter-economies is a key aspect, in response to the student debt crisis. 3E will be organized along the lines of a gift economy. A basic principle is never to charge for anything, as has been the practice all along at SenseLab. Hence the urgency of alter-economic thinking. Personally, we're feeling cornered by the university, as it conforms more and more to the dictates of the neoliberal value system and management model. I have already left the university, through the privileged door of early retirement, and Erin is just holding on. The 3 Ecologies does not feel optional to us. It's a matter of survival. It's imperative that we find ways of creating sustaining milieus for thinking and acting together, imbued by a politics of care. They must be open to segments of the population for whom higher education is traditionally inaccessible, including those who are neurodiverse. This requires sustained attention to techniques of relation. The idea is to create a pre-figurative milieu – one of many, for there are projects of this nature popping up everywhere – enacting emergent modes of relation and new forms of knowledge production. There is no time to go more into detail here. Readers can refer to the SenseLab Web site ([senselab.ca](http://senselab.ca)) for more details and links.