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## **Feminist Philosophy, Pragmatism, and the "Turn to Affect": A Genealogical Critique**

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## Feminist Philosophy, Pragmatism, and the “Turn to Affect”: A Genealogical Critique

Recent years have witnessed a focus on feeling as a topic of reinvigorated scholarly concern, described by theorists in a range of disciplines in terms of a “turn to affect.” Surprisingly little has been said about this most recent shift in critical theorizing by philosophers, including feminist philosophers, despite the fact that affect theorists situate their work within feminist and related, sometimes intersectional, political projects. In this article, I redress the seeming elision of the “turn to affect” in feminist philosophy, and develop a critique of some of the claims made by affect theorists that builds upon concerns regarding the ‘newness’ of affect and emotion in feminist theory, and the risks of erasure this may entail. To support these concerns, I present a brief genealogy of feminist philosophical work on affect and emotion. Identifying a reductive tendency within affect theory to equate affect with bodily immanence, and to preclude cognition, culture, and representation, I argue that contemporary feminist theorists would do well to follow the more holistic models espoused by the canon of feminist work on emotion. Furthermore, I propose that prominent affect theorist, Brian Massumi, is right to return to pragmatism as a means of redressing philosophical dualisms, such as emotion/cognition and mind/body, but suggest that such a project is better served by John Dewey’s philosophy of emotion than by William James’s.

### I. The Affective Turn: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking?

Since the mid-1990s, some cultural and social theorists in a variety of fields – geography, gender studies, cultural studies, queer studies, and sociology – have turned to affect as a means of redressing perceived shortcomings in contemporary theory, especially poststructuralist and deconstructionist thought.<1> This “affective turn,” as it has been termed by one of its earliest proponents, Patricia Ticineto Clough (2010), is distinguishable from the general philosophical or psychological interest in feeling, as it presupposes a retreat from, or a moving beyond, the “linguistic turn” via affect. “Affect,” for this group of cultural theorists, is understood as a topic that certainly encompasses the common questions concerning the most salient aspects of feelings (such as their functioning, and social and political implications) on the one hand; but on the other, “affect” is posited as a new concept with which to reconsider basic ontological assumptions.<2> As such, the recent turn to affect is methodologically and contextually different from the stable and more or less continuous preoccupation with affect and emotion evident throughout the history of philosophy.<3>

In this article, I draw out what, exactly, is new about the new affect theorists,<4> and how their work is connected to feminist philosophies of feeling. Not only will this allow for an overview of the most recent debates concerning emotion and affect, but it will also redress a significant gap in cross-disciplinary discussion on the topic. There appears to be little overlap among the work of the new affect theorists and philosophers, even among feminist philosophers. A search of this journal, for instance, produced just two articles referencing the “turn to affect,”<5> and *Parrhesia* is the only philosophy journal known to me to devote a special issue to what has been portrayed as a paradigm shift in critical theorizing.<6> Given the explicit promise

affect is said to hold for feminist and similar liberatory politics, an assessment of the turn to affect as it stands in relation to feminist philosophy is therefore in order.

My exposition will particularly hone in on one of the most prominent theorists of a new ontology of affect, Brian Massumi. Massumi draws on the work of Spinoza, Deleuze and James, and it is his adoption of the latter's thought that will be examined here. Specifically, I shall place Massumi and James side by side as a means of critiquing some aspects of the "turn to affect," and as a springboard for suggesting the feasibility of a feminist theory of emotion that draws on the philosophy of James's friend and colleague, John Dewey. By focusing on pragmatist theories of the emotions in the wider context of the affective turn, I propose a return to anti-dualistic thinking that resists bifurcations of emotion/reason, mind/body, biology/culture – bifurcations that continue on in work by the new affect theorists.

### i) The Turn to Affect

One of the early texts heralding the turn to affect, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins" by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, sets out some problematic features that "theory knows today" (2003, 93) – features against which the new affect theorists come to differentiate themselves. In contemporary theory (itself conflated with the poststructuralist and deconstructionist paradigm), Sedgwick and Frank find that

the distance...*from a biological basis* is assumed to correlate near precisely with its potential for doing justice to difference (individual, historical, and cross-cultural), to contingency, to performative force, and to the possibility of change;

and that

human language is assumed to offer the most productive, if not the only possible, model of understanding representation (93).

One of the dominant critiques to emanate from affect theorists, thus, is the supposed anti-biologism of contemporary theory, thought to originate in a fear of essentialism. Moreover, Sedgwick and Frank hold that the privileging of language, through an ontology of social constructs, distracts theory from the lived materiality of bodies and the possibility of change. Similar criticisms are made and rearticulated by other affect theorists. Thus, although Clough (2010) views the turn to affect as a vital extension of contemporary theory, she argues that it does "propose a substantive shift in that it *return[s] critical theory and cultural criticism to bodily matter*, which had been treated in terms of various constructionisms under the influence of poststructuralism and deconstruction" (206). Given this concern with constructionism's perceived neglect of materiality, affect theorists advocate not just a turn to affect, but also to the body – the latter sometimes understood in neo-vitalist terms as a charged liveliness, "a dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter generally" (207). Affect itself, then, comes to be understood as an immanent, pre-linguistic, bodily phenomenon.

Affect theorists' focus on embodiment should be viewed alongside certain critical theorists' calls for a return to matter and materiality more generally. Such work is exemplified by the writings of Elizabeth Grosz (2004), Rosi Braidotti (2013, 2006), Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (2010), and proposes the need for a focus on lived materiality in the context of the limitations of contemporary theory, including feminist theory. While Braidotti can be viewed as straddling the poststructuralist and new materialist traditions, theorizing materiality in the context of biopolitics and the

posthuman, Grosz (2004) is more stringent in her critique of the linguistic turn, as she admonishes feminists for ignoring the body through an undue regard for social construction and representation. Theorists need, rather, to recover the body as a topic worthy of scholarly pursuit, to “remind” themselves “as social, political, and cultural theorists, particularly those interested in feminism, antiracism, and questions of the politics of globalization, that they have forgotten a crucial dimension of research” (2). The new affect theorists and feminist neo-materialists can thus be interpreted as part of the same family or grouping of theorists who find contemporary theoretical approaches unproductive, or at least incomplete, and advance theories emphasizing the centrality of matter, embodiment, and/or affect.

While it is heartening to see such lively theoretical interest in the body and feelings, the turn to affect or materiality must be assessed in terms of what it sets out to do. Much like Hemmings (2005) and Ahmed (2008), I worry that the emphasis on *newness* or *retrieving* risks rewriting and omitting existing accounts of feeling and lived materiality. The idea of needing to return to the body and affectivity as valid theoretical subjects implies there once was a period when theorists did not concern themselves with such. This, however, is not borne out by retrospective readings of feminist work on embodiment and emotion.

#### ii) A Feminist Genealogy of Theorizing Feeling

Built upon the rich history of philosophy of emotion, there is a legacy of feminist thought, stemming at least from second wave feminism, that draws on canonical work to make specifically feminist political claims. For instance, thinkers such as Susan James, Genevieve Lloyd, and Moira Gatens, have examined the sometimes disputed development of mind-body dualisms during the modern period, their gendered implications, and whether insights from Descartes, Hobbes, or Spinoza, can come positively to bear upon present-day feminist thought on the emotions (James 2000). Similarly, Elizabeth Spelman (1989) has taken Aristotle as a starting point when arguing that anger can be interpreted as an emotion with defined political functions complicated by gender. Other feminist theorists have made use of the ancient Stoics (Nussbaum 2001), Hume (Baier 1987), and psychoanalytic thinkers, such as Freud and Lacan (Chodorow 1979, Kristeva 1980).

Besides utilizing canonical work on the emotions, feminists have of course made distinct contributions of their own regarding, particularly, the centrality of gender to political theorizing on feeling and emotion. They have drawn attention to the close identification of women with the emotions on the one hand, and men with reason on the other (Lloyd 1993). This gendered alignment of the emotion-reason dichotomy has further been theorized alongside the public-private divide, with Enlightenment thought and the development of liberal capitalist systems, in particular, being shown to have established distinct spheres for women and men (Little 1995, Bar On and Ferguson 1998). Feminists have also focused on the repressive or liberatory potential of certain emotions, and have theorized our affective lives in light of social and political expectations regarding femininity and masculinity. Spelman (1989) has asked whether anger, as “an essential political emotion” entailing judgment (of members of dominant groups) should be (self)censored. Audre Lorde (1984) has written powerfully about anger and racism, and Naomi Scheman (1993) has outlined the political implications of anger in the context of changed emotions arising in feminist consciousness-raising groups.

Feminist work on the emotions has often been steeped in related philosophical debates in feminist epistemology, moral psychology, phenomenology, and metaphysics, posing questions such as: Do women and men experience shame differently? Are there specific, gendered experiences relating to embodiment, such as breastfeeding (Taylor and Wallace, 2012), that provide insights about particular emotions, such as shame, and the shaming of women? Are women and those historically deemed Other epistemically privileged with regard to their experiences of marginalization? If so, what impact does privileged knowledge have on the relationship between cognition and emotions? What emotional costs are attached to not having one's particular knowledge recognized or engaged with? Feminist philosophers on the emotions have grappled with such questions amid wider concerns arising from feminist conceptual frameworks, including from feminist standpoint theory and care ethics. Thus, Uma Narayan (1988) has outlined several pitfalls that must be surmounted in our daily epistemic practices should we wish to work together to avoid undue emotional burdens being placed on epistemically privileged 'insiders' of oppression by 'outsiders.' Burrow (2005) has argued for separatist communities of interpretation, where epistemically, and thereby emotionally, marginalized groups come to claim a "space within which persons can reflect on the social meanings of their experiences and develop a language to intelligibly express that experience" (37).

Feminist care theorists, such as Virginia Held (2006) and Nel Noddings (1984), have emphasized the emotional, rather than the rational, as a basis for morality, and have drawn out gendered assumptions implicit within liberalism, or a justice ethics as it is often referred to, including its prioritizing of the detached individual engaged in abstract moral reasoning. Such theories, then, have elevated the emotions, especially those related to caring practices – that is, love, empathy, and friendship. On the other hand, care ethicists have been critiqued for misleadingly introducing sex difference in moral reasoning through a gendered "different voice" (Gilligan 1982), for reinforcing stereotypes of women's increased emotionality and caring nature (Spelman 1991), and for downplaying the risks involved in women's affective labor and caregiving (with gendered asymmetries in care assumed to be harmful to women's moral and epistemological integrity in intimate, heterosexual relationships, and thereby undermining of women more generally) (Bartky 1990). Politically laden interpretations of emotions have thus intersected with theorizing on a host of related feminist questions concerning moral cognition, knowledge production, care, and epistemic privilege, to name but some of the most relevant themes here.

Feminist theorizing on feeling has also taken place against a backdrop of developments in mainstream philosophical work on the emotions. Feminists have drawn out the political and social implications of gendered readings of the emotions, and have positioned themselves relative to some of the dominant conceptions of what, exactly, emotional experiences are. Spelman, for instance, has coined the term the "Dumb View" of emotion in her description of one dominant model, which denies cognition a role in the emotions, and reduces them to mere physical feeling-states, to "quite literally, dumb events" (1989, 265). In contrast, she mobilizes a cognitive account of emotions, allowing for judgment and intentionality. The cognitivist model holds that emotions are usually about something, rather than mere physical feeling-states or ethereal passions arbitrarily visiting the body. A number of feminist philosophers have thus theorized emotions' intentionality in conjunction with the

frequent dismissal of women's emotions as unintentional or irrational, and the attendant need for "uptake" (Frye 1983, Campbell 1994, Burrow 2005).

Contra Paul Ekman's (1980, 1987) well-known research on the universal expression of emotions, and similar physicalist models, Naomi Scheman has adopted a social constructivist approach to stress the contingent, and socio-politically constituted nature of our emotions. She notes that different societies may categorize the emotions variously, or find significance in certain emotions (or compounds of emotions) over others, with such significance being liable to change. She argues that emotions aren't individual 'possessions' by illustrating changes in emotions, and in our understandings of emotions, that are precipitated by women's participation in consciousness raising groups. Alison Jaggar has also adopted social constructivism as a means of critiquing positivist – that is, physicalist – models of emotions, arguing that "mature human emotions can be seen neither as instinctive nor as biologically determined" (1992, 121). Noting that emotions are learnt by children, and include both mental and physical aspects, she develops a critique of dominant Western epistemological claims, including of the "derogatory...attitude toward emotion" (125). Although mindful of their potential to maintain a mind-body dualism, she credits cognitivist theories with identifying intentionality as an important dimension of emotion (120).

What binds the above enumerated feminist conceptualizations of emotions, is a concern with holistic theorization. Feminist philosophers have sought to articulate theories that redress dualisms, particularly the cognition-emotion dualism, and the mind-body dualism (see also Campbell, 47), and the implications such dualisms have held for women. Spelman, for instance, seeks to undo the physicalist reduction of emotions in the Dumb View, while Jaggar embraces intentionality but cautions against a cognitivist separation between "intellectual cognition" and "affective elements" of emotion (1992, 120). There is thus a long-standing feminist awareness of the need to ameliorate the privileging of one dualistic oppositional over another, and women's easy identification with the particular devalued oppositional. As will become clear in the second part of this article, what is at stake in the current debate on affect and emotion, is the role cognition and representation are afforded therein. By introducing a distinction between emotion and affect, and by theorizing affect in vitalist terms, much affect theory reinforces dualisms feminists have long sought to dismantle. Not only does such work thus result in the erasure of existing feminist theorizations of affect and emotion, but it lapses into a reductive physicalist model that proffers impoverished metaphysical conceptions of emotion, cognition, and embodiment – conceptions that in turn render feminists' ability to make political claims impossible.

### iii) Theoretical Continuity and Rupture

Given the short sketch of feminist work on the emotions, it is clear that second and third wave feminist philosophers have theorized the emotions right up until, and even during, the pronouncement of the affective turn. Elizabeth Spelman, Audre Lorde, Uma Narayan, Marilyn Frye, and Annette Baier produced work on the emotions during the 1980s, the same decade Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* was published. The latter spawned debates on the gendered political, epistemological, and moral significance of emotions that extended well into and beyond the 1990s, encompassing the work of Virginia Held, Nel Noddings, Joan Tronto, and Sara

Ruddick (1989), among others. At the same time, Susan James, Genevieve Lloyd and Moira Gatens continued to produce work on the emotions informed by early modern philosophy; Sue Campbell and Naomi Scheman published in an analytic vein on anger; and Alison Jaggar (1992) and Diana Tietjens Meyers (1997) wrote about “outlaw emotions” and their relationship to “heterodox moral perceptions.”

Feelings were thus not ignored by feminist theorists in the period leading up to the affective turn, nor can the same be said of materiality. Second wave feminists made considerable contributions to critiques of dominant norms and assumptions in the life sciences, and developed alternative frameworks and epistemological approaches that were able to deal more adequately with materiality, especially women’s materiality. Sara Ahmed (2008) illustrates this point in her critique of the “founding gestures of the ‘new materialism,’” by highlighting the work of feminist philosophers of science, such as Donna Haraway and Evelyn Fox Keller, and the important role women’s health activism played in inspiring work that critically engaged with scientific research. For Ahmed, omission of this feminist work is not just negligent, but deliberately used as a tool for differentiating the new (read: material, embodied) from the old (read: immaterial, linguistic, social constructivist), as “you can only argue for a return to biology by forgetting the feminist work on the biological, including the work of feminists trained in the biological sciences” (27). Just as the new affect theorists charge previous theories with ignoring affect while simultaneously overlooking important feminist work on affect and emotion around the time of the affective turn in the mid 1990s and beyond, so some of the new materialist theorists treat existing work on materiality as irrelevant.

The problem here is twofold: firstly, there is a tendency for existing feminist work to fall by the wayside in the clamor for uniqueness and newness – work that might contradict the discourse of a new revolution in humanities and social science research based on materiality and affect. Secondly, much of the work from which the new affect and materialist theorists wish to distance themselves is a particular type of theorizing that is nonetheless sometimes presented as undifferentiated, monolithic “theory,” “feminism,” or “critical theory.” Poststructuralist and deconstructionist theory thus comes to stand for all contemporary thought, thereby enabling the omission of work done from a pragmatist or historical perspective. Theory not falling neatly into the continental/analytic divide, or simply falling outside the purview of poststructuralist analyses – such as some of the feminist science studies work cited by Ahmed – is also readily excised.

With that said, I think it is best to understand the ‘new’ theories of affect and materiality as continuous with, rather than disruptive of, previous feminist and philosophical thought. For, although these theories often exclude directly relevant critical work, feeling and materiality are not novel concerns for theorists – indeed Western feminist thought on the emotions goes back at least to Mary Wollstonecraft’s rather pessimistic take on women’s sensibility (1993, 133). Anu Koivunen’s (2010) mapping of the new affect theories in feminist work also supports this interpretation, as she states that one could argue that the turn to affect never occurred. She notes that “the issue of affect did not emerge from nowhere to feminist and other critical scholarship,” and that in “anthropology, sociology and psychology, new interest in the previously neglected issue of ‘the emotional’ was already diagnosed in the 1980s”

(22). Also, Koivunen wonders, “what, if not about work with affects, is the long history of feminist engagement with psychoanalysis?” (22).

On the other hand, one should stop and ask whether there is something distinct about the affect paradigm, extending beyond the broad thematic preoccupation with the bodily and the affective. I have already stated that “affect” is employed, in such work, in much the same way it always has been – to address questions concerning the political implications of our affective lives, and so forth – while, at the same time, “affect” takes on a new role: it is used to re-evaluate fundamental ontological assumptions and forms the basis of an ontology of affective, bodily immanence. While this latter understanding of affect is often attributed to the work of Spinoza, Deleuze, and others, the particular, contemporary use of “affect” by the new affect theorists in this regard does somewhat differentiate their work, albeit within the context of existing theories on materiality and feeling. To further elaborate on this appropriation of affect for ontological purposes by this set of theorists, I shall now turn to an analysis of Brian Massumi’s work.

## II. Massumi’s Affective Ontology and James’s Philosophy of Emotion

Like other affect theorists, Brian Massumi takes aim, in the introduction to his *Parables of the Virtual* (2002), at contemporary theory – poststructuralist and social constructivist, although broadly termed “cultural theory” or “critical thinking.” He notes that his ontological process of “double becoming” subsumes “the kinds of codings, griddings, and positionings with which cultural theory has been preoccupied,” claiming that “ideas about cultural or social construction have dead-ended because they have insisted on bracketing the *nature* of the process” (12). For Massumi, “if you elide nature, you miss the becoming of culture, its emergence (not to mention the history of matter)” (12). Massumi’s emphasis here on nature is typical of the new affect and materialist theorists, and is presented as a concept capable of rescuing theory from its own demise, a “dead-end” that is rooted in its foregrounding of culture.

Critically, an early description of affect notes the distinction between affect and emotion. Thus,

for present purposes, intensity will be equated with affect... Affect is most often used loosely as a synonym for emotion. But... emotion and affect – if affect is intensity – follow different logics and pertain to different orders. An emotion is a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal (27-28).

Affect comes to be identified with materiality, spontaneity, and lack of volition, while emotion involves cognitive processing, intentionality, language and awareness. Reinforcing this conception of affects as pre-linguistic, immanent intensity with Benjamin Libet’s neuroscientific experiment purporting to show a half second delay between a body’s reaction to stimulus and its cognition,<sup><10></sup> Massumi argues that “something that happens too quickly to have happened, actually is virtual” (30) (hence the title of the book), and goes on to say that “affect is the virtual as point of view,” and that the “autonomy” of “actually existing, structured things liv[ing] in and through that which escapes them” is “the autonomy of affect” (35). Massumi thus



develops an ontology of affect and embodiment, which entails affect's role as virtual potential, intensity, and immanence, and which escapes strictures of the linguistic cognitive to form a kind of autonomous, pure, and unsullied force or stuff-in-the-making of the dynamic bodily.

This is consistent with work done in an affective frame, which often seems to overemphasize embodied materiality and affect as intensity, movement, and the emergent, at the expense of what are portrayed as limiting features of ontological spontaneity: reason, the mind, language, and culture. Although professing to wish to undo philosophical dualisms, Massumi, like other affect theorists, actually prioritizes one dualistic oppositional over another. Thus, in an insightful analysis, Ruth Leys (2011) has shown that his sometimes selective scholarly re-appropriations have in fact continued to support, rather than dismantle, the dualisms he claims to oppose. His use of Libet's experiment supposedly capturing a half second delay between brain activity and the mind's decision to flex a finger, has been described by Leys as depending upon "a highly idealized or metaphysical picture of the mind as completely separate from the body and brain to which it freely directs its intentions and decisions" (455). Indeed, in a desire to reify the body, Massumi has utilized such neuroscientific research to highlight the primacy of materiality over the mind. His (2002) description of what happens during the supposed half second is telling:

During the mysterious half second, what we think of as "free," "higher" functions, such as volition, are apparently being performed by autonomic, bodily reactions occurring in the brain but outside consciousness, and between brain and finger but prior to action and expression (29).

Such statements presuppose a clearly distinct mind, brain, and body, where the latter is privileged as prior, pure, and more immediate – as Massumi says, "the skin is faster than the word" (25). Affect is similarly presented as an unpredictable dynamic that lacks consciousness and cognition.

From a feminist canonical perspective, such expositions are contentious, as they display a sharp dualism between cognition and emotion, the mind and the body. They are problematic, too, from a pragmatist perspective, as pragmatism is inherently anti-dualistic (Seigfried 1996). Massumi invokes Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari as significant influences, but also draws, rather fleetingly and unsystematically, on William James. He theorizes emergence as a typical feature of pragmatist ontology, the overcoming of the nature-culture dualism via habit, and science at the intersection of nature and culture (236-7). While James's anti-dualistic thought disallows clear demarcations between the mind and the body, it is possible to read his theory of emotion as compromised in this regard, as it is often understood as a mere reduction of emotion to physical functions. It is thus hardly surprising to see James featured in Massumi's affective thought, since his emphasis on the bodily appears to make a neat fit with James's theory of emotion.

James (1981) did of course coin that oft-quoted, unfortunate statement that "we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble" – a statement he subsequently regretted and characterized as an example of "slapdash brevity of language" in a restatement of his theory (1994, 206). If James is understood solely as a theorist reversing the 'common sense' sequence of emotional experience from *external stimulus* > *emotion* > *bodily response* to *external stimulus* > *bodily*

*response*>*emotion*, then it is possible to see how James could nicely slot into an affective theory that elevates the body above the mind, as there appears to be no role for cognition in James's exposition. Indeed, for James, the idea that "mental perception of some fact excites the mental affection called the emotion, and that this latter state of mind gives rise to the bodily expressions" is problematic. Instead, his theory holds "that the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion" (1981).

Much was made, even during James's lifetime, of the shortcomings of such an articulation of the emotions, which appeared to eradicate all cognitive elements and to valorize the physical in a bid to counter idealist theories of introspection on the emotions.<13> Thus, James was radical in his securing of a place for the body in affective thought, perhaps so radical that he overstated his case and obscured his own, more nuanced descriptions of the coterminality of body, mind, and emotion. For instance, in an 1887 review, he rejected the notion that emotions are involuntary and do not involve cognition – an idea cognivist philosophers of emotion have positioned themselves against since the 1960s (see Solomon 1980). Here, in a discussion on "romantic affection," James writes that there is "no doubt the way in which we think about our emotions reacts on the emotions themselves, damping or inflaming them, as the case may be" (1987). Several contemporary commentators (Redding 2011) have read James as including some sort of appraisal or judgment within his conception of emotion. For instance, Joseph Palencik has argued that James's "perception of the exciting fact" giving rise to a somatic emotional experience is not reducible to mere sensation, but relies on "an organism possess[ing] a broader evaluative understanding of its situation" (2007). It is therefore not the case that one should run from something fearful without knowing why, as in the infamous example of the flight from a bear.<14> As James notes in his 1894 rebuttal, it is of course entirely plausible that people should react differently to the possibility of a bear in certain contexts ("the same bear may truly enough excite us to either fight or flight, according as he suggests an overpowering 'idea' of his killing us, or one of our killing him"), hence the need for "any theory of emotion" to "start rather from the total situation which it suggests than from its own naked presence" (1994, 206).

Mark Johnson (2007) points out that James does speak of embodiment and feeling in relation to thought in a chapter of *The Principles of Psychology* titled "The Stream of Thought", where he says that "as we think we feel our bodily selves at the seat of thinking" (94). Nonetheless, in James's chapter on emotion, he is very explicit about the fact that the feeling of "bodily changes... IS the emotion" and does not redress this in a later restatement of his theory. James's temporal ordering of external stimulus, bodily response, and emotion, invites a reading of these processes as atomistic rather than, in some sense, implicated in each other, and his theory allows for an extreme materialist reading of emotion. Certainly, the James-Lang theory, as it came to be known, is different from much of the more idealist musings on religious emotion to be found in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1985). For new affect theorists in search of work prioritizing the physical over the cognitive, though, standard readings of James's theory provide just the right kind of material with which to elevate spontaneity, imminence, and movement of affect to overcome the assumed strictures posed by cognition, language and culture.

### III) A Pragmatist Politics of Feeling for Feminists

Beyond these heuristic limitations of James's theory of emotion and its role in an atomistic theory of affect, it is important to note the political implications of Massumi's affective ontology. His privileging of materiality, affective spontaneity, autonomy, and emergence over the mind, language and cognition, introduces and maintains atomistic and dualistic metaphysical proscriptions, but is also politically questionable. If affects are beyond judgment, culture, and the socio-linguistic, then what have critical theorists to gain by turning toward affect? How can affect be mobilized for social and political change? By aligning affect so closely with the bodily emergent, which can never be captured, represented, or contained, affect's power for feminists remains unclear. That is not to deny that there are affects, that is, feelings that are not yet fully cognized, subliminal phenomena, or emotions that have not yet come into view – but what is their purpose from a political theoretical perspective, if they necessarily remain hidden? By providing an ontology of affect, but not a social theory that might explicate how affects can be manipulated, how they are culturally generated and transmitted, how they can be utilized for change, Massumi deprives affects of political salience.<15>

Much is to be gained, I think, by developing a theory of feelings or of the politics of emotion that does not subsume feelings in an ontology of affect, but that seeks to undermine atomistic thinking and philosophical bifurcations – as much feminist work on emotion has traditionally done. Massumi is also entirely right to turn to pragmatist work to address dualisms, and to draw on the theoretical tools this tradition has provided to deal with philosophical questions concerning the relationship between nature and culture, mind and body, and reason and emotion. Given the concerns raised with regard to the political purchase of theories of feeling that undermine judgment, cognition, and representation, I propose John Dewey as a useful ally for feminists in search of a theory of feeling that is also politically relevant. Dewey's (1894, 1895, 2008, and Tufts, 1985) work on feeling and emotion affords cognition and judgment a role, is anti-dualistic and anti-atomistic, and recognizes emotions as dispositional, relational and socially constituted. As such, his largely neglected work on emotions could be employed in conjunction with canonical feminist expositions of emotion in the development of a politically salient theory that might draw on important pragmatist concepts, such as habit (to theorize social and political change, and the capacity of feelings to be transformed) and transaction (to establish the complex interplay between self and environments, nature and culture).

While arguing for feminists' adoption of William James as a philosopher of embodied emotion, Shannon Sullivan (2015) admits that James's theory is individualist, if not atomistic,<16> and notes that James is "fairly silent" on the question of the inter-subjective nature of our emotions (201). Sullivan draws on Teresa Brennan's (2004) entrainment theory of the transmission of affect to supplement James in this regard, but I maintain that Dewey makes a better pragmatist candidate for feminist theorizations of emotion in several regards.

*Contra* James, Dewey views emotions not as processes that individuals undergo in isolation from each other. Reflecting Dewey's transactional conception of selves that

continuously constitute and are constituted by their environments, emotions unfold transactionally in our daily lives. We are actively engaged in and productive of our affective experiences in accordance with the ever-changing contexts of our environments. Thus, for Dewey (2008), emotions “are not, save in pathological instances, private” (43-44), but social affairs. This chimes nicely with feminist accounts of emotion that usually ascribe a social constructivist dimension, thereby allowing for political analyses of affective experiences.

Secondly, Dewey (1967b) critiques James’s division and temporal ordering of stimulus, bodily response, and emotion, noting that “no such seriality or separation attaches to the emotion as an experience” (174). Emotion, for Dewey, “has an intellectual content” (171), while for James, emotion has “no ‘mind-stuff’”, just the “feelings of its bodily symptoms” (451). Dewey thus rejects the apparent reduction of emotions to mere physical feeling-states lacking in cognition, and resists the atomistic treatment of individual processes involved in the emotional experience itself. In this way, mind-body and cognition-emotion dualisms are undercut, as Dewey affords cognition and intentionality a role in emotion, and reinserts bodily feeling into thought. The coterminality of each of these supposed oppositionals is thus guaranteed, as Dewey’s work on emotion – much like second and third wave feminist work – proposes an anti-dualistic approach to feeling. My contention is that feminists can draw on both Dewey and existing feminist work on emotions to avoid the tendency toward reductive, physicalist thinking in contemporary affect theory, by developing theory that embraces holistically the different dimensions and processes of emotional experiences as intermingled and implicated in each other.

Finally, it remains to be said that just about the time the new affect theorists announced the “turn to affect” in literary studies, queer studies, and cultural studies, philosophy witnessed a neo-pragmatic turn, or a pragmatist revival, which included significant developments in feminist-pragmatism.<17> Pragmatism, especially Dewey’s thought, can constitute a significant resource for feminists interested in feeling and the body, and feminist (neo)pragmatism can add fruitfully to ongoing debates in the trajectory of contemporary theory, including debates on the limits or promises held by poststructuralism and deconstruction. Indeed, classical pragmatism has foreshadowed some of the debates and critiques raised by subsequent poststructuralist theory, and has sometimes been understood as a philosophical framework that can bridge or provide an alternative to the analytic-continental divide, constituting a conceptual middle ground with recourse to philosophical methods and tenets that are also conducive to feminism, such as experimentalism, epistemological fallibilism, political meliorism, and metaphysical anti-dualism. A contemporary, reinvigorated theoretical concern with feeling and embodiment should proceed by building upon affect theorists’ calls for same, but by developing theories of feeling that are responsive to feminist, political analyses in the wider context of existing work on the emotions and embodiment. A good place to start would be with the rich history of feminist theorizing on feeling and materiality we already have at our disposal, and the pragmatism that has steadily evolved and become revitalized over the last number of years. In this way, feminists can make the most of the “turn to affect,” which is laudable in its interdisciplinarity and in its enthusiasm for themes that are, and have been, deeply relevant to feminism.

## NOTES

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1. In geography, see Thrift (2004); in gender studies, Probyn (2005); in cultural studies, Massumi (2002); in queer studies, Sedgwick (2003); in sociology, Clough (ed.) (2007).
2. For the purposes of this introduction, I will use the terms “affect,” “emotion,” and “feeling” interchangeably. As the paper progresses, though, the distinction between “affect” and “emotion,” and the role this distinction plays for particular theorists, will become clear.
3. It should be noted that although the “turn to affect” was first announced in the mid-1990s, it has increasingly gained traction over the last couple of decades in a number of social science and humanities subjects, with conferences and special issues figuring more prominently in the last five years in particular – see Pedwell and Whitehead (2012), and Blackman and Venn (2010).
4. It should be noted that although the “turn to affect” was first announced in the mid-1990s, it has increasingly gained traction over the last couple of decades in a number of social science and humanities subjects, with conferences and special issues figuring more prominently in the last five years in particular – see Pedwell and Whitehead (2012), and Blackman and Venn (2010).
5. See Schaefer (2014) and Bargetz (2015). While Schaefer draws on affect theory to develop a poststructural feminist atheism, she overlooks the difficulties many affect theorists have with poststructuralist thought, and indeed, their positing of affect as a new paradigm *in opposition to* poststructuralism. Bargetz argues for acceptance of the ambivalence of affect, drawing on Jacques Rancière's thought on emancipation. Hers is the only other more thorough-going analysis of affect in feminist philosophy I have encountered.
6. See Caze and Lloyd (2011). Rosi Braidotti's work (2013, 2006) also cites affect theorists, such as Clough and Massumi. Generally, although the new affect theorists draw on philosophical work, there appears to be little reciprocal engagement from the discipline.
7. Research on emotions is often classified in terms of dominant models of emotion, including the cognitive, the social constructivist, the Darwinian and the Jamesian (which together here I am referring to as “physicalist”, following Dixon (2003)). My inclusion of James here is not entirely straightforward, see part II of this paper.
8. For methodological critiques, see Russell (1994) and Fridlund (1994).
9. Sedgwick and Frank's (2003, 93) reference to “what theory knows today” is instructive, as is Grosz's scolding of “social, political, and cultural theorists,” who have “forgotten a crucial dimension of research” (2004, 2).
10. Specifically, the half second delay is said to occur between the registering of brain activity by an EEG (electroencephalograph) machine in test subjects and their flexing of a finger. This experiment has been widely critiqued, both within and outside of its own discipline, see Leys (2011, 452-458).
11. For a critique of some affect theorists' selective appropriation of scientific work, see Papoulias and Callard (2010).

12. For a fascinating “genealogy” of habits and similar pragmatist concepts in relation to the supernatural and contagion, see Lisa Blackman’s series of essays (2013, 2008, 2007) on William McDougall, William James, and Gabriel Tarde.
13. See especially chapter 7 in Dixon (2003).
14. For a similarly anti-physicalist reading of James’s theory, see J.M. Barbalet (1999).
15. See also Lili Hsieh (2008, 61).
16. Sullivan (2015, 200) notes that she “won’t try to establish here whether his individualism is atomistic.”
17. See, e.g. Seigfried (1991, 1993, 1996) and Dickstein (1998).

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