

Affect and Emotion: James, Dewey, Tomkins, Damasio, Massumi, Spinoza

Kate Stanley

This essay endeavors to link three distinct genealogies of affect theory through the mutual influence of William James. Donald Wehrs' wide-ranging overview of scholarly approaches to affect in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries underlines James' unduly peripheral status in the field, couching its lone mention of the Jamesian model of emotion within a discussion of contemporary neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, whose career has been devoted to reviving James' original claim that "a purely disembodied human emotion is a nonentity."¹ Alongside the "neurocognitive-evolutionary" account of affect represented by Damasio and others, Wehrs' introduction outlines two further affective genealogies introduced into humanities scholarship in the mid-90s by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Brian Massumi. Since that time, Wehrs observes, the authority and locus of affect theory have oscillated between Massumi's appeal to Deleuzian thinking and Sedgwick's appeal to Silvan Tomkins. While Tomkins is often treated as a crossover figure whose work potentially bridges affect study between the sciences and humanities, and between the twentieth century and what came before, in this essay I trace the roots of Tomkins' (and therefore Sedgwick's) affect back to James. I also argue that James is both formative and underattended as a precursor within Massumi's thought, and further contend that the emphasis on Spinoza that Massumi gleans from Deleuze mirrors the emphasis on Spinoza offered by James. In examining the quietly pervasive and durable impact of Jamesian strains, I hope to explain why James requires "revival" by Damasio in the first

K. Stanley (✉)

The University of Western Ontario, London, ON, Canada

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place, to offer correctives for the marginalization of James' thought, and to claim James' crucial significance for contemporary affect studies.

Neglect of James' seminal theory of emotion stems partly from a problem of terminology, whereby notions of "emotion" become subject to manifold—and often disparaging—redefinition. The value of what Tomkins inherits from James is hence easy to overlook in the context of the "affective turn" in the humanities, because Massumi helps found the modern field of affect theory by influentially positioning the term "affect" as an explicit contrast and remedy to the term "emotion." Since the publication of Massumi's "The Autonomy of Affect" in 1995 (the same year Sedgwick coedited the first Tomkins reader, *Shame and its Sisters*, with Adam Frank), the category of emotion has become prevalently—and, as I contend, inaccurately—equated with fixity and closure. I aim to query the oppositional thinking entrenched by Massumi's formidable essay by tracing a Jamesian genealogy of emotion that is irreducible to static and limiting cognitive or conceptual structures. As I demonstrate, philosophical and psychological theorists working in James' wake—including John Dewey, Tomkins, and Damasio—are likewise insistent in framing emotions as forces that exceed subjectivity and signification—critically establishing emotion as a nexus where the ongoing issues of affect study (force, excess, embodiment, and description) are first seen to converge physiologically and cognitively. These theorists serve to qualify Massumi's dominant and discontinuous definition of affect—and to realign the field with James—precisely by asserting deep continuities between psychological and physiological registers of experience.

Yet despite this seeming divide between genealogies of affect that would stake their difference on competing definitions of emotion, I will conclude by suggesting that theorists of emotion and the broader genealogies of affect they represent might meet on shared Spinozian grounds. Both James and Deleuze express an abiding indebtedness to Spinoza. However, James' reading of Spinoza retrieves an insight largely disregarded in the poststructuralist tradition, namely that Spinozian affect is fundamentally comprised of an indissoluble "union of mind and body."² By recovering this sense of union, I recover the utility of James—and by reclaiming a convergence of emotion and affect, at the point where the psychological is reunited with the physical, I also suggest reunion between certain long-standing divisions in the field of affect studies.

THE CIRCUITRY OF EMOTION

In *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James proposes that "emotion ... is nothing but the feeling of a bodily state."³ This claim is revolutionary because it inverts a prevailing view that treated emotions as purely psychological states, which cognitively catalyze (and thus necessarily precede) their resulting bodily manifestations—trembling, tears, wincing, etc.

James' countering proposal posits that "an emotion [is] indicative of physical change, not a cause of such changes."⁴ Here, a stimulating event or object effects a set of "bodily commotions" that might include "quick breathing, palpitating heart, flushed face," which only subsequently achieve the state of being "felt."⁵ While there are no clear divisions or tidy stages in one's experience of this structure of feeling, for the purpose of clear explanation, James breaks the structure down into sequential parts:

perception of event → bodily response → feeling of bodily response

With his most famous example of how this sequence is actually lived, James corrects the following "common-sense" encapsulation of an emotional response to an unexpected encounter: "we meet a bear, are frightened and run."⁶ According to James, this ordering of events overlooks the unthinking bodily response that inserts itself between the initial perception and the subsequent reaction. The sight of the bear excites changes in one's muscles, glands, heart, and skin, which are only recursively felt as fear; we may already be running by the time our emotional response identifies and synchronizes with the more instantaneously immediate visceral reaction.⁷ For James, emotions are always retrospective interpretations: the belated action of feeling is looped back through the telling bodily state that gave it rise—the sense of jeopardy and self-preservation manifest in gooseflesh and twitching flight muscles—at which point those physical excitations can become felt as an emotion, such as fear.⁸ Crucially, there is for James no structural distinction to be drawn between a chance encounter with a bear or an old friend; both events trigger a set of reverberations and sensations in the body, a base state of affectedness which then might variously be felt as fear or delight, as disagreeable shock or as pleasant surprise.

James revises and reformulates his "visceral theory of emotion" over a ten-year period, yet its basic tenets remain the same—from his first 1884 articulation in "What is an Emotion?" (published in *Mind*), through the "Emotions" chapter of *Principles* (1890), to "The Physical Basis of Emotion," published in *Psychological Review* in 1894.⁹ Following James' 1894 assertions, John Dewey would publish a series of responses (also in *Psychological Review*) that sought to elaborate the full significance and reach of James' model of emotion, even as Dewey emphasizes the difficulty of discretely anatomizing and verbally describing its complex structure and temporality. It would be a mistake, Dewey warns, to reduce James' model to a causal sequence of stimulus and response: "No such seriality or separation attaches to the emotion as an experience."¹⁰ For the sake of his discussion, Dewey breaks up the "whole concrete emotional experience" into "separate parts," yet he insists that these component parts are experienced "as contemporaneous phases of one activity"; there is "coordination" between "the 'exciting stimulus' and the excited response," which "are constituted at one and the same time."¹¹

Dewey's difficulty in describing this coordination is compounded by the oppositional tension on which it depends; as he notes, if the sensory stimulus and motor response "coordinate without friction ... there is no emotional seizure."¹² A frictionless encounter is one in which there is no tension between expectation and event. For instance, if someone opens the oven and anticipates its wave of heat, there is no cognitive friction and therefore no irruption of emotion; by contrast, if someone enjoying a warm shower is blasted with cold water, she may produce a startled or angry reaction, her senses rankled into emotional response by the unexpected discontinuity. Because emotions are founded on this fundamental friction—this provocative discrepancy between the tenor of the stimulating input and the tenor of the bodily response—it is impossible to describe them "without using dual terms" which designate the independence of the receptive function from the reactive function, two states which can smoothly elide into each other unnoticed, or can chafe an emotion into being when they come into tension.¹³ Such dualistic and sequential terms may be antithetical to the experience of emotion, but are nevertheless necessary to its expression; this incongruity between the materiality of feeling and the language of feeling will become a dominant and divisive driver in the evolution of affect. Dewey's articles conclude by restating rather than resolving the problem of description: "What shall we term that which is not sensation-followed-by-idea-followed-by-movement?"¹⁴ In seeking to name this atemporal figure of motive sensation, he cycles through such terminological contenders as "sensori-motor coordination," "continuum," "organic unity," "whole act," and "matrix," before finally settling on the term "circuit" to describe a structure of emotion that is "contemporaneous" yet recursive, "undivided" yet riven with "tensions."¹⁵

As a nominal means for designating emotion's elusive materiality and temporality, Dewey's language of "circuitry" is variously reinvigorated over the next decades by Tomkins, Damasio, and Massumi, each of whom notably extends Jamesian tenets into the latter half of the twentieth century. While the "affect system" developed by Tomkins through the 1950s and 1960s has been described as the "only truly novel theory of emotion" post-James, I follow Adam Frank in framing the novelty of Tomkins' thinking as an extension of his "explicit affiliation with James."¹⁶ As Frank explains, Tomkins arrives at his own theory by bringing James' "laboratory tradition of physiological psychology" into contact with "midcentury sciences of organized complexity."¹⁷ Informed by burgeoning trends in cybernetics and systems theory, Tomkins theorizes how James' complexly embodied "proprioceptive circuits" of emotional experience intersect with other physiological and psychological systems.¹⁸ Yet while Tomkins develops his own "feedback circuits" that share the same general structure as the coordinated Jamesian circuit, Tomkins also draws important terminological, physiological, and taxonomic distinctions between his definition of affect and Jamesian emotion. Here, it might

be useful to again recall the breakdown of Jamesian emotion, which Tomkins upholds with a few key revisions:

perception of event → bodily response → feeling of bodily response

In Tomkins' usage, "affect" refers to "bodily response" in the sequence above, and the categorical variety of bodily response or affect is what he works to rigorously quantify in *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* (1962–1991). Tomkins ventures to depart from James primarily by shifting the focus of affect from the general embodiment of heartbeats, nerves, sweat, and tears to the specific embodiment expressed by the human face; while Tomkins meticulously describes visceral, muscular, skeletal, and epidermal shifts throughout the body, these bodily responses are always secondary to facial responses in his analysis. Tomkins offers this distinctly Jamesian formulation: "the feedback of the facial response *is* the experience of affect."¹⁹ In other words, the face does not belatedly embody an expression or an interpretation of something else. Like James, Tomkins uses the term "feeling" to describe one's awareness that an affect or bodily response has been triggered, and "emotion" to describe the cognitive interpretation of that affect and its feeling.²⁰ Tomkins' focus on affective feedback loops that are chiefly circuited through the physiology of the face, rather than internal organic systems, leads him to distinguish a series of nine characteristic facial expressions, which in turn create a taxonomy of major affects: interest-excitement, enjoyment-joy, startle-surprise, distress-grief, shame-humiliation, contempt-disgust, anger-rage, and fear-terror. With this work, Tomkins aims to specify and categorize physiological reactions that in James remain undistinguished within the broad category of "bodily response." Tomkins' systematic account of the facial feedback loop therefore refines in qualitatively individuated ways how the more general Jamesian circuit is materially manifested and affectively experienced. "Affect," as employed by Tomkins, becomes a term that allows an overarching generality to be described alongside the shaded and manifold specificity of *affects*.

As a more recent theorist in the Jamesian lineage, Antonio Damasio has devoted his career to substantiating and expanding James' model of emotion through contemporary neuroscientific methods that make it possible to verify circuitry that previously could only be tested introspectively. Dewey's "sensori-motor circuits" and Tomkins' "feedback circuits" are elaborated in Damasio's work as "body loops," which retain the basic structure of Jamesian emotion, with added physiological and neurological specificity.²¹ With what he calls the "as-if body loop," Damasio introduces a "virtual" dimension to James' theory. As he suggests, the "body source" for emotions "may be the representation of the body 'as if' rather than the body 'as is.'"²² While Damasio confirms James' hypothesis that we most often use the body itself as a "theater of the emotions," he observes that under some circumstances "the balance of responses may favor intrabrain circuitry and engage the body minimally."²³ In such cases, the brain learns to concoct the body state "without having to reenact it in the body proper."²⁴ As Damasio concludes, the

neurally-circuited mechanisms which he outlines are wholly “compatible” with James’ theory: “None of the features I have added undermines or violates the basic idea that feelings are largely a reflection of body-state changes, which is William James’s seminal contribution to this subject.”²⁵

In Damasio’s account, the virtuality of this “as if” adds “a new dimension” to James’ “original formulation.”²⁶ Yet the prospect of this virtual dimension is precisely what Massumi values most in James’ original thinking; Massumi does not need Damasio’s neuroscience to access in James what he will call an “incorporeal materiality.” In the introduction to *Parables for the Virtual* (2002), his initial major contribution to affect theory, Massumi looks to Spinoza to define “affect” as “a body’s *capacity* to enter into relations of movement and rest” [*affectus*] and as “a bodily intensity” [*affectio*].²⁷ Aiming to bring these definitions (*affectus* and *affectio*; capacity and intensity) together, Massumi observes that “the variation in intensity is *felt*” and this feeling of intensity is where he locates the “pure capacity” for affect, or its potential for action.²⁸ As Massumi suggests, James’ “radical empiricism” helps explicate the circuited relation between Spinozan intensity and capacity:

Where we might loop into shortly is empiricism, at the other end of its history. William James made transition and the feeling of self-relation a central preoccupation of his latter-day “radical” empiricism. “The relations that connect experiences,” he wrote, “must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation must be accounted as ‘real’ as anything else in the system.” If incorporeal materialism is an empiricism it is a radical one, summed up by the formula: *the felt reality of relation*.²⁹

To begin to understand how Spinoza’s embodied, relational, and action-oriented definition of affect connects with what James describes as “the feeling of self-relation” (and “the felt reality” of that relation), Massumi expresses the need for an “expanded empiricism”—an empiricism beyond the manifest Jamesian-Deweyan circuitry of general bodily response, beyond the categorical Tomkinsian feedback of facially specific response, and beyond the virtual Damasian physiology of neurally-constituted response.³⁰ In the passage above, Massumi implies that he “might loop” his readers into an elaborated discussion of the “expanded” or “radical” empiricism he finds in James, but unfortunately for Jamesians, such elaboration is not “shortly” forthcoming.

Rather than returning in greater detail to James in the remainder of his introduction or soon thereafter, Massumi instead moves *Parables* in a different direction by reprinting “The Autonomy of Affect,” in which James does not figure, as the book’s first chapter. From its initial appearance in *Cultural Criticism* in 1995, this essay served to influentially orient the field of affect studies toward Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza. Seven years later, with the introduction to *Parables*, Massumi seemingly intends to put James into complementary contact with Spinoza, but when the book eventually re-engages with James’ radical empiricism in its final chapter, Spinoza is absent from the discussion, and the two figures remain separated by 200 intervening

pages. Massumi further cordons James from Spinoza and seemingly promotes the dominance of a Deleuzian reading with his polemical approach to defining “affect” against “emotion.” Even as the introduction to *Parables* affords equal attention to the dual facets of Spinozian affect, its first chapter, “The Autonomy of Affect,” immediately sidelines *affectus* and the body’s capacity for acting, declaring instead that “intensity will be equated with affect”; that *affectio* is affect.³¹ Having established this focus, Massumi oppositionally defines and prioritizes the full intensity of “affect” against and above the “qualified intensity” of “emotion.”³² Emotional intensity is “qualified” by its limiting organization “into narrativizable action-reaction circuits”; by contrast, the “unstructured” flows of affective intensity are uninhibited, liberated by “the suspension of action-reaction circuits.”³³ Because it gestures toward structure for the purposes of explanation—even temporally fluctuating, materially inconstant, and descriptively insufficient structure—the Jamesian history of emotion-as-circuitry is seemingly downgraded by Massumi as too causal, too empirical, and too narratively coherent and closed to accurately represent affect, which in a poststructuralist mode ought instead be negatively defined, as exceeding all such structurings.

Guided by Deleuze’s embrace of unformed and unstructured intensities, Massumi fixes “emotion” as a rigid designation—as a term that unfavorably solidifies these affective flows into bounded “subjective content” and narrative forms.³⁴ “It is crucial,” Massumi concludes, “to theorize the difference between affect and emotion” so that “psychological categories” will not creep back into the working definition and operation of affect, thus “undoing the considerable deconstructive work that has been effectively carried out by poststructuralism.”³⁵ In Massumi’s account, the work of the poststructuralist affect theorist is to probe “zones of indetermination” that transcend dichotomies between subject and object, inner and outer, reception and action.³⁶ Yet the non-dualizing logic guiding these investigations often reinstates an oppositional binary—one that defines the “autonomy” of bodily affects against emotion’s enslavement to delimiting psychological categories. Rei Terada distills the Deleuzian distinction upon which Massumi draws with her definition of “emotion” as “a psychological, at least minimally interpretive experience whose physiological aspect is affect.”³⁷ In *Parables*, these definitions are distinctly value-laden; while the “tawdry status of a private ‘emotion’” is saddled with subject-centered ideology, affects are freed from bounded subjectivity.³⁸ In other words, bodily affects are privileged over psychological emotions on the basis that they are more impersonal, and necessarily not limited by the forms of selfhood. The division drawn between “private” emotion and “impersonal” affect thus ironically still comes to rest on the reductive Cartesian mind/body division that Massumi and other affect theorists working in a Deleuzian tradition would seek to overcome.

My goal here is neither to valorize emotion, nor to reject poststructuralist affect, but instead to recover a definition of Jamesian circuitry that precludes partitioning the body from the mind, or the mind from the body. In fact,

James' model of emotion wholly resists rigid distinctions between affects understood as physiological sensations and emotions understood as psychological states. As I have outlined, Dewey, Tomkins, and Damasio follow James in formulating feedback circuits that connectively loop bodily responses with the brain. In their usage, the word "psychological" designates an integrated unity of mind and body that intimately entwines processes of feeling, thinking, and acting.

READING MASSUMI READING JAMES

While "The Autonomy of Affect" privileges intensity over action and therefore raises Deleuzian affect over Jamesian emotion, Massumi concludes *Parables* by recalling his brief introductory reference to James—the desired synthesizing of "incorporeal materialism" with radical empiricism that remains inconclusively deferred at the end of the book. In *Parables*' final reference to James, Massumi observes that for the radical empiricist, "relation is directly sensed as a 'fringe' of ongoing, a residue of potential or newness marginally accompanying every determinate perception (the virtual as it actually presents itself)."³⁹ A decade later, Massumi will return to the question of how the virtual "actually presents itself," pointedly placing Deleuze's incorporeal virtuality alongside James's embodied empiricism in the opening pages of his next book, *Semblance and Event* (2011).

"If I am guilty of romanticizing anything," Massumi admits, "it would be *intensity*."⁴⁰ It is perhaps this urge that initially prompts him to equate "affect" with "intensity" in "Autonomy," and to correspondingly sideline its counterpart, *affectus*, the body's capacity for action. In *Parables*, Massumi is suspicious of the tendency for "incipient action" to be subsumed into "causal instrumentalized action-reaction circuits."⁴¹ To "actualize" the "incipience" of action, Massumi worries, is to bind it to the cause-and-effect logic of "linear time" and narrative.⁴² Conversely, Massumi opens *Semblance* with a string of James quotations (from *Essays in Radical Empiricism*), read alongside Deleuze, which seem to reconsider and promote the processual, recursive nature of action understood as ongoing, relational activity. First, from James:

Something's doing (James 1996a, 161).

Then, from Deleuze:

That much we already know. Some-thing's happening. Try as we might to gain an observer's remove, that's where we find ourselves: in the midst of it. There's happening doing. This is where philosophical thinking must begin: immediately in the middle (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 21–23, 293).

Again, from James, a series of thoughts all compiled in a rush:

What's middling in all immediacy is "an experience of activity" (James 1996a, 161)...

"Bare activity, as we may call it, means the bare fact of event or change" (James 1996a, 161).

In bare point of fact, that is where everything, not just philosophy, begins ...

"'Change taking place' is a unique content of experience" (James 1996a, 161).

The unique content of experience: "the sense of activity is in the broadest and vaguest way synonymous with life ... To be at all is to be active ... We are only as we are active" (James 1996a, 161–162).

To begin to think life, we must begin in the middle with an activist sense of life at no remove: in the middling immediacy of its always "going on" (James 1996a, 161).⁴³

In what remains of this essay, I want to suggest that the resonances Massumi discerns between what he calls Deleuze's and James' "activist philosophies" find a common source in Spinoza. While Deleuze's indebtedness to Spinoza has been well documented (by Massumi and others), fewer affect scholars have noted Spinoza's formative force in James' thinking and writing.

At Harvard in 1890, James taught a philosophy class on Spinoza alongside a psychology course that used his recently published *The Principles of Psychology* as its textbook. A year later, he began to bring these two streams of investigation and pedagogy—the philosophical and the psychological—into direct contact with each other, through two lecture series that form the basis of his practical theory of education. James frames his *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* as an attempt to put his psychological model of emotion to work in the classroom and in daily life. Spinoza guides this endeavor, supplying the basic insight at the heart of all these talks: "action and feeling go together."⁴⁴ Addressing an audience of Cambridge teachers, James looks to Spinoza to suggest that the primary aim of education should be to cultivate feelings that give rise to positive and productive actions. In "The Will," the concluding lecture of the series delivered to teachers, James cites Spinoza to argue that positive thoughts and feelings are more hospitable to the exercise of a freer, less constrained will:

Spinoza long ago wrote in his *Ethics* that anything that a man can avoid under the notion that it is bad he may also avoid under the notion that something else is good. He who habitually acts *sub specie mali*, under the negative notion, the notion of the bad, is called a slave by Spinoza. To him who acts habitually under the notion of good he gives the name of freeman. See to it now, I beg you, that you make freemen of your pupils by habituating them to act, whenever possible, under the notion of a good.⁴⁵

Following Spinoza, James argues that the best way to transform students from “slaves” into “freemen” is to teach them habits of introspection; only those who are introspectively attuned to the positive or negative valence of their feelings are equipped to distinguish good from bad guiding “notions” of how to act.

The pedagogical principles that James derives from *Ethics* are founded on Spinoza’s fundamental claim that there is “no absolute, or free, will” for those who “do not know any cause of their actions.”⁴⁶ Such ignorance is, for Spinoza, the definition of “human bondage,” which can only be countered by an intimate awareness of the workings of affective life. He writes, “a man does not know himself except through the affections of his body and their ideas. So when it happens that the mind can consider itself, it is thereby ... affected with joy, and with greater joy the more distinctly it can imagine its power of acting.”⁴⁷ In short, the “power of acting” stems from the “power to understand” both one’s own affective capacity and one’s own affective action.⁴⁸ An increased understanding of how affects arise and operate in turn increases our capacity to act upon them so that, in turn, we are “less acted on by them.”⁴⁹

Spinoza’s influence on James can be heard throughout *Talks to Students* in his affirmative calls for a freer and fuller life. In the first lecture of that series, “The Gospel of Relaxation,” James invokes Spinoza as an antidote to the problematic underside of the American “national ideal” of rapidity, vivacity, and incessant activity toward progress. This “bottled-lightening quality” of the “American Character” has fostered “bad habits” manifested in “those absurd feelings of hurry and having no time, in that breathlessness and tension, that anxiety Present and future, all mixed up in our mind at once, are the surest drags upon steady progress and hindrances to our success.”⁵⁰ James recommends a Spinozian “plan of living” to correct this “defective training” and to usher in “‘*acquiescentia in seipso*,’ as Spinoza used to call it.”⁵¹ As Spinoza insists, this “blessed internal peace and confidence” can only be achieved through an integrated “union of mind and body,” where there is “no essence of the mind” independent of “an actually existing body.”⁵² James echoes this teaching, attributing Spinoza’s “healthy-mindedness” to his fundamental understanding of an integrative mind-body loop, which two hundred years later will become the basis of Jamesian emotion.⁵³

In Spinoza’s understanding of the body’s capacity for action and the mind’s capacity for reflection, James finds an action-oriented “plan of life.”⁵⁴ Massumi similarly finds a model for “really living” in James’ model of emotion.⁵⁵ As Massumi notes in an interview from 2015, “With intensified affect comes a stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life”; he goes on to reflect that “Spinoza takes us quite far” in thinking about the “entirely embodied” way we live, before asserting that “his thought needs to be supplemented with the work of ... William James.”⁵⁶ In reading Spinoza through

James, Massumi's recent writings have likewise supplemented the anti-structure of Deleuzian affect with the original structure of Jamesian emotion. In a chapter in *Semblance* devoted to the "activist philosophy" of James' "radical empiricism," Massumi recalls James' bear anecdote, and thus returns us to where this essay began: with the pioneering insight that we are always already actively engaged in an emotionally charged situation by the time we become aware of it. Massumi quotes the Jamesian claim that "'We live forwards,' but since we have always already rolled on, 'we understand backwards,'" and this conflicted temporal circuitry is further distilled in Massumi's pithy rephrasing of James' embodied emotion: "participation precedes cognition." Massumi then voices his unifying agreement: "This is the sense of James' famous saying that we don't run because we are afraid. We are afraid because we run."⁵⁷ James' "plan of life" reveals the futility of preconception because understanding is always retrospective, arising in the midst of action that is already unfolding; it is only when we take pause and look back "that we are clearly cognizant of what it was that set us dashing."⁵⁸

Massumi draws on this Jamesian formulation yet again in his 2015 study *Ontopower* to theorize the affective dimensions of a post-9/11 politics of "preemption." He invokes James' bear encounter to explain how the Bush administration's color-coded terror alert system was designed to modulate fear in the face of threats "that cannot be specified."⁵⁹ Fueled by the logic of preemption, the coiling relation between threat and fear travels across "potential circuits that do not eventuate."⁶⁰ Instigated by an "abstract force," the "Jamesian loop" of reaction and response remains locked in the realm of the virtual.⁶¹ Whereas in "The Autonomy of Affect," Massumi's Deleuzian-inflected discussion of "autonomous" affects celebrates the virtual as a realm of boundless potential when guided by James' circuitry of emotion, Massumi's more recent work recasts the key terms of his earlier analysis—virtuality and potentiality—as the dangerous mechanisms by which fear becomes "an autonomous force of existence," or what he calls "an ontopower."⁶² In this context, "autonomy" describes the unanchored self-sufficiency of a "fear-threat feedback loop" that operates independently of concrete causes (e.g., a bear) and "preempts" any embodied response or "body activation" (e.g., running).⁶³ Despecified, disembodied, and automatized, the "threat-fear loop" becomes an all-pervasive "affective atmosphere" which "short-circuits" the potential for action by rendering virtual both stimulus and response: no evident bear, and no clear way to run.

As "one of the most influential affect theorists in the humanities and social sciences today," Brian Massumi was responsible for instantiating a fundamental split between affect and emotion.⁶⁴ I have argued that this foundational distinction advanced the autonomy of Deleuzian affect at the expense of Jamesian emotion. In looking back—across two decades of his own work, across the preceding twentieth century of affect-adjacent scholarship, and

toward the thinking of William James—Massumi’s latest books have become more vocally invested in the crucial role played by James in the present and future figuring of affect. Yet it remains to be seen how Massumi’s readers or the wider field of affect theory will register and respond to this Jamesian turn in his work. Notably, the lone scholarly attempt to take up *Ontopower* in any detail cites Henri Bergson’s influence, but does not mention James’s formative importance for the book.⁶⁵ (By way of comparison, Massumi makes twenty-seven mentions of James in *Ontopower* and only five mentions of Bergson, all of which are in footnotes.) Bergson registers more readily than James, I would wager, because Massumi’s founding statements in affect theory identify Bergson as a primary source of Deleuzian virtuality, just as they name Spinoza as the forefather of Deleuzian affect. While only so much can be made of a single article’s oversight, James’ omission again indicates the tenacious—and increasingly incomplete—legacy of Massumi’s original exclusion of emotion from affect theory.

What can be gained by further recognizing and resuscitating James’ contribution to affect theory? If Massumi’s work on affect branches in two directions, toward the intensities of Deleuze and toward the pragmatist action of James, by Massumi’s own estimation the future of affect’s critical utility will require greater emphasis on the embodied political activation enabled by the latter. In likewise returning to and reckoning with the structures of affect after James, my hope is to push affect study forward by understanding backward, just as Massumi’s field-orienting work with Jamesian emotion is already unfolding, despite our lagging awareness of it.

NOTES

1. William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1950 [1890]), vol. 1, 452.
2. Baruch Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, trans. Edwin M. Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 124.
3. James, *Principles*, vol. 1, 459.
4. *Ibid.*, 131.
5. William James, “What Is an Emotion?” *Mind* 9, no. 34 (1884):16; James, *Principles*, vol. 1, 503.
6. James, *Principles*, vol. 2, 449–450.
7. *Ibid.*, 450.
8. James’ theory of emotion is often discussed as the “James-Lange Theory,” which links two similar hypotheses regarding the origin and nature of emotion that James and Carl Lange began developing independently in the mid-1880s.
9. James, *Principles*, vol. 2, 667.
10. John Dewey, “The Theory of Emotion. (II.) The Significance of Emotions,” *Psychological Review* 2, no. 1 (1895): 18. Dewey publishes “The Theory of Emotion. (I.) Emotional Attitudes” (1894) as a response to James’ final formulation of “The Physical Basis of Emotion” (1894), which appeared in the

previous month's issue of *Psychological Review*. The next year the second installment in the "Theory of Emotion" series appeared in *Psychological Review* and in 1895 he augmented James' model of emotion into a more wide-ranging critique of the stimulus response paradigm of neural functioning that had gained currency at the turn of the century; see John Dewey, "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology," *Psychological Review* 3, no. 4 (1896): 357–370. In place of a "patchwork of disjointed parts, a mechanical conjunction of unallied processes," Dewey asserts the "correlative" movements of an "organic unity" ("Reflex," 358, 363). Taken together, Dewey's responses to and revisions of Jamesian emotion have been credited with founding the Functionalist school of psychology.

11. Dewey, "Significance," 16, 26, 25, 18.
12. *Ibid.*, 27.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Dewey, "Reflex," 358.
15. *Ibid.*, 360, 361, 358.
16. Adam Frank, "Some Affective Bases for Guilt: Tomkins, Freud, Object Relations," *English Studies in Canada* 32, no. 1 (2006): 12; Virginia E. Demos, "Silvan Tomkins's Theory of Emotion," in *Reinterpreting the Legacy of William James*, ed. Margaret E. Donnelly (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1992), 212.
17. Adam Frank, *Transfereential Poetics, from Warhol to Poe* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 4.
18. Silvan S. Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*: vol. 1, *The Positive Affects* (New York: Springer, 1962), 54. Tomkins pursued graduate work in psychology and philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania where he took two graduate seminars in the early 1930s with a student of James' from Harvard, the philosopher Edgar A. Singer, Jr. When he finished his doctorate in 1934, Tomkins moved to Harvard to do postdoctoral work in philosophy, then joined Henry Murray's group studying human personality at the Harvard Psychological Clinic (which had been founded by James' colleague Morton Prince) (Frank, *Transfereential*, 31–32). Frank gives this overview of Tomkins' theory of affects: "Tomkins proposed that humans and other animals have evolved affect systems that are distinct from both the drives and cognition. Humans, according to Tomkins, are born with eight or nine innate affects that act as the primary motives: the negative ones, fear-terror, distress-grief, anger-rage, shame-humiliation, and contempt-disgust; the positive ones, interest-excitement and enjoyment-joy; and the reorienting affect of surprise-startle. These are at once individual and shared; individual in that they are experienced in or on an individual physiology, and shared in that they take place primarily on the skin and musculature of the face and in the tones of the voice and are communicated both to the self and to others, or sometimes to the self as an other" ("Affective Bases," 13).
19. Silvan S. Tomkins, *Exploring Affect. The Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tomkins*, ed. Virginia E. Demos (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 217.
20. Donald L. Nathanson, prologue to Silvan S. Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*: vol. 1, *The Positive Affects* (New York: Springer, 1962), xiv. Tomkins

eventually dropped the term “emotion” in favor of a larger category he called “scripts.”

21. Dewey, “Reflex,” 355.
22. Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt, 1999), 191.
23. Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon, 1994), 172; Damasio, *Feeling*, 47. As Damasio explains, “humoral signals (chemical messages conveyed via the bloodstream) and neural signals (electrochemical messages conveyed via nerve pathways)” change “the body landscape” and are “subsequently represented in somatosensory structures of the central nervous system,” which he describes as a “sensory body map” in the brain, which can nevertheless be felt (*Feeling*, 80).
24. Damasio, *Descartes’*, 155.
25. Damasio, *Feeling*, 191.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 15. Massumi’s foreword to his translation of Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* offers more detailed definitions: “*L’affect* (Spinoza’s *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act. *L’affection* (Spinoza’s *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include ‘mental’ or ideal bodies).” Brian Massumi, “Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgments,” in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xvi.
28. Massumi, *Parables*, 15, 16.
29. *Ibid.*, 16.
30. *Ibid.*, 256.
31. *Ibid.*, 27.
32. *Ibid.*, 28.
33. *Ibid.*, 28; 260 n. 3; 28.
34. *Ibid.*, 28. Massumi’s oppositional definitions of affect and emotion echo Lawrence Grossberg’s *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), a study that introduces affect to cultural studies. Grossberg asserts, “Unlike emotions, affective states are neither structured narratively nor organized in response to our interpretations of situations” (25). Massumi underlines his commitment to strict distinctions between affect and emotion by pointing to “slippage” in Grossberg’s definitions (*Parables*, n. 3, 260).
35. Massumi, *Parables*, 28, 27.
36. *Ibid.*, 164.
37. Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the “Death of the Subject”* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 5. In Terada’s work (as in James’), a third term, “feeling,” mediates between these two domains of experience. While this project will follow Terada in defining feeling in a way that emphasizes the common ground between its physiological and psychological

- aspects, I depart from Terada where she upholds a rigid distinction between affects as physiological sensations and emotions as psychological states (5).
38. Massumi, *Parables*, 219.
 39. *Ibid.*, 241.
 40. Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 84 (emphasis added).
 41. Massumi, *Parables*, 30.
 42. *Ibid.*, 41, 30.
 43. Massumi, *Semblance*, 1.
 44. William James, *Writings 1878–1899* (New York: Library of America, 1992), 826.
 45. *Ibid.*, 821.
 46. Spinoza, *Reader*, 53.
 47. *Ibid.*, 53, 98.
 48. *Ibid.*, 164.
 49. *Ibid.*, 164–65.
 50. James, *Writings 1878–1899*, 831, 833.
 51. *Ibid.*, 829.
 52. Spinoza, *Reader*, 40, 160.
 53. William James, *Writings 1902–1910* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 121.
 54. Spinoza, *Reader*, 3–4.
 55. Massumi, *Semblance*, 32.
 56. Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2015), 6.
 57. Massumi, *Semblance*, 32.
 58. Massumi, *Parables*, 231.
 59. Brian Massumi, *Ontopower: War, Powers, and the State of Perception* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 9.
 60. *Ibid.*, 217.
 61. *Ibid.*, 130.
 62. *Ibid.*, 182.
 63. Brian Massumi, “Q&A with Brian Massumi,” accessed February 22, 2017. <https://dukeupress.wordpress.com/2015/08/19/qa-with-brian-massumi/>; Massumi, *Ontopower*, 180, 184.
 64. Ruth Leys, “The Turn to Affect: A Critique,” *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (2011): 435.
 65. Nathan Snaza, “Preemptive Logic and the Necessity of Animal Politics,” *sym-ploke* 24, no. 1–2 (2016): 499–506.

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