

## **Subaltern Empathy: Beyond European Categories in Affect Theory**

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### **Abstract**

While there is a growing interest in affect theory in Humanities disciplines, much of this work is arguably still dominated by the Eurocentric assumption that cognition (or thought) is superior to feeling as a form of intelligence. This intellectual endeavor could be described as an attempt to analyze and theorize the complex field of emotions and the ways in which they shuttle between private and public realms, between biology and abstract philosophical categories. Many theorists and critics are now reconsidering affect (Brennan, Damasio, Massumi, Sedgwick) but there is little consensus on terminology, e.g. distinguishing between affect and emotion (or feeling). For example, the highly influential work of Sylvan Tompkins differs from that of Freud in designating the affect system (rather than the drive system) as the primary motivational system, and examines the effects of “emotional contagion.” But to what extent does such an approach take into account the translation factor in the communication of this “contagion” process? What “archives” enable research on affect in any given place? My paper will examine some attempts to think about affect both inside and outside the structures of this European tradition.

### **Keywords**

affect, emotions, psychoanalysis, cultural theory, Eurocentrism, decolonization.

For those who monitor the *Zeitgeist* in cultural theory it is clear there has been a turn to affect theory over the past few years. I had attempted to grapple with very preliminary aspects of these issues in a chapter of my last book. I examined the ways in which people expressed emotions and feelings when they had to move from one language to another in a context where these languages did not have equal status. My examples included Eva Hoffman's much-cited thoughts on leaving Poland for North America and Edward Said about moving from Arabic to English while being schooled in Cairo, in the first instance (Gunew, *Haunted Nation*). Affect is mobilised here as a kind of penumbra of inchoate emotions when subaltern subjects are forced to change from one language to another. I characterised this palimpsest of "linguistic affect" as forming part of that carapace of techniques for survival the subaltern learns to take on. I need to clarify that the following short paper is not a critique of prevailing, orthodox affect theory but it does assume some familiarity with this field (Tomkins, Damasio, Massumi, Sedgwick). The paper does, however, challenge the fundamental premises upon which Affect debates have been constructed so far by asking the question: how culturally specific is this body of theory? The Affect debates consistently, for example, reference psychoanalytic criticism which usually assumes universalist categories and modes of address. My paper (and the larger project which it attempts to capture) interrogates this basic assumption.<sup>1</sup>

When one embarks on the critical literature of emotions, feelings, and affect, one soon discovers that there are no certainties. To give one instance, cultural anthropologist William Reddy suggests that psychologists, a dominant example, are by no means clear about how to delineate and measure emotions, in general:

But as notions of "voluntary" and "conscious" have broken down, and as thinking has increasingly been regarded as reflecting multiple levels of activation, attention, and coherence, *it has become difficult to sustain the distinction between thought and affect . . . no-one has found a way to probe or measure an emotion directly.* (Reddy 31, my emphasis)

Reddy also makes the important point that anthropologists reading primarily for cultural difference, in whose work it is assumed that emotions *are* culturally

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<sup>1</sup> These are apparently new questions, judging from the responses to this work in different parts of the world (to date: Australia, U.K., U.S.A., Taiwan, Bulgaria, Ireland).

constructed, are none the less unable to account sufficiently for the workings of history in the field and thus find it difficult to show whether emotions *change* within a culture in any measurable ways:

Among anthropologists, a prevalent tendency to regard emotions as culturally constructed has led to a wide range of new and persuasive ethnographic accounts of worldwide emotional variation. . . . The idea that emotions are culturally constructed provides grounds for a political critique of the Western common sense that identifies emotions as biological and feminine. At the same time, this idea robs anthropologists of any grounds for a political critique of the local and emotional practices they study. (Reddy 54)

Thus while constructivist approaches open up many questions they simultaneously suspend the field of emotions in a timeless zone that limits analysis. Arguably, while there may well be an “affective turn” in theoretical debates, where emotions, feelings, and affect are concerned we are still (it seems) groping our way in the dark. Nigel Thrift offers a useful overview of affect theories and debates:

In particular, different cultures may not have the same words for emotions or may explain a particular emotion in a radically different way. Further, the specific events that trigger particular emotions can . . . be quite different between cultures; for example, disgust is triggered by quite different kinds of food according to cultural norms of what is nice and nasty.

Four different notions of affect, then, each of which depends on a sense of push in the world but the sense of push is subtly different in each case. In the case of embodied knowledge, that push is provided by the expressive armoury of the human body. In the case of affect theory it is provided by biologically differentiated positive and negative affects rather than the drives of Freudian theory. In the world of Spinoza and Deleuze, affect is the capacity of interaction that is akin to a natural force of emergence. In the neo-Darwinian universe, affect is a deep-seated physiological change written involuntarily on the face. How might we think of the politics of affect, given that these different notions would seem to imply different cues and even ontologies? (Thrift 64)

Thrift states concisely that “affect is understood as a form of thinking” (60), thus undermining the commonplace binary move that places affect in opposition to consciousness and reason. This point is augmented in useful ways by William Connolly in his book on geopolitics:

You cannot appreciate the creative possibilities in thinking without coming to terms with the layered play of affect in it; but you cannot fit thought entirely into a closed schema of logic, narrative, discourse, expression, or explanation if you do attend to the play of affect. It is through the play of affect—partly within the orbit of feeling, intention, and consciousness and partly below their thresholds—that the creative element of thinking finds its most effective possibility. . . . Since affect is not entirely under the regulation of consciousness, the flow of thinking exceeds its governance too. (Connolly 74)

In other words, Connolly is reminding us that if we follow too narrowly Thrift’s contention (affect as a form of thinking) we are in danger of losing sight of the body in its biological (and neurobiological) aspects.

Alertness to this danger has also shaped the directions pursued by recent feminist researchers such as Elizabeth Wilson, Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz.<sup>2</sup> For example, Wilson revisits corporeality discussions and the debates on the hysterical body and suggests that there is a “feminist retreat from the biology of hysteria” (an emphasis on psyche rather than soma):

Specifically, there has been a persistent foreclosure on the biology of conversion hysteria in most feminist expositions—the particularities of muscles, nerves, and organs in their hysterical state have remained curiously underexamined and some of the truly remarkable questions about hysteria remain unasked. (Wilson 3)

As illustration, she refers to Vicki Kirby’s work on dermagraphic hysteria (as in Charcot’s theatre) where marks and bleeding were observed to occur on the skins of hysterics. For all that earlier talk of returning to the body, why, she concludes,

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<sup>2</sup> Their work is usefully collected in a special issue of *Australian Feminist Studies* 14.29 (April 1999), guest-edited by Elizabeth Wilson.

did no-one really consider the *biological* mechanisms which underpinned this phenomenon? The body, she argues, remained somewhat abstract in these earlier debates.

In the case of my own work, the research was driven by the question that arises in all my projects: how culturally specific are these supposedly universal terms and concepts? For example, when we enter the “psy” disciplines (e.g. psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis etc.) we are automatically immersed in universal terms and concepts. It may well be that we are reasonably comfortable with stating, for instance, that there are five universal expressions of emotion: anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and enjoyment and that are all manifested in distinct *facial* expressions (Thrift 64). However, what induces their manifestation is clearly variable as in the example of what precipitates nausea regarding food. In addition, *interpretations* of facial expressions, the privileged site for communicating affect, are surely not universal. We think here of the highly stylized expressions associated with different cultural dance traditions and will return to those examples later.

Part of this project, therefore, also links with a much broader enterprise that has also been manifesting itself over several years now, the injunction from postcolonial scholars to “provincialize Europe” pursued by Dipesh Chakraborty and Ranjana Khanna amongst others. It represents a way of undoing the universal claims that reside at the centre of the so-called “European” tradition. The specific question that brought together an interdisciplinary team at the University of British Columbia, Canada (2005-06) was: **To what extent can we think meaningfully about affect outside the concepts and terms of European psychoanalysis?** We met over several months sharing our work and thoughts and finally held a two-day colloquium in which we came together with researchers from Australia, USA, and the U.K.<sup>3</sup>

We found the following disciplinary areas most relevant for the continuing project: Philosophy, Cultural Anthropology, and Language, particularly in the sense of translating across languages. Affect is typically equated with intensities, the halo effects surrounding moods or emotions. But intensities too have their disciplinary regimes and appropriate displays. The arguments made in the first workshop suggested that it is difficult to consider that specific cultural contexts (including languages and the repertoire of gestures etc. that regulate intimate family relations) have no role to play in articulating affect. The rest of the paper

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<sup>3</sup> The workshop and symposium were captured in a DVD titled *Feeling Multicultural: Decolonizing Affect Theory Colloquium, 2007*, Centre for Women’s and Gender Studies, UBC.

gives some provisional remarks on areas of interest to the project of “decolonizing affect theory.”

## Philosophy

In an essay published in 1995 concluding a volume titled *Emotions in Asian Thought* the comparativist philosopher, the late Robert Solomon, suggested the following:

It is not enough to empathize with people from a very different culture. One has to know the rules, the conditions, the mores, the local myths and popular expectations. One has to understand the society and not merely the emotion. (Solomon 267)

One of the turns in philosophy that has bearings on the considerations in this paper has been philosophy’s current engagement with the sciences and the biological bases for what were considered to be mental states. One notes that in neuro-physiological work there is increasing literature which argues that the nervous system changes in response to changing contexts so that we can no longer adhere confidently to the traditional division between nature and nurture: *either* corporeality *or* culture. For example, psychiatrist Brian Wexler pursues such a proposal in *Brain and Culture* where he concludes that “[i]n our time of mixing and interpenetration of cultures, late maturation of the frontal lobes increases the ability of young adults to incorporate features of a culture that is changed from without, and thereby widen the difference between themselves and their parents” (242). In her study on the transmission of affect Teresa Brennan starts from the neo-Darwinian assumption that transmission is effected genetically, and suggests, for example, that “The extent to which the maternal environment interacts with the genetic variables in inheritance has been consistently underestimated” (91).<sup>4</sup> We note in passing that adherents of Sylvan Tomkins’ work and his influential

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<sup>4</sup> The figures of speech Brennan employs are telling ones: “Rather than the generational line of inheritance (the vertical line of history), the transmission of affect, conceptually, presupposes a horizontal line of transmission: the *line of the heart*” (Brennan 75, my emphasis). Brennan continues her exploration of this ubiquitous figure of the heart when she discusses what she terms the “sealing of the heart” (Brennan 113).

taxonomy of the affects<sup>5</sup> may have overlooked that he too invokes the importance of cultural aspects:

We will argue that a complete science of man must focus not only on the causal mechanisms underlying cognition, affect and action, but also of the cultural *products* of man. Man is to be found as much in his language, his art, in his science, in his economic, political and social institutions, as he is to be found in his cerebrum, in his nervous system, and his genes. We would urge that the biopsychological mechanisms and the social products be integrated into a science of man and not polarized as competitors for the attention of psychology. (Tomkins, "Ideology and Affect" 109)

### Cultural Anthropology

If we listen to cultural anthropologists, the idea of universal expressions for the emotions is far less certain and in fact many would deem it to be conceptually impossible. Indeed, the very notion of cultural universality appears to be inconceivable for cultural anthropology's core definition, since any cultural articulations are embedded in specific contexts. Catherine Lutz's and Geoffrey White's review essay for the *Annual Review of Anthropology* produced in 1986, more than 20 years ago, sets out a framework that is still remarkably pertinent:

One of those tensions is between universalist, positivist approaches and relativist, interpretive ones. . . . Those concerned with cross-cultural regularities in emotion bring with them an interest in the ethological and evolutionary, the psychodynamic, commonsense naturalism, and in language universals. Those concerned primarily with the social and cultural construction of emotion draw on a number of different traditions, including the ethnopsychological, the social structural, the linguistic, and the development. . . . (406)

It seems we are still caught between the universalists and the relativists, a binary that is echoed as well in the introduction to the recent collection *Mixed Emotions* (Milton & Svasek).

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<sup>5</sup> See particularly the volume *Shame and Its Sisters*.

Arjun Appadurai's 1990 essay on praise in Hindu culture, ranging from the divine to the everyday (e.g. begging) is illuminating, particularly so in respect to the inner and outer forms of what he terms "emotion talk." According to Appadurai such distinctions in the Anglophone world are "anchored in the New Testament, where, for the first time in Western history, a major normative claim was made about the separability of act and actor, intention and action, 'inner states' and 'outer forms'" (93). He goes on to argue that what he terms this "topography of the self" is parochial and specifically Western and that room needs to be made for *alternative* topographies of the self. Viewing the emotions as discursive public forms that create what he terms "communities of sentiment," Appadurai explores various forms of praise to illustrate such alternatives. It is evident that he pays particular attention to discursive formations and supports the specific terrains of language and translation across languages as central to these investigations.

The UBC workshop group included Anand Pandian, a cultural anthropologist, and this field has contributed substantially to de-familiarizing European traditions.<sup>6</sup> Pandian traces the trope of "cultivation as a living language of experience, circling between the material work of the cultivator and the metaphorical imagination of a cultivated heart" (Pandian, "Let the Water for the Paddy also Irrigate the Grass"). In the work he shared with us<sup>7</sup> he looked particularly at the "figurative topographies of sentiment and sympathy sketched in a genre of funerary elegy (*oppu*) in south India" (Pandian, "Let the Water for the Paddy also Irrigate the Grass"). Closely attending to the language by means of which Tamil women both express and explain their grief, he "explores prospects of healing elaborated through an imagined resonance between a wounded heart and inhabited landscape: between an interior condition of loss, and a lived environment of sympathetic echo" (Pandian, "Let the Water for the Paddy also Irrigate the Grass").

A trope which runs through his work as an example of the link he is making between agriculture and moral cultivation is the notion of the "irrigated" heart where water functions as the sign of the ultimate gift (the one which requires no return and reminds one of Derrida's influential concept of hospitality). Water, whether as dam, labour-intensive irrigation channels, or the laments of the Kallar women who aim to draw out the tears of others, can be read as a sign of the workings of (postcolonial) collective affect. Pandian also draws on Dipesh

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<sup>6</sup> One thinks here, for example, of Gananath Obeyesekere's ground-breaking volume *The Work of Culture*.

<sup>7</sup> The work from which he cited is part of his forthcoming publication *Crooked Stalks: Cultivating Virtue in South India* (New York: Duke UP, 2009).

Chakrabarty's analysis of the parallel Bengali concept of the "exemplary" or "compassionate heart" (*hridaya*).<sup>8</sup>

While the recurrent figure of the heart suggests interiority of a certain kind, traditionally, the face is considered the privileged site of affect studies and this connects, for example, to the classical passions and the medieval humours; it doesn't take an effort of imagination to uncover *other* taxonomies of the face than western ones.<sup>9</sup> For instance, there is the Sanskrit tradition of *rasa/bhava* as exemplified in dance (see Appendix)<sup>10</sup> and there are the Noh masks which contemporary Butoh dance draws upon. Masks in turn suggest other invocations of affect in indigenous societies, for example, the rich tradition of Canadian North West coast First Nations art. But to what degree is there overlap between these systems and to what extent can we indicate these without over-simplifying their contexts and possibly occluding incommensurable differences?

While the face remains the privileged site for affect and suggests a decipherable externality one can argue as well that it too is not directly accessible and might be described as hiding more than it reveals; it is also the site most subject to "engineering" as Thrift has pointed out. Consider also Judith Butler's reference to Levinas on the "face" in her response to 9/11, *Precarious Life*. Butler analyses the "face" as both humanizing and serving to de-humanize the "other," whether in terms of the purported "face of evil" (Osama) or the "spoils of war" (Afghani women throwing off their burkas before the western media). Ultimately the focus on the face is important in making clear the limits of representation, that is, "the face does not represent anything, in the sense that it fails to capture and deliver that to which it refers" (Butler 144). Outside the familiar distortions of media representations, an adjacent and as deliberative (in the rhetorical sense) area is that of the arts. Thrift mentions the work of Bill Viola and his extraordinary project on

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<sup>8</sup> See Chakrabarty Ch. 5. This concept in turn is invoked in recent attempts (Khanna among others) to examine Freud's relationship to India, mediated in part by Girindrasekhar Bose, the founder of the Indian Psychoanalytical Society in Calcutta in 1922 (Hartnack 82). Worth mentioning as well is an interesting point which surfaced in a discussion I was having recently at UCLA. It appears that in both Arabic and Chinese traditions it is the liver rather than the heart that is typically considered to be the seat of the emotions. Clearly this requires more research.

<sup>9</sup> I noted with interest a recent report in the daily paper that some people are 'face-blind,' that is, cannot recognise faces and that the term for this genetic dysfunction is prosopagnosia (*Globe & Mail*, June 16, 2006, Social Studies A20).

<sup>10</sup> As part of the UBC workshop we were fortunate to have the participation of Sitara Thobani, an anthropology student and performer trained in the Orissi tradition.

*The Passions* that draws on medieval Western pictorial iconography. Here is Viola in relation to his project:

During the entire time that I was at the Getty my father was dying slowly, inexorably. . . . While he was still alive but fading, I was at The Art Institute of Chicago for a planning meeting about an upcoming show, and I walked into the gallery of fifteenth-century paintings. There was Dieric Bout's *Crying Madonna* all by herself, eyes swollen and red in the excruciating detail of the Northern painters' hard-core realism, with tears streaming down her face. I began sobbing uncontrollably. I couldn't stop.

Later I realized what had happened. A kind of feedback loop had formed, a visceral/emotional circuit had been completed, and like a mirror, we were both crying—the painting and me . . . and the function of an artwork changed dramatically for me at that moment. My training in art school was all about responding to artworks from an intellectual, perceptual, or cultural way—in other words as a viewer, not a participant. . . . (198)

### **Language & Translation**

As Robert Solomon states, “it is worth noting the extent to which even our supposedly most scientific theories are founded on metaphors” (282). In their groundbreaking collection *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, anthropologists Catherine Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod distinguish between discourse *on* emotions and emotional discourse (10) and emphasize as well the importance of historicizing emotions, to explore whether they change over time (5). Focusing on the term “discourse” they argue that it corresponds to “parole” in Saussure's *langue/parole* formulation i.e. “language as spoken and used” (*parole*) rather than its abstract coding (*langue*).

Since my own work in this area began with the affective tensions relating to those caught up in having to change languages, it was very useful to discover the work of Australian-based linguist Anna Wierzbicka. For example, her critique of Martha Nussbaum's *Upheavals of Thought* contains a cogent discussion of the phrase “uncontrollable weeping” and this is particularly pertinent in relation to the Viola example and to Darwin's chapter “Special Expressions of Man: Suffering and

Weeping” (from his *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*).<sup>11</sup> Darwin comments about weeping: “With the civilized nations of Europe there is much difference in the frequency of weeping. Englishmen rarely cry, except under the pressure of the acutest grief . . . ” (157) and “a frequently repeated effort to restrain weeping, in association with certain states of the mind, does much in checking the habit” (158). Here is Wierzbicka on Nussbaum:

What she does not seem to recognize is that language is the primary vehicle for the transmission, and indeed operation, of cultural norms. . . . For example, when she describes her own grief at the scene of her mother’s death, she says, “I wept uncontrollably” (120). Some Anglo-Americans may weep uncontrollably in certain circumstances and some may not, but they are all familiar with the phrase to *weep uncontrollably*, which carries with it the implication that people might *want* to control their emotion and their weeping. In other languages (e.g. in Polish) there are no phrases corresponding with to weep uncontrollably because there is no shared assumption embedded in the language itself that people can be expected to want to control their weeping and their emotion at a death scene. (583-84)

Given these comments it is clear that translation theory is at the heart of these inter- or cross-cultural analyses; the interest lies in the details, the ways in which the specific linguistic terms, which always mediate our account of these processes, can never simply be mapped onto each other. This brings us once again to the Sanskrit taxonomy of *rasa/bhava*. June McDaniel, a scholar of religious studies, offers the following definition:

In the Sanskrit and Bengali languages, there is no exact term for emotion. The term used most frequently for it is *bhava* or *anubhava* (the physical expression of the state of *bhava*) . . . is a way of being, a sense of identity which may be individual or shared. It is believed in many of the Bengali devotional traditions that religious ecstasies can create waves of *bhava* (*bhava-taranga*), which can spread through crowds of people. . . . (41-42)

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<sup>11</sup> Participants read Darwin’s chapter for the second Affect workshop held in Sydney, Australia in June, 2008.

And as we learnt from Pandian's work in the first workshop, the heart (*hridaya*) remains the "inner seat of feeling" (McDaniel 43). Moving from *bhava* to *rasa*, "The sentiment of *rasa* is a transformation of the basic, more "concrete" emotion of *bhava*. The term *rasa* means sap, juice, liquid, essence, and taste, and is often translated as flavor, relish, mood, and sentiment. . . . When emotions become *rasas*, they may be viewed as art objects, and combined in aesthetic fashion" (McDaniel 47). In this aesthetic dimension there is a separation from the emotion: "In *bhava*, the person experiences emotions directly; while in *rasa*, he or she empathizes and observes the emotion and situation, feeling *as if* he felt the emotion but not being involved directly enough to feel it directly" (McDaniel 47). It is this pedagogical distance and its link to the aesthetic that is of particular interest. There is an example of it described in a talk by cultural anthropologist Kalpana Ram describing a diasporic audience at a dance performance in Australia:

The more transportable cultural practices such as music and dance provide a kind of housing, of being in place. In them, first generation immigrants do not simply remember but *relive* the patterning and coherence provided by the earliest "passionate liaisons" with which our bodies intertwine with their world. Spectatorship is sufficient to enact this effect, provided we rid spectatorship of its ocular-centred connotations, and expand it to include the listening, the keeping of time with hands with the variable rhythms of the *tala*, the appreciative shaking of the head and verbal noises of encouragement with which audiences of Indian concerts engage with the performance. At a performance of Malavika Sarukkai in 2006, the family behind me was actively guessing the raga from the first overture of the flute, humming the raga and singing a few songs in that raga even before the formal announcement. Special emotions flowed at the exploration of Yashoda and Krishna, and there was a standing ovation at the end. By contrast, the audience in Chennai, south India, at which I also watched Malavika perform only a few months earlier, was enthusiastic but controlled in its appreciation. (Ram, "Diasporic experience, Indian modernity/Nationalism, Historical time" 6-7)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In an earlier analysis of this topic Ram theorizes such manifestations of 'structures of affect,' as reminiscent of "the fetishistic phantom limb in Merleau-Ponty's account" (Ram, "Phantom

June McDaniel describes the “ladder of emotions” used in yogic practices (48) where a new person is ultimately created. This links as well to Appadurai’s suggestion cited above concerning new “topographies of the self” and it is this possibility for transformation that suggests productive further exploration. The idea of education in relation to affect or rather the conscious acknowledgement of affects as repositories of meaning that may be schooled is the direction Teresa Brennan’s book takes as well.<sup>13</sup>

### **Educating the “Heart”: Affect, Aesthetics, and Pedagogy**

Arjun Appadurai’s work brings together all the three areas this paper has explored: philosophy, cultural anthropology and language/translation. Like McDaniel he too distinguishes between the actor and the action. For example, in a discussion of the avoidance of the evil eye he states that the trick is to praise the accomplishment as though divorced from the actor (99). Appadurai also gives us more details concerning bhava/rasa which he sees as useful for constructing that alternative topography of the self. There are eight bhavas: love, mirth, grief, energy, terror, disgust, anger, and wonder:

In the poetic context each of these is transformed into a corresponding mood (rasa), a generalized, impersonal feeling capable of being understood by other persons in similar states. In drama, these moods are expressed in a publicly understood set of gestures, and both the dramatic performance and its critical analysis involve the appraisal of these gestures. (Appadurai 106)

Importantly, he turns to aesthetic theory, an exposition of Indian poetics, to clarify this process, citing the work of A. K. Ramanujan:

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Limbs: South Indian Dance and Immigrant Reifications of the Female Body”), a very productive analogy.

<sup>13</sup> The notion of aesthetics and affect as part of a pedagogical project was also at the centre of a recent workshop held at UBC on “Varieties of Empathy in Science, Art and Culture,” (October 2008) where the term ‘empathy’ was derived from its original German ‘Einfühlung’ and its embedding in nineteenth century German aestheticism. My thanks to Susan Lanzoni and Robert Brain for inviting me. See <<http://www.empathy.pwias.ubc.ca>>.

The actor, as in a Stanislavsky school, must study the physical stances and expressions that are functions and reflections of their mood, even glandular secretions of tears and contractions of the solar plexus: one feels grief because he weeps, joy because his face glows and his eyes dilate. It is a form of physical imagining. . . . The emotion produces tears and gestures; cannot the gestures reproduce the emotion? And the reader and the spectator in his turn goes through the incipient gestures and tensions in himself: the mood creates a condition in which the reader or spectator reconstitutes his own analogous private, incommunicable, and forgotten feelings into this impersonal expression. They are transmuted into the mood. This he enjoys, and thus he can enjoy, for example, grief. (Ramanujan 117-18)

This transmission of affect creates that “community of sentiment” to which Appadurai referred in an earlier quotation. Thus whereas the form is impersonal and aesthetic the mood it provokes in the recipient/spectator is deeply personal. It is also inevitably embedded in social contexts. For example, in his fascinating and lucid study, Daniel Gross sounds some cautionary notes concerning the social contexts within which emotions operate:

Simply put, the higher one’s social status, the more frequently one is subject to the offensive behaviour of others and, therefore, the more one can become angry. (69)

Emotions, whether in the context of eighteenth-century psychology or even our own popular psychology, must be read as markers of social distinction rather than just expressions of human nature essentially shared by all. (178)

Thus the degree to which one may be permitted to display emotion depends on one’s social status. However, as Pandian’s work shows, the notion of the “irrigated” or educated heart (drawing also on the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty) is not simply the preserve of the privileged classes. It can certainly be perceived as the project of generating empathy across many social groups.

In the final part of this paper heart and face come together in a contemporary film-maker’s response to 9/11.

### **Anne Marie Fleming's *Heart* (formerly "Blue Skies")**

Ann Marie Fleming is a Canadian film-maker who is best known for her imaginative documentary (it could also be termed a "mockumentary" since it parodies many of the markers of "authenticity" in the genre) of her great-grandfather (born in China in 1885) titled *The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam*. Her ancestor was a magician whose cosmopolitan company of artists travelled across the world between the two world wars.

It is difficult to describe this short film because its effects are so ambiguous and it generates the uncanny in devastating ways. One attempt could be: we hear crying and then have the close-up of a face to the degree that we cannot tell at this point whether the face is male or female. The crying continues for an excruciatingly long time but this is a very short film so in a sense it exposes us to "duration" because we have no end point for this exposure. The camera pulls back to reveal a man crying. There is a knock on the door and a woman enters. She then helps the man dress in what appears to be a costume. She coaxes the man to drink something and then leaves. He begins to make up his face, and we note that the face is of an ambiguous or hybrid phenotype, perhaps Eurasian. The screen goes dark and then lights up on a stage where the man, in a rather kitsch Chinese costume which includes a headdress of blinking lights, begins singing in a falsetto register (counter-tenor) the famous Irving Berlin song "Blue Skies":

I was blue, just as blue as I could be  
Every day was a cloudy day for me  
Then good luck came a-knocking at my door  
Skies were gray but they're not gray anymore

Blue skies  
Smiling at me  
Nothing but blue skies  
Do I see

Bluebirds  
Singing a song  
Nothing but bluebirds  
All day long

Never saw the sun shining so bright  
Never saw things going so right  
Noticing the days hurrying by  
When you're in love, my how they fly

Blue days  
All of them gone  
Nothing but blue skies  
From now on

[2]  
I should care if the wind blows east or west  
I should fret if the worst looks like the best  
I should mind if they say it can't be true  
I should smile, that's exactly what I do

At the end of the film we realise from the final credits that it is a response to 9/11.

When one views this short film for the first time on a large screen in the dark it is quite easy to respond empathetically to the crying, in other words, it evokes the “feedback loop” or “visceral/emotional circuit,” described by Viola. Analytical responses question what kind of affect is being transmitted in this opening sequence. Responses can also involve embarrassment rather than the release of the empathetic sorrow Viola describes. Such elements are mediated by the intermediary “concern” displayed by the solicitous woman (Dresser? Partner? Angel?). The viewer is puzzled about the nature of the ritual/rite of drinking. This is paralleled simultaneously by the enigma of the body in terms of racialization, suggested by costume as much as by phenotype. When the actor begins to sing the familiar pop song there is a rush of emotion for some of us, at least those who know this whole text is a response to 9/11 (which we don't really learn until the final frame). But the precise nature of the empathy is difficult to define. As simply creating a response to 9/11 it maps unspecified grief in an enigmatic narrative tableau. The performer is both deeply invested in the ritual of preparing for the performance and appears somewhat absurd when the preparation culminates in the campy song. And yet he is also oddly moving: the affected (in the sense of staged) performance is also affecting. Like many great sentimental texts it arguably risks but eludes bathos.

Like Pandian's funerary laments it too invokes a sodden heart where everyone's losses are remembered by means of clichés that somehow regain a kind of innocence, momentarily.

These questions and examples are designed to support the need for posing the question: To what extent can we think meaningfully about affect outside the concepts and terms of European psychoanalysis? The project of "decolonizing affect theory" is in its infancy but the hope is that it will generate more nuanced work on affect theory.

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## Appendix

### Rasas: Aesthetic Affect (Sanskrit Tradition)

The purpose of poetry is usually described as emotive; the emotion aroused, however, is not the pity and terror of Aristotle, but a calmer experience, an aesthetic sensation based on feeling lifted to such a plane that grief is not felt as grief, and love no longer as love—according to one definition "impersonalized and ineffable aesthetic enjoyment from which every trace of its component. . . material is obliterated." The basic rasas or "flavours" from which this aesthetic experience should arise are usually classified as eight.

1) Srngara (eros,love), 2) Hasya (comic), 3) Karuna (pathos), 4) Raudra (fury), 5) Vira (heroic), 6) Bhayanaka (fear), 7) Bibhatsa (odious) and 8) Adbhuta (marvellous), 9) A ninth rasa called Santa (tranquil) appears in later criticism. These rasas are produced by determinants or causes (vibhavas), consequences or results

(anubhavas) and transitory emotions (vyabharibhavas) that arouse the permanent emotions (sthayibhavas).

The eight sthayibhavas are:

1) Rati (love, pleasure or delight), 2) Hasa (laughter), 3) Soka (sorrow), 4) Krodha (anger), 5) Utsaha (energy), 6) Bhaya (fear), 7) Jugupsa (disgust), 8) Vismaya (astonishment), and 9) Nirveda (detachment).

There are thirty-three transitory moods:

1) Nirveda (detachment), 2) Glani (fatigue), 3) Sanka (apprehension), 4) Augrya (cruelty) 5) Dainya (depression), 6) Asuya (envy), 7) Mada (intoxication), 8) Srama (exertion), 9) Cinta (anxiety), 10) Dhrti (resolution), 11) Smrti (recollection), 12) Vrida (modesty), 13) Moha (Delusion), 14) Alasya (idleness), 15) Capalya (fickleness), 16) Harsa (joy), 17) Amarsa (indignation), 18) Visada (despair), 19) Apasmara (forgetful), 20) Jadata (stupor), 21) Vitarka (deliberation), 22) Supta (dreaming), 23) Autsukya (eagerness), 24) Avahittha (dissimulation), 25) Mati (inclination), 26) Vivodha (awakening), 27) Vyadhi (sickness), 28) Unmada (insanity), 29) Garva (arrogance), 30) Avega (agitation), 31) Mrti (death), 32) Trasa (fright), 33) Nidra (sleep).

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