



## **Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotions**

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# Against Constructionism

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## The Historical Ethnography of Emotions<sup>1</sup>

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by William M. Reddy

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A coherent account of emotional change must find a dynamic, a vector of alteration, outside the discursive structures and normative practices that have monopolized ethnographic attention in research on affect. But this dynamic can be found in the very character of emotional expression. Emotion talk and emotional gestures are not well characterized by the notion of "discourse" derived from the poststructuralist theories of Foucault or by that of "practice" derived from the theoretical writings of Bourdieu, Giddens, and others. These concepts do not capture the two-way character of emotional utterances and acts, their unique capacity to alter what they "refer" to or what they "represent"—a capacity which makes them neither "constative" nor "performative" utterances but a third type of communicative utterance entirely, one that has never received adequate theoretical formulation. An attempt is made to formulate a framework for emotional utterances, and the framework is applied to a number of examples.

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1. The project that gave rise to this paper has been supported by a fellowship from the National Humanities Center and by a grant from the Arts and Sciences Research Council of Duke University. I am grateful to Sally Haslanger, Kristen Neuschel, and members of the Triangle French Studies Group, who read and commented on earlier drafts of this paper, and to colleagues Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn for helpful conversations and suggestions. At an earlier stage, numerous conversations with Shelly Rosaldo and Renato Rosaldo posed the problem of emotional constructionism for me in a pointed manner.

Ethnographic study of emotion has flourished in the past 20 years as part of the broad reaction in anthropology against the oversimplified views of practice and relationship that prevailed in an older conception of culture. Ethnographers who concentrate on the subject of affect often insist, however, that there is nothing to emotion beyond the local discursive structures through which it is figured and practiced. Others remain agnostic on this point, viewing the question of the "real" emotions that individuals feel as beyond their purview. These stances implicitly emphasize the power of the collective over the individual, even if they reject the idea of monolithic cultural patterns. Significantly, no ethnographer of emotions has attempted a historical account of changing emotional discourses or practices. A coherent account of emotional change must find a dynamic, a vector of alteration, outside the discursive structures and normative practices that have monopolized ethnographic attention.

But this dynamic can be found in the very character of emotional expression itself. Emotion talk and emotional gestures are not well characterized by the notion of "discourse" derived from the poststructuralist theories of Foucault or by that of "practice" derived from the theoretical writings of Bourdieu, Giddens, and others. These concepts do not capture the two-way character of emotional utterances and acts, their unique capacity to alter what they "refer" to or what they "represent"—a capacity which makes them neither "constative" nor "performative" utterances but a third type of communicative act entirely, one that has never received adequate theoretical formulation.

A proper understanding of the dynamic character of emotional gestures and utterances—their capacity to alter the states of the speakers from whom they derive—offers a starting point for a coherent, politically meaningful historical ethnography of emotions. The dynamic character of emotional utterances and gestures is a universal factor, central to the shaping of and alteration of emotion "discourse" in every context.

### The Persistent Dilemmas of Relativism

The absolute plasticity of the individual is a necessary implication of strong constructionist stances on questions of sexuality, ethnicity, and identity. Michel Foucault, beginning with *Discipline and Punishment* and continuing in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*, argued for a view of power so all-pervasive and so insidious in its operation that there was no refuge where the individual could say, "This is me, this is where the true self lives." Every space was subjected to disciplinary determination, so much so that the very experience of being a subject was, in Foucault's view, an outcome of power's discursive workings (see, e.g., Fraser 1989 for a critical appraisal; see also Reddy 1992). Foucault was not a relativist—he deplored this tyranny

of discourse—but, as he occasionally acknowledged, his position was inconsistent, for there was nothing in the name of which he could justify his disapproval. In his last works he had begun to distance himself from this extreme position (Foucault 1985). But it is important to recognize that his earlier notion of power does not involve the sway, the persuasive capacity, the authority, or the coercion exercised by one person over other persons. It is not, in this sense, a notion of power that has any Western pedigree; it has nothing to do with what we normally call “politics.” Nor does the type of resistance Foucault occasionally alludes to as a possibility represent anything resembling political action. Foucault is, in this sense, a relativist in all but name. He substituted “discourse” for what Anglo-American anthropologists in the 1970s were in the habit of calling “culture”; discourse is a more pliable concept, less constraining, able to comprehend greater diversity and looseness in social life, as well as change. However, it is no less relativistic and, in the end, can offer no clearer political vision than cultural relativism.

Another influential model widely used to replace older notions of culture is Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice, built around the concept of habitus. Like the notion of discourse, practice, in Bourdieu’s sense, is much looser than prior concepts of culture. The concept helped Bourdieu to understand the gap between what informants say to ethnographers and the actual shape of the actions they take. Explicit principle is never simply “applied” to social life, Bourdieu argues; instead, the complex qualifications and reformulations that intervene are themselves ethnography’s (and history’s) proper object of study. They are formed by an inarticulate sense of rightness and strategy (habitus) which cannot be communicated verbally. Bourdieu’s individual is not plastic, because he endows individuals with a desire to pursue advantage and a strategic sense that drives them constantly to sort out and reformulate situations and action plans. However, this pursuit of advantage must be regarded either as empty, the content being completely determined by cultural context, or else as predefined and therefore universal. In the former case, practice theory remains relativist and apolitical; in the latter, it may fall into the economist’s fallacy that advantage and interest are easily defined (in Western terms). This fallacy is present, although “corrected” in various ways, in Bourdieu’s (1979) notion of “cultural capital.”

Bourdieu’s marxist inclinations are apparent in the way he treats the individual, but practice theory has no inherent marxist implications. For example, Sherry Ortner’s (1989) use of practice theory to write a social history of Sherpa Buddhism is not a marxist interpretation; she endows Sherpa individuals with a drive for “legitimacy,” a goal that is rooted in local folklore, religion, and inheritance practices going back many centuries. Against the backdrop of this uniform (local) conception of the individual’s deepest desires, she is able to construct a coherent and compelling vision of social and religious change. Because the Sherpa individ-

ual’s makeup is locally determined, in her account, the larger political implications of this history are muted. Ortner underscores the fact that Sherpa actions and goals contributed to the shaping of British imperial influence in the region; the colonial subjects are not passive victims—an important political recognition. However, the changes that Sherpa society undergoes can be neither celebrated nor deplored from Ortner’s starting point, since they are the outgrowth of the pursuit of a goal—“legitimacy” in the Sherpa sense—that Ortner can neither approve nor condemn. This is a version of historical change in which internal contradictions produce tensions that are enhanced by altered exogenous variables (British incursion into the region) and then work themselves out. The changes themselves are not depicted in a politically meaningful way, since no judgment is offered about their effects.

In the debate over essentialism, feminist theorists have been struggling with a version of the same problem that has confronted anthropologists and cultural historians, and extreme relativism still arises as a conceptual necessity at certain junctures of this debate. “Essentialists” maintain that women are endowed with universal characteristics that distinguish them from men, characteristics in virtue of which they must, in justice, demand for themselves a very different place in society from that accorded them in the contemporary West. Antiessentialists insist that claiming special characteristics for women is perpetuating the same error that apologists for male domination have always made (for reviews of this dilemma, see Alcoff 1988, Riley 1988, Miller 1991, Haraway 1991, Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991). Woman’s difference has justified her disqualifications, antiessentialists note, and any argument based on difference can be turned against women. Moreover, women need to be freed from any and all expectations as to their “nature.” Any appeal to their reproductive powers or nurturing roles or emotional sensitivity only boxes women into expectations that frustrate efforts to achieve self-realization and full equality with men. But antiessentialism easily becomes a species of extreme relativism, in which there is a marked reluctance to assert anything at all about the individual. The argument that it is constraining to characterize women *as nurturing* or *as emotional* easily becomes an argument against characterizing women and men in any way. The political goal of liberating men and women from constraining expectations or assumptions can easily get lost in this refusal to characterize them, since, if individuals are entirely empty and wholly plastic, then there is nothing in virtue of which liberation is good.<sup>2</sup>

2. This dilemma is particularly evident in the efforts of Judith Butler (1987, 1990, 1993) to plumb the depths of sexual identity and to set aside the biases implicit in earlier, especially psychoanalytic and poststructuralist, theories of sexuality. I follow the argument of Nancy Fraser (1992) in calling for a theory that conceptualizes “political agents.”

## Emotional Constructionism as a Form of Relativism

These dilemmas have come into focus recently, and in a very compelling and important way, in a number of ethnographies of emotion (Abu-Lughod 1986, Lutz 1988, Grima 1992; see also papers collected in Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990 and the important earlier work by Rosaldo 1980, 1984). These studies have drawn inspiration from Foucault's notion of discourse, Bourdieu's concept of practice, and feminist critiques of essentialism. In each case the ethnographer, a woman, carried out fieldwork in an unusual way; each was integrated into a local household as a woman and shared in the constraints on movement and interaction locally imposed on women. Because of this integration, Abu-Lughod and Grima, working in Muslim societies, had access to "private" female expression and practice that previous male ethnographers had been barred from or considered unimportant. Lutz, working on a Pacific atoll, found no public-private divide in expressing emotion, contrary to both Western and Muslim notions of privacy and propriety.

All three ethnographers espouse a strong constructionist view of emotions and an antiessentialist view of female identity. For these ethnographers, there is no limit to the extent to which personal feelings are socially, locally, culturally constructed. For Grima, "that emotion is culture echoes throughout the [ethnographic] literature" on emotions (p. 6). Abu-Lughod (1990) cites with approval Rosaldo's (1984:147) insistence that individual emotional life is "overwhelmingly" shaped by culture, and she deplores the facile suppositions implicit in the talk-show host's question "How did you feel?" This kind of question, she argues, trains people to acquire an entirely arbitrary and illusory "hermeneutics of feeling" (1990:24–25). For Abu-Lughod (1991), there is no such thing as culture, only local particular constructions. Yet these localized and fragmentary constructions are enormously powerful; they fully determine identity and experience down to the most intimate, most fleeting impulses of feeling. In the Bedouin community she studied, even off-hand fragments of poetry recited privately to express a sense of personal anguish are structurally constrained in their entirety. She is willing to suggest (1986) that such expressions may point to the possibility of a better way of life, but she is not prepared to take up this point as a theme for theoretical or methodological elaboration. Lutz (1988) offers an insightful critique of Western social scientific conceptions of emotion (which have also been critiqued usefully by Oatley 1992 and Gergen 1995) and notes how these have reflected and perpetuated our own narrow conceptions of the relation between public and private, objective and subjective, male and female. Her analysis of life on Ifaluk reveals a society in which these distinctions would seem odd and arbitrary, in which emotions are the main guide to and justification for public speech and moral action. Follow-

ing Foucault, she insists (1990) that U.S. women's way of speaking about efforts to control their emotions actually create those emotions.<sup>3</sup>

These outstanding contributions to the growing field of the anthropology of emotion are notable for their adamant refusal to allow for any physiological, psychological, or other universal determinant or influence in emotional life. Many other contributions to this field remain neutral or agnostic about the relation between constructed and discursive emotional expression and actual emotional experience. Fred Myers proposes to "leave open" (1986:105) the relation between culturally constructed emotions and individual psychological dynamics. Simultaneously, he wishes to avoid examining the question whether an actor "really" feels emotions that are culturally appropriate in given circumstances (1986:106–7). Schieffelin uses the phrase "to a significant extent" (1985:169) when speaking of the influence of social construction on emotions. Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo (1990:164) stipulate that they "focus on social meanings and relationships, together with their implications for handling conflict, rather than on subjective or personal meanings" (for further discussion, see Besnier 1990:430). Whether such epistemological caution is more appropriate than the strong stand of Grima, Lutz, and Abu-Lughod is not the real point, however. The strong constructionist stand is one that views the individual as fully plastic, and it is one that, as a result, cannot provide grounds for a political critique of any given construction. Grima (1992:163–64) condemns the "oppression" of women in Paxtun society, which is firmly in the grip of a male-centered "gerontocracy"; she explains the firmness of this grip by noting that female identity and survival are entirely wrapped up in relationships to males. However, if, as she asserts, "emotion is culture," then we must accept that those women who *perform* no emotional need to free themselves from this oppression *have* no need to do so. One cannot have it both ways. Unless one specifies the grounds—by saying what in fact universally characterizes the individual (which both the strong constructionists and the agnostics wish to avoid doing)—one cannot have a politics of emotion or a meaningful history of emotion.

There is, moreover, troubling evidence against the strong constructionist point of view from other ethnographies of emotion—evidence suggesting that individual emotional life has a dynamic character and that specific communities strive to shape, contain, and channel (not construct) emotional expression. Brenneis's (1990) work on Fijians of Indian descent and White's (1990a, b) study of A'ara speakers' "disentangling" practices both focus on methods employed to encourage expression of hidden or pent-up negative feelings that threaten community solidarity and peace (see also Watson-Gegeo and

3. "The cultural construction of women's emotion can thus be viewed not as the repression or suppression of emotion in men (as many lay people, therapists, and other commentators argue) but as the creation of emotion in women" (Lutz 1990:87).

White's [1990] interesting anthology dealing with widespread Pacific practices of this nature). Besnier (1995) emphasizes the striking contrast between the effusive emotional style of letters written by Nukulaelae Islanders and their reserved style in person; he also remarks on the rarity of anger in letters in comparison with personal oral communication. Both contrasts point to an effort to organize or orchestrate rather than construct emotion. Appadurai (1990) and Obeyesekere (1985) make sense of certain South Asian practices by treating them as efforts to bring about changes in rather than constructing feeling states, as does Wikan's (1989, 1990) work on Bali (see also Rosaldo 1989). Cognitive anthropologists have found that individuals respond to emotion-charged cultural "schemas," such as romantic love or class consciousness, in highly divergent ways, depending upon context and personality; this diversity points to underlying emotional proclivities that such schemas may or may not engage (Holland 1992, Strauss 1992). Lutz's work could be read as showing the existence of similar dynamic features in Ifaluk practices of negotiating conflict. The studies by Grima and Abu-Lughod indicate, as do many other studies (e.g., Good and Good 1988, Lavie 1990), that Muslim societies display a strong normative bias in favor of feelings of suffering and grief and treat joy and desire not as nonexistent but as dangerous and in need of rigid governance or, where governance breaks down, concealment. There is abundant evidence that the concept of emotion in the West has for centuries been associated with practices aimed at eliciting hidden emotion or else maintaining its invisibility (see, e.g., Daumas 1996; Denby 1994; Pinch 1995; Reddy 1993, 1994, 1997; Stearns and Stearns 1986). Many psychologists assert that there are only a few basic varieties of emotions; they certainly have good evidence that autonomic nervous system reactions and facial expressions come in a few basic varieties across the globe, with an apparent genetic basis (Ekman 1982, Ekman and Davidson 1994; but see the important caveats of Barrett 1993 and the argument of Ortony and Turner 1990).

Historians working within what has been called the "new cultural history," especially those concerned with the history of sexuality and gender identities, have confronted a very similar conundrum. Lyndal Roper (1994) has eloquently pointed out the weaknesses of extreme historicism (the historian's equivalent of cultural relativism) in the interpretation of early modern European history, but her argument could apply to new cultural history wherever it is practiced. In the historicist approach, she argues, "The means we use to interpret the society also allow us to shunt off all that puzzles us about early modern society into the realm of the 'pre-modern'" (1994:111). In Roper's view, the fact that a distinction (such as gender) "looks different in different historical periods does not show that it is entirely contingent" (p. 16), and, she concludes, "both social constructionism and linguistic constructionism short-circuited the realm between language and subjectivity, as

if there were no space here to be bridged." While these critical remarks seem very much on target, Roper's extensive dependence on the complex apparatus of psychoanalysis to help understand what lies within this (as she calls it) "psychic" space between language and subjectivity seems fraught with problems. Not least of these is the difficulty posed by the very notion of the "psychic," which, as critiques by Lutz (1988) and others suggest, in transforming thought and feeling into objects of diagnosis, depends on a very loaded, ethnocentric (and recent) Western tradition of social science.

It is noteworthy that, while historical ethnography and the ethnography of emotions have both flourished in the past two decades, there continues to be a gap between them that no one has tried to bridge. White (1991) has moved in the right direction, in a study aimed at sounding individual emotional reactions (in the present) to popular notions of history in the Solomon Islands. However, this is still a far cry from a history of feelings. Roper's dependence on psychoanalysis, for all its drawbacks, adds weight to the conclusion that no meaningful history of emotions is possible from a strong constructionist position.

### Bridging the Space between Language (Practice) and Feeling

Here I wish to propose a solution to this political dilemma, which is at the same time a dilemma about conceptualizing history and cultural difference. I propose to find within the very plasticity of the individual grounds for making universal assertions that can motivate ethnographic and historical analysis that is politically meaningful. Grounding universal claims in emotional life rather than in identity, gender, culture, or discourse sidesteps the thorny questions that have recently formed insurmountable stumbling blocks to any universalism or humanism. To say something about the inherent character of emotions offers a way out, a basis for political judgment that is not a *petitio principii*.

The dilemma of emotional constructionism might be reformulated in the following manner: The Western ethnic view (including that of expert social science) of statements about emotions is that they are descriptive in character or, in J. L. Austin's terms, "constative." The strong constructionist view of Grima, Lutz, and Abu-Lughod might be seen as an insistence that statements about emotions are "performative" in Austin's sense. Just as saying "I do" at a wedding *is* to wed, so to say "I am angry" is, in the constructionist view, to *be* angry. To perform anger, sadness, fear, shame, is to be angry, sad, fearful, ashamed. Grima (1992:7), for example, defines emotion as a combination of behavior and expectations, denying that there is any "inner" residuum on which they are based. Abu-Lughod says that it is better "to examine discourses rather than their putative referents" (1990:28). I would argue that both

views are mistaken and that statements about emotions are neither descriptive (constative) nor performative—they neither adequately represent nor construct (perform) emotions. An emotion statement is not, as Austin suggested, a “mere report” (1975:78–79). It is an effort by the speaker to offer an interpretation of something that is observable to no other actor. Such an effort is essential to social life, an inescapable facet of one’s identity, one’s relationships, one’s prospects. As such, it has a direct impact on the feelings in question. If asked the question “Do you feel angry?” a person may genuinely feel *more* angry in answering yes, *less* angry in answering no. A common strategy in psychological studies of emotion and mood is to induce emotions in subjects by having them read statements such as “I am joyful” or “I am sad.” Such reading exercises dependably produce effects in the subjects consonant with the mood or emotion invoked, as do exercises in which subjects are instructed to adopt certain facial expressions (see, e.g., Rholes, Riskind, and Lane 1987 and, for a general review of such research, Laird 1987; on inducing affect with facial movements, see Ekman, Levenson, and Friesen 1983). Many other effects are possible, including the opposite: expressing a feeling can easily result in its rapid dissipation. Stable patterns of such statements, repeated over years, have very profound, shaping effects on one’s whole emotional makeup.

I propose to call emotion statements such as these, in which the statement’s referent changes by virtue of the statement, “emotives.” Performative utterances, by the way in which they refer to themselves, actually do things to the world. In the statement “I accept your nomination,” the verb “accept,” used in this way, refers to or names the statement in which it appears, making the statement an acceptance. The acceptance, as an act of the speaker, changes the world in a way that a descriptive statement cannot, because it makes the speaker into a nominee. An emotive utterance, unlike a performative, is not self-referential. When someone says, “I am angry,” the anger is not the utterance—not in the way that, in “I accept,” “accept” is the acceptance. An emotive statement seems at first glance to have a real external referent, to be descriptive or constative. On closer inspection, however, one recognizes that the “external referent” that an emotive appears to point at is not passive in the formulation of the emotive, and it emerges from the act of uttering in a changed state. Emotives are influenced directly by and alter what they “refer” to. Thus, emotives are similar to performatives (and differ from constatives) in that emotives do things to the world. Emotives are themselves instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying emotions. There is an “inner” dimension to emotion, but it is never merely “represented” by statements or actions. It is the necessary (relative) failure of all efforts to represent feeling that makes for (and sets limits on) our plasticity. Many ways of expressing feeling work equally well (poorly); all fail to some degree. It is here, rather than in some putative set of genetically programmed

“basic” emotions, that a universal conception of the person, one with political relevance, can be founded.

## Emotives and Poststructuralism

This concept of emotives builds on poststructuralist insights about language but goes beyond them.

In the first place, the existence of emotions is not dependent upon the accuracy of one or more Western notions of intentionality or of the person, which poststructuralists have widely and very successfully attacked. The existence of emotions is not dependent on the accuracy, either, of Western conceptions of what emotions are. Ethnographic research has repeatedly demonstrated the narrowness and partiality of this family of Western conceptions, a narrowness and partiality closely associated with the notions of intention that poststructuralism rejects. But it has also repeatedly confirmed the existence of lexicons and practices significantly similar to those Westerners associate with emotions (see, e.g., Manson, Shore, and Bloom 1985, Heider 1991). On the basis of this research, emotions cannot be regarded—as they have been in the West—as a residual, somatic, antirational domain of conscious life whose turbulence is a constant threat to the formulation of clear intentions. Instead, I argue, they must be regarded as the very location of the capacity to embrace, revise, or reject cultural or discursive structures of whatever kind.<sup>4</sup>

Emotions are the real world-anchor of signs. To restate this in poststructuralist terms, there is a feeling that goes with every sign; emotion generates *parole* against the backdrop of *langue*. Philosophers and researchers have not been able to find language’s anchor in the world when regarding signs or language as referring or pointing to a world and have wrongly concluded that signs and language must therefore float free of any possible world. But the world they belong to is the world in which feelings occur, in which utterances and texts grow directly out of feelings. One does not need a questionable Western-style subject to provide the link between them.

An emotive utterance is not self-referential like a performative but claims by definition to refer to something close to its origin, to its own world-anchor. Why does this kind of reference not fail, just as all other kinds of reference to a “world” that is not already signs fail? The answer is that it does fail. The emotive effect derives from the failure. If the emotive did not fail, it would be a “mere report,” an accurate representation. A state-

4. This assertion depends on a broad definition of emotion that cannot be fully explored here but that draws on the views of psychologists such as Laird (1987), Oatley (1992), and Averill (1994), who regard emotions as a form of, or aspects of, thought or cognition, and of philosophers such as Solomon (1984, 1992), De Sousa (1987), and Greenspan (1988), who argue that emotion represents a form of judgment that cannot be readily distinguished from thought or rationality.

ment about how one feels is always a failure to one degree or another; like a performative it is neither true nor false. Emotives constitute a kind of pledge that alters, a kind of getting-through of something nonverbal into the verbal domain that could never be called an equivalence or a representation. The very failure of representation is recognized and brings an emotional response itself; this response is part of the emotive effect. This is true whether one's "intention" is to speak the "truth" about one's feelings or not. This problematic link between emotive and emotion, this dilemma, is our activity as a person. One might say that, just as a performative can be happy or unhappy, an emotive brings emotional effects appropriate to its content or effects that differ markedly from its content. If it does bring appropriate effects, then the emotive, in a Western context, might be said to be "sincere"; if it does not, the emotive may be claimed, after the fact, to be hypocrisy, an evasion, a mistake, a projection, or a denial. But all of these characterizations—including the notion of sincerity—are problematic, themselves forms of failed reference.

A proper understanding of emotive utterances undermines Derrida's critique of "presence," because presence can be reconceptualized as the ongoing effort to cope with emotive failure. It undermines Foucault's concept of discourse as well, because emotive alteration of feelings sets a limit on discursive construction and becomes the hidden subject of all discourse. The concept of emotives is compatible with Habermas's critique of poststructuralists on the grounds that their theory involves them in a "performative contradiction"—because they appear to speak and write with the *intention* of persuading us there are *no* intentions. However, the concept of emotives also points toward a modification of Habermas's notion of communicative rationality, since in formulating emotives speakers are trying to communicate with themselves as much as with others.<sup>5</sup>

## Emotives, Repression, and Cultural Styles

The concept of emotives can draw support from recent reformulations of the notion of repression. The question whether repression really occurs has inspired debate among psychologists for decades. There has been a recent convergence among contending views, however, that offers support for a reformulated view of repression consistent with the concept of emotives being elaborated here. The convergence can be seen in the relatively large area of agreement that unites a prominent defender of the concept of repression and one of its persistent critics.

In a recent review, David S. Holmes (1990) argues that there is no laboratory evidence to support the existence of repression, despite sustained efforts over the past 60

years to find empirical proof of its operation. Holmes notes that psychotherapists viewing videotapes of therapy sessions often disagree as to when repression is occurring or how its operation is effectuated. Holmes concedes willingly that laboratory research has yielded abundant evidence of "selectivity in perception and recall" (p. 97) and readily accepts the existence of "denial," a related process which he defines as a conscious decision to ignore and forget (p. 86). These concessions are substantial. It is only because repression is deemed to be an unconscious mechanism that laboratory studies have failed to turn up conclusive evidence of it. Matthew Erdelyi (1990), however, argues that there is no bar in psychoanalytic theory to viewing repression as resulting from a conscious decision to forget. Memory research—Holmes and Erdelyi agree—has identified an array of mechanisms available for use in conscious suppression of unpleasant thoughts or feelings or memories. Such conscious suppression—any act of conscious "denial," in Holmes's sense—may therefore, in Erdelyi's view, be considered an instance of "repression." (Nor is there, he remarks, any reason that a person cannot, in a second stage, consciously decide to forget having consciously decided to forget something.) "If repression (defensive or otherwise) can be conscious, then suddenly it becomes an obvious and ubiquitous device" (Erdelyi 1990:14). Erdelyi's own research on memory shows that amnesia can result from a conscious decision not to think about certain material and also that this amnesia can be largely undone by a subsequent decision to recall it followed by sustained effort over a number of days. Thus, despite considerable disagreement among psychologists, cognitive and memory research has yielded findings that easily allow the reformulation of a concept of repression.

By some models of consciousness, such as Dennett's (1991) "multiple drafts" model, the distinction between conscious and unconscious is never a sharp one in any case. Any report a person might make about an inner state is, by such a model, only one of a number of incomplete "drafts" that contend for focus. The argument here is that explicit emotive statements such as "I am not angry" are instances of such drafts. Feelings involve, at once, action orientations and the unformulated "thick" thinking that bonds contending drafts together.<sup>6</sup> They are summation states, a background against which focal discursive structures emerge.

To characterize such summation states is extremely difficult; in general actors are compelled to fall back on conventional expectations about appropriate emotions. In addition, there is so much at stake in vital relationships that emotives often have the status of contractual commitments. ("I feel like going to a movie." "He frightens me.") These expectations and commitments do not involve mere "display rules," as Ekman (1980, 1982) and others contend, but neither do they "create" emotions out of whole cloth as the strong constructionists would have it. That simply asking subjects to read

5. On communicating with oneself, see Johnson-Laird and Oatley (1989), Dennett (1991), on Habermas's critique of poststructuralism, see Matusik (1989); see also Reddy (1992).

6. The term "thick" here is used following Geertz (1973).



emotives from cards produces effects in them consonant with the emotions invoked suggests that intensification of the emotional state “described” may be emotives’ most common effect. But it is far from being the only one. When intensification works, it may be viewed as an act of “repression” with regard to alternative or opposite feelings (and their corresponding “drafts” of emotives).

The inadequacy of conventional emotives to characterize the complex summation states they “describe” can be covered over, to some extent, by the effects of habitual repetition. Isen and Diamond (1989:144), in a review of research into affect as an automatic process, arrive at a telling conclusion that is worth quoting at length:

To the extent that affect can have an influence automatically—without attention or intention and seemingly irresistibly—it can be understood as a deeply ingrained, overlearned habit, or as a process of chunking and organizing the situation. Thus, . . . seemingly irresistible feelings might be addressed in much the same way that other overlearned processes are understood, or in the way that other broad constructs or conceptualizations are refined (differentiated or “unpacked”).

We are reminded of the way in which little boys have often been taught to keep from crying by substituting anger for sadness: “When something bad happens don’t get sad, get mad.” Thus, people may be able to regulate their feelings, through their focus and through changing what they learn in given situations. Similarly, they may be able to change the impact of certain kinds of feelings, again by directing thoughts along certain lines. In this way, problem emotions, even though they feel automatic and uncontrollable, may be alterable. This does not mean that unwanted affective reactions will be easy to change (old habits die hard), but it does suggest that change may be possible and that the very sense of inevitability may be misleading.

Thus, there is good reason to attribute extensive power to the conventional emotives authorized in a given community to shape members’ sense of identity and self-awareness, members’ manner of confronting contingencies and routine. But power to shape is a very different matter from the capacity to create from nothing. The nature of the residuum that is not satisfactorily shaped is an all-important question for understanding what is universally human and for understanding the politics of that shaping power. In any given field context, one would expect to find a wide range of deviations, resistances, and alternative idioms that point to possibilities for change through crisis, dissolution, or adaptation and that offer grounds for drawing conclusions about who has power and who does not.

Where emotives have their greatest effects and are subject to their greatest failures is in situations of what I will call intense ambivalence. Cultural or conven-

tional action patterns often come into play both in producing such situations and in helping actors navigate them. It is especially because community conventions recommend the use of emotives to manage intense ambivalence that communities may be said to have emotional styles or tones.

To illustrate, I will draw some examples from Grima’s (1992) vivid ethnographic review of Paxtun emotional conventions. Paxtun convention dictates arranged marriages in which bride-prices can be quite significant. A recently wed woman is confined to the home, forced to carry more than her share of the housework, and required to submit to the authority and undergo the mistreatment of her husband’s mother and sisters as well as any senior wives present. Marriage is therefore conventionally the first great sadness, or *gham*, in a woman’s life. The intensity of a woman’s suffering, through this and other *gham* experiences, as she unflinchingly submits to the requirements of her family is her principal source of honor. As a result, the bride, dressed in her best and decked out in jewelry and other adornments, is supposed to adopt a downcast expression, tearful, quiet; she takes no part in the celebrations of the marriage ceremony. Her crestfallen demeanor is said to be “beautiful.” But does culture create the *gham* of the bride? Structurally, the transition seems likely to be experienced as both a severe loss (of familiar persons and places, the only ones known since birth) and a drop in status (from daughter to in-marriage bride, lowest in the new household’s pecking order). What the emotional conventions of the wedding ceremony do is give shape to the likely emotions of the bride, rather than create them. They do so in a manner that allows for a highly restrained display of opposition. Both the restraint and the display accrue to the bride’s credit, because they suggest that she is mastering intense negative feelings in order to remain obedient to her male elders and acquiesce in the marriage.<sup>7</sup> This is a convention for managing intense ambivalence (the desire to obey versus the desire not to marry), aiming at the repressive transformation of rebelliousness into *gham*.

Characteristic of Paxtun women’s conventional emotional style is that they cannot express an intense emotion or inclination publicly, except in the form of *gham*. To display infatuation with a single young man is forbidden, but loss of that man resulting from arranged marriage to another transforms the infatuation into a source of suffering. The suffering not only may be expressed but, if expressed in a restrained manner as silent sorrow, is rewarded with admiration and respect. To display intense pride in a son’s energies, skills, and accomplishments runs the risk of insulting listeners. But if that son is hurt in an accident, falls ill, or dies, the expression of *gham* may be indulged in—indeed it is required that a mother express extremely intense grief,

7. This renders such sadness akin to the reluctance certain Bedouin brides express surreptitiously through the *ghinnāwa* form of poetry, according to Abu-Lughod (1986).



without restraint, in such situations. The intensity of grief is often displayed by momentary lapses in modesty: rushing out of the house without a veil, seeking help from strange men to get to a hospital, bursting into tears when speaking.

For example, Grima (1992:66–67) describes reactions in Madyan to news that a local woman's daughter had just died in childbirth in Karachi. Mourners quickly gathered at the mother's house.

The women were sitting quietly, some crying, some talking with their veils held over their mouths. We waited, looking down the hill for some sign of the body's arrival. No one knew whether the baby was alive or not. No one knew any details of the death. The assembly rose when the coffin was first reported by a group of children to be on its way. Almost immediately the mother stood up on a cot and began in a loud *zharā*:

...

My daughter is dead.

...

My mad daughter is dead.

...

It is a beautiful day of Ramadan

...

and my daughter is dead.

By now, everyone was standing, scouring the hillside for sight of the procession of men carrying the body. They were standing and squatting on the roof, the terrace, the ledge over the hill. The moment her daughter's body was sighted the mother began an agonized lament, still standing above the crowd on a cot. One at a time, the assembled women came to embrace her and the two would wail and weep together.

Where American and European convention might dictate restraint of grief at the first news of a death, so that appropriate measures might be taken—funeral arrangements, travel, meetings with relatives—Paxtun convention dictates that women at once attempt, through emotive words and gestures, to intensify grief to its fullest and that they find extraordinary gestures of loss of self-possession to confirm its intensity.

According to Grima, women seldom have occasion to get out of the house; however, the senior woman of a household is obliged to visit the households of friends, neighbors, or relatives who have suffered a setback. On arrival, she must explain how she heard of the matter and listen to a detailed account of the misfortune. One slightly unusual informant admitted to deriving "joy" from such visits—in a manner suggesting that such an admission was inappropriate. Yet it is clearly a valued prerogative of postmenopausal women that they can visit as much as they like without fear of dishonor. Women's whole identities revolve around *gham*, according to Grima. When asked, they insist their life has been nothing but a series of incidents of *gham*, and they

readily offer brief autobiographies consisting of a string of narratives of sufferings.

When viewed as emotives, expressions of suffering by Paxtun women frequently do lead to extreme *intensification* (but, I would argue, not creation) of grief and sorrow. The whole pattern of restrictions on female behavior—involving low estimation of female capacity, fear of their misbehavior, submission of women to male authority—represents an independent source of sorrow. The death of a son is reason enough to grieve in many societies. But when that son was born in a marriage not desired (which is the *normative* case in this society) and raised through self-discipline, self-abnegation, and submission to family authority and the needs of male honor (these are the *local* ways of talking about women's duty), the woman's extreme ambivalence about her life of personal losses may offer deeper reasons to grieve over the loss of a son. Grima notes that Paxtun women's expressions of sorrow are extremely self-involved. A male relative who has been injured may lie at the side of a room ignored by a group of women who listen with rapt attention as the man's mother tells how she heard of the injury and how she reacted. Hence the whole pattern of emotives discussed by Grima speaks of emotions *managed* not created. Grima herself speaks frequently of emotional control rather than construction (e.g., pp. 8–9, 141, 163). Just as convention lays down a host of restrictions on female behavior and choice (which are understood locally as harsh), so convention lays down a style for repressing some feelings and intensifying and publicly expressing others. These restrictions and this style obviously work well for some women; others rebel to one degree or another. (Grima mentions numerous cases of women who, for various reasons, have rejected or fallen outside this "system.")

The implication here is not that certain feelings such as grief at death are "natural" or universal. Situations of intense ambivalence are likely in most social orders because they arrange for and encourage emotional attachments or hopes that inevitably come into conflict. A young Paxtun woman is encouraged by institutional arrangements that offer both rewards and penalties to develop a deep attachment to her mother. At the same time, marriage is an essential element of the normative life cycle. Thus a wedding is highly likely to generate intense ambivalence in a bride. Intense ambivalence can be a nodal point of instability in a normative emotional style. By allowing women full expression of sorrow (but not other feelings) and by treating sorrow as a source of honor for women, Paxtun convention tries to tip the balance of ambivalence toward grief. This is not culture creating grief but convention promoting certain emotives over others because, over time, these emotives strongly influence individual emotion in a manner that allows for a certain stability and ideological comprehensibility in a community's life.

The variation of individual responses (some fitting expectations well, some going all the way to complete deviance) provides an initial reservoir of possibilities for change, something that can be drawn upon when ideo-

logical, economic, or political factors put pressure on the system (as is, indeed, happening in the larger towns of the region Grima studied). Those who feel more frustrated or excluded can more readily adopt new norms that are contending for domination. An important question for comparative analysis would be whether certain emotive styles force greater numbers into emotional deviance than others.

If we conceive of community conventions as stipulating styles of emotional control that exploit the capacity of emotives to shape emotions, then power, politics, and liberation regain their meaning. Emotional control is the real site of the exercise of power: politics is just a process of determining who must repress as illegitimate, who must foreground as valuable, the feelings and desires that come up for them in given contexts and relationships.

### Parsing Feelings: Conceptions of Self

I will not provide a full discussion here of the wide variety of emotional lexicons that have been examined by ethnographers in the past 20 years or of how variations in self-concepts can affect the use of emotives. Briefly, it is reasonable to expect family resemblances among emotion terms from different languages because research has gathered very strong evidence of a physiological substrate of action orientations and facial expressions that probably has a genetic base. If one or more of the "draft" thoughts we harbor at a given moment are inclining us to violent action, for example, our autonomic nervous system and our endocrine system may undergo certain changes and our facial muscles are likely to take on certain positions (Ekman 1982, Gottman and Levenson 1988, Weinberger 1990). A similar set of changes is related to planning to flee. Ekman and his associates have made an important contribution by identifying six common configurations of this type: "happiness, fear, surprise, anger, disgust, sadness" (Ekman 1980:11; see also Lakoff 1987:33–36; Lutz and White 1986: 410; Ekman and Davidson 1994). But they make a serious error when they call them "basic emotions." Ortony and Turner (1990), Barrett (1993), and others have persuasively challenged this idea. Ortony and Turner remark that the physiological states that have been associated with intense emotion are ambiguous. Fear and anger are associated with a single state of arousal; tears may result from joy as well as sorrow (see also Fridlund 1992:103). In their view, Ekman and others have identified not genetically programmed emotions but only certain genetic components of emotions. Barrett argues that each instance of an emotion is unique, although they can be categorized into "families" according to how they are "associated with particular facial, vocal, and physiological characteristics because they involve similar functions relative to the environment" (p. 154). Other research suggests that the conscious masking or suppression of emotion also results in characteristic autonomic and endocrine system

states (for discussions of the research, see Bonanno and Singer 1990, Weinberger 1990). Emotional lexicons provide, among other things, conventional tools for referring to the links between thought-emotion drafts, on the one hand, and facial and physiological configurations (readiness to act), on the other. Thus, it would make sense to look for rough equivalents, in various cultures, of those emotion terms most obviously associated with autonomic states, facial configurations, laughter, blushing, tears. But this is hardly all that emotion lexicons do. No research has suggested, for example, that there is any basic facial or autonomic nervous system configuration, cross-culturally, for "shame." Rough equivalents for "shame" exist in many languages and are central to the local conception of person, relationship, emotion (see, e.g., Myers 1986, Rosaldo 1983, Reddy 1997, Halperin 1989, Schieffelin 1985, Levy 1984), but the dissimilarities are as prominent as the similarities. "Anger" in one locality may be a central, highly prized concept with many meanings (Rosaldo 1980), whereas in another the equivalent term represents something narrow, feared, suppressed, denied (Howell 1981, Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1990). Nor is the establishment of a lexicon and explanation of it uses a sufficient end for the ethnographic study of emotions, not if one envisions the possibility of writing a history of emotions with political meaning. It is essential to have some conception of the givens upon which this lexicon works (either well or poorly), to discover the tensions out of which change may grow and the stakes in terms of the distribution of political power.

Like central lexical items, varying self-concepts can be powerful aids in the formulation of emotives and the realization of their potential for sustaining an emotional style. A common feature of self-concepts is that they allow for the location of what we would call emotions to safe places outside the self, where they are barred from influencing action. They thus mesh with local definitions of emotion (or perhaps a refusal to conceptualize emotion as such, as in, e.g., Grima 1992) to provide coherence to the local emotional style. Ancient Greeks viewed powerful emotions such as love or desire for vengeance as inflicted on them by the gods (Padel 1981). Early modern Protestants might regard what they called "religious despair," as well as other illicit feelings, as instilled in them by the Devil (MacDonald 1992; see also Jackson 1985). Precontact Maori regarded what we might consider symptoms of extreme fear before a battle as the activity of a "harmful *atua*," making their bodies shake and sweat (Smith 1981:149). Society Islanders frequently view what we would call grief as a set of somatic symptoms indicating a mild illness (Levy 1984:219–20). There are limits to what can be accomplished by such constructions of the self. Since I regard any functioning central nervous system as a site of emotional events, I assert that these constructions are elements in emotional management styles, styles of use of emotive utterances. Grief, fear, anger have a reality, even if we cannot, by using such terms as "grief," "fear," or "anger" or their rough equivalents in any lan-

guage, refer adequately to what is going on emotionally. Words do not "refer" to emotions in this sense. But this is not to say that emotions do not exist or are discursive "constructions." Locating a feeling outside the self or categorizing it as, for example, an illness is a strategy similar to repression, although the feeling may remain in consciousness.

### A Historical Instance of Emotive Style: French *Délicatesse*

This brief theoretical discussion is sufficient to ground a sketch of a historical ethnography of emotions, one that has a political dimension to it. I will draw on my research on early 19th-century France to illustrate the approach.

Building on earlier work, I have begun a survey of records of civil suits (including some libel cases, which were technically criminal) from the 1820s and 1830s, based partly on newspaper sources, partly on archival materials. I am attempting to examine the use of emotive utterances in the records as well as to grasp the overall emotional style they present, which I hope to place in its context of the unfolding mutual articulation between the "sincere" or "Romantic" style and the revived, revised honor-based style—both of which were vigorously promoted in the Restoration and early July Monarchy periods (Reddy 1993, 1994, 1997). A civil case of 1826 involving a "disavowal of paternity" provides a vivid illustration of how the concept of emotives can be used to enrich historical-ethnographic interpretation. The case was followed closely by a daily paper, the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, which gave verbatim reports of barristers' pleadings in the case in eight lengthy articles during February, March, and April 1826.<sup>8</sup> The collateral heirs of a M. de Thésignies, recently deceased, initiated the case. They charged that the two children born to Thésignies's ex-wife, a popular vaudeville actress known as Mlle. Desmares, were obviously the fruits of adultery and as such, although born before the marriage was dissolved, should be excluded from Thésignies's inheritance. The resolution of the case turned on the interpretation of statements made in letters exchanged by the deceased Thésignies and his ex-wife in 1819. Thésignies himself had never disavowed his paternity of the children, but the collateral heirs asserted that the couple had lived apart since 1806 and that Thésignies did not even know of the children's existence. The minor children's counsel insisted that in the exchange of letters of 1819, shortly before his death, Thésignies had acknowledged the existence of the children and promised Mlle. Desmares that they might "become dear to him."

The difficulty of the case resulted from the ambiguity of the language in the 1819 letters; this nagging ambiguity inspired lengthy and heated oratory on both sides during the trial and may also account for the public in-

terest the case provoked. Both Thésignies and Desmares, in their 1819 exchange of letters, exercised *délicatesse* in the expression of their feelings. This term, *délicatesse*, was used both in the letters and by the barristers on both sides in referring to them. The term was, in fact, widely used in the period in talking about appropriate self-expression; it could be (very approximately) translated as "extreme discretion." According to Germaine de Staël, *délicatesse* became important in French manners not because of emotional sensitivity or sentimentalism but because of the heightened concern of aristocrats about their honor after they had been forced to submit to the authority of the absolute monarch in the 17th century. But, in her account of the history of emotions, this "délicatesse du point d'honneur" (roughly: "extreme discretion required to protect honor") created an opening for increased sensitivity to feelings and therefore was, despite the dissembling that honor often required, a very positive development (Staël 1991 [1800]:96, 278, 282, 302). Euphemism and circumlocution showed respect for the honor and sensibilities of the interlocutor; the more intense the feelings, the more imperative the need for restraint. *Délicatesse* was, therefore, an idiom for handling nodal points of intense ambivalence, just as *gham* is for Paxtun women. There was nothing obligatory about this, although plenty of normative comments might be found in the records; it was instead an emotional style that became widely popular in this period (more so but hardly exclusively among the literate) for deep reasons that went back centuries and had to do, as well, with the defeat of the effusive "sincere" style of the Jacobins in the 1790s, which had all too obviously been abused by political opportunists and widely mimicked by those fearful of the guillotine (Nye 1993, Denby 1994).

The Thésignies-Desmares union had been an unconventional one, to say the least. Thésignies had written into their marriage contract of 1804 that they would live apart, a provision of dubious legality. He had visited his wife regularly, then intermittently during 1804 and 1805; he had tried unsuccessfully to have the marriage annulled in 1806. In a letter of 1807, Mlle. Desmares complained bitterly of his attitude toward her: "Haven't you repeated a hundred times that your only desire was to separate from me? . . . Each time you leave my bed, don't you repeat the same thing? Don't you blush at having been seen by my concierge? Haven't you dropped me flat twice?"<sup>9</sup>

It was a matter of intense dispute during the trial whether they saw each other frequently or at all during the years from 1807 to 1810, years during which two children were born to Mlle. Desmares. For a time Thésignies spied on her; at one point he tried to prevent her from acting, at another he tried to force her to reside with him. Mlle. Desmares's response was to sue for divorce in 1807, but she later dropped the case. In 1810, police records showed, Thésignies physically attacked her and a male companion when he met them in a park.

8. See coverage in the *Gazette des Tribunaux* of February 18 and 25, 1826; March 4, 12, 18, and 19; April 1 and 8, 1826.

9. Cited March 18 by Dupin, my translation here and elsewhere.

This last incident prompted Mlle. Desmares to sue again, this time successfully, for divorce.

When Thésignies heard of the death of Mlle. Desmares's current male companion in 1819, he wrote to her at once, proposing that they reestablish a close personal relationship. He blamed himself for the failure of their marriage. He insisted that "amidst the most violent storms, I have retained for the person to whom my destiny is tied a lively friendship which has made me constantly desire to reunite with her."<sup>10</sup> He followed this statement with a very strong expression of sentiment: "Adieu, my dear Colette, I embrace you as tenderly as I love you. Please respond to me this evening; I would like to come see you alone, and to find you alone."<sup>11</sup>

As emotives, these statements by Thésignies are to be viewed not as "accurate reflections" of his feelings—or their opposite—but as traces of an effort to reconfigure his feelings in a new way, in a new context. Thésignies was making a dramatic move to reframe his previous "storms" as the nonessential, contingent features of an enduring emotional attachment. He was not given the chance to demonstrate whether these emotives were successful, intensifying the affections they named temporarily or permanently, because Mlle. Desmares gently declined his invitation:

On returning from the country, I received your letter, monsieur, and I see there with regret the expression of a sentiment that troubles me. I have duties to perform; nothing can distract me from them. Alas, I know from sad experience what one suffers from failing to perform those which our position in society demands. . . . Circumstances and my misfortune have placed me in a position which nothing can change. . . . Tell me, monsieur, that this language does not injure your heart, for I would be unhappy to distress you.<sup>12</sup>

In response, Thésignies pressed his case, insisting that he envisioned only friendship between them, the only sentiment appropriate to his age and ill-health. But she persisted:

While I believe what you say in your second letter, an undefinable fear holds me back; I cannot prevent myself from seeing new torments in the future. . . . The idea that my efforts could render life less painful for you makes me believe in happiness: I seize with enthusiasm the means that might reconcile me with myself. . . . But could it be that my duty prevents me from following the stirring of my heart? But I cannot live for myself alone; I began in my youth all the pain that I must complete now. I cannot look back at the past without feeling painful memory. . . .

To refuse the means offered to me to be able to

confess the involuntary sorrow I have caused you is a painful sacrifice required of me by the delicate position [*la position délicate*] I find myself in with you.<sup>13</sup>

And Thésignies persisted:

Don't look back at the past; your youth, your position, the seductions of society, a plethora of advice in which you found an embarrassment of choices, everything excuses you. Don't I also have my faults? weren't they the first? my shortness, my bizarre habits, frequent abandonments of many days' duration . . .

If some delicacy [*une délicatesse*], perhaps misunderstood, prevents you from receiving me, at least write to me from time to time, so that I do not go for years without hearing from you. . . . Have complete confidence in me, you have no better friend. Speak to me of what interests you, of all that is dear to you; what is dear to you can become so to me.

These last two passages were the most hotly contested elements of the trial. The collateral heirs saw, in Mlle. Desmares's remarks about present duty and her "delicate position," an admission that she was the mother of adulterine children, whose presence in her home she must keep secret from Thésignies in spite of her desire to make up for her wrongs toward him. In this passage, "You admit your adultery!" cried the collaterals' barrister, Mauguin, melodramatically. The children's counsel saw in Thésignies's admission of having been the first to commit error and in his promise to hold dear whatever was dear to her proof that he knew about the children and was willing to accept them as legitimate fruits of their union. Each accused the other of making too much out of "all this vagueness of thought, this delicacy of expression" ("le vague de la pensée, cette délicatesse de l'expression").<sup>14</sup>

Thus the *délicatesse* with which both Thésignies and Desmares addressed each other made it impossible to say what each had known, what each had concealed, what each had presumed when they exchanged letters in 1819. The court refused to infer anything definite from the letters and rested its decision on the evidence of the children's birth certificates, where Desmares had used her own last name and listed the father as "unknown." The court declared the children illegitimate and excluded them from the inheritance.

Thésignies and Desmares use elaborate circumlocutions when writing to each other. Thésignies says, "What is dear to you can become so to me," not "I am willing to love your illegitimate children," if that is in fact what he means. Desmares says, "Alas, I know the sad experience of what one suffers from failing to perform those [duties] which our position in society demands," not "I know what one suffers when one is un-

10. Letter of September 19, 1819, cited by *Gazette des Tribunaux* March 12, 1826, by Mauguin and again March 18, 1826, by Dupin.

11. Cited March 18 by Dupin.

12. Response to Thésignies letter of September 19, 1819; cited by Mauguin, March 12, 1826.

13. Cited by Mauguin, March 12, 1826

14. Mauguin pleading in *Gazette des Tribunaux*, March 12, 1826.

faithful to a husband," if that is in fact what she means. But why do they address each other in this manner? What, on the basis of this evidence, does the term *délicatesse* mean?

Under the public code that prevailed in France in the decades after the Revolution, it was as much a breach to speak of a forbidden action as to perform one; to perform one openly or publicly was a double infraction (Nye 1993; Reddy 1993, 1997). A husband who did not forgive his wife for a lapse of fidelity and who did not keep her secret was deemed to be as guilty as she, or even more guilty. He damaged her honor and his own more than she did, especially if there were extenuating circumstances surrounding her slip. It was well understood that life did not match norms and widely accepted that words could repair life's imperfections almost entirely by covering them in silence.

Therefore Thésignies's affection for his ex-wife and feelings of shame or contrition for the transgressions he committed during and after their marriage require that he not mention these transgressions, or hers. To do so would be but a further transgression. Yet he must allude to them in order to express his feelings of forgiveness and hope. Likewise, Mlle. Desmares must protect her illegitimate children from shameful encounters with her ex-husband. At the same time, she must avoid mentioning why she prefers not to see him, for that would shame both her and him. She wishes him well, wishes to atone for the past, yet is obliged by duty as a mother not to attempt to comfort him. This is the *position délicate* ("difficult position," or "precarious position") she finds herself in. Thésignies attempts to reassure her, but his very reassurance, to be convincing, must demonstrate his respect for her fear of shame: "If some delicacy, perhaps misunderstood, prevents you from receiving me . . ." Thus both speak in a tissue of abstractions and allusions that leave the lawyers in 1826 shouting at each other the probable truths that were never stated.

A constructionist account of the concept of *délicatesse* would assert that it was part of a complex of discursive terms that created the feelings that this emotion discourse was allegedly about. The strong emotions whose avoidance was dictated by *délicatesse* had no being outside of this enacting of avoidance. Their very intensity was established by the elaborate efforts made to avoid mentioning topics or using words that would elicit them directly.

An account based on the concept of emotives concedes that to allude to a feeling in a "delicate" manner may well intensify it, and intensify at the same time a feeling of fear toward it, the feeling that it is a dangerous feeling. Speaking habitually in this manner can powerfully shape one's emotional reactions. But *délicatesse* as part of an emotive style or idiom does not create the emotions it is about. A constructionist account would have to confront the evidence that here, again, in early 19th-century France, one finds abundant traces of emotional management, emotional control. Speakers reassure each other of their regard by avoiding eliciting emotives that would intensify shame or grief. Certain

kinds of repression become collaborative efforts. This constantly repeated theme, in one cultural context after another, represents local recognition of the distinctive character of emotive utterances and local attempts to regulate the power of such utterances to change how we feel.

Within the context of Western history, this was a moment when *délicatesse* in language responded to a heightened sense of exposure to gossip and scrutiny in the newly founded laissez-faire social order. The power of shame as a regulatory "metasentiment" was reinforced.<sup>15</sup> *Délicatesse* provided a buffer zone that allowed for the continuation of a sense of family honor ill-suited to the realm of free speech and free contract that the Revolution had opened up. At the same time it helped individuals navigate this frightening new realm. Within this buffer zone individuals comforted themselves and each other that their navigation of the increasing array of life choices imposed by civil society was adequate, acceptable, not shameful.

*Délicatesse* attempted to accomplish by silence what, in the 20th century, we attempt to accomplish by dropping all concern for public exposure and openly sharing our transgressions and feelings. The concept of emotives helps us to grasp this evolution not as a random drift from one kind of pure construction to another but as part of a larger project of managing emotion in a context of constantly enhanced choice, differentiation, and discrimination driven by capitalist development and a politics of individual liberation.

## The Historical Ethnography of Emotions

The study of emotions among historians has, so far, been plagued by presentism (for a review, see Pinch 1995). Carol Stearns and Peter Stearns (Stearns and Stearns 1986, 1990; P. Stearns 1994) and their associates have done important spadework in the history of what they call "emotionology," that is, normative popular literature—advice and etiquette manuals, for the most part—published in the United States since the 18th century. They have also been able to sketch out some sense of how this literature was received and used. Wouters (1995) has extended their work to several countries in a valuable comparative study (see also Jackson's [1985] historical survey of Western views of melancholy). But this work remains rather distant from the proper concerns of ethnographers: the role of emotions in the practices and relationships that make societies what they are. A recent study by Spurlock and Magistro (1994) gives some sense of the possibilities that are opening up, however.

15. The idea of a regulatory "metasentiment" is from Myers (1986: 120); among numerous other studies that examine some rough equivalent of "shame" regulating emotional expression (i.e., formulation of emotives), see Schieffelin (1985), Shaver et al. (1987), White (1990a), and Gilmore (1987). For further discussion of shame's regulatory role in early 19th-century France, see Reddy (1997).

In French studies, research on the history of gender has increasingly brought forward the centrality of ideas about emotions in conceptions of gender identity. The fundamental role that “sentimentalism” (Denby 1994) played in the 18th century and in the Revolutionary decade and its subsequent discredit as a political ideology have raised a range of issues about the history of emotions in Europe that researchers have now begun to explore in earnest (Hunt 1992, Maza 1993, DeJean 1991, Stewart 1993, Berenson 1992, Nye 1993). Why and how, over time, sentimentality was ascribed to women or claimed by men, why and how it was contrasted with “honor,” “passion,” and other key concepts, how it was used in the home or in public to categorize or justify changing practices—these are questions of the greatest moment in current French historical research on the Revolutionary period, its prelude, and its aftermath. The need for an adequate methodology for dealing with such issues, whether in the context of French history or in other contexts, has been emphasized by Adela Pinch (1995:109), who has called for

approaches that historicize and theorize their own epistemologies of emotion in relation to how a culture of the past understood the relations between language and emotion: approaches that could think, for example, about what Wordsworth meant when he declared that the mind attaches itself to words, “not only as symbols of . . . passion, but as *things*, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion.”

Wordsworth insists on precisely what the concept of emotives is intended to grasp.

Striking in this regard is a work that Wordsworth’s contemporary, Germaine de Staël, published in 1800, *De la littérature dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*. Staël’s study proposed a history of emotions in Europe based on her strong views about the relation between literature, politics, and social life. Coming very close to the concept of emotives, Staël argues that the way in which attention is turned toward feelings and the vocabulary marshaled to speak of them have a direct impact on the feelings themselves. By Staël’s account, for example, the arrival of Christianity in Europe made possible an initial, limited discovery of emotional complexity. Previously, men had too much power over women to value women’s choices or feelings. Now (1800:171, emphasis added),

Man’s happiness grew with the independence of the object of his tenderness; he could believe he was loved; a free being chose him, a free being obeyed his desires. *The mind’s perceptions, the nuances sensed by the heart multiplied along with the ideas and impressions of these new souls, who were trying out moral existence, after having languished in life for a long time.*

Elevation of woman to the status of a free being by her endowment with an equal soul leads to appreciation of

complexity of feeling, because the slight changes of a free being matter. Feelings in turn become more complex as ideas about them become capable of appreciating nuances. Feelings multiply, and “moral existence” becomes possible. The change is sufficiently marked that Staël speaks of “new souls”; yet it is not a “construction” out of nothing but the realization of possibilities that were always there.

In Staël’s account, subsequent changes, especially the Protestant Reformation and the rise of the sentimental novel after 1700, enhanced sensitivity to feeling and enhanced the resulting multiplication of nuances of feeling to a pinnacle that represented the greatest achievement of civilization, making possible “friendship in love” between a man and a woman. Staël’s long-neglected work offers a counterweight to the influential views of Weber, Freud, Elias, or Foucault that the history of European civilization is a story of constantly increasing repression, control of appetites and impulses, discipline (on these theorists, see Roper 1994, Weinstein 1990).<sup>16</sup> Staël held that not just religion and literature but also commerce and the progress of liberty played essential roles in increasing sensitivity and in the increasing complexity of emotional life.

Without subscribing to Staël’s Romantic idealism or her view of the ancients as incapable of appreciating emotional nuance, one may agree that institutional differentiation always means a concomitant increase in opportunities to distinguish finer varieties of emotions and opportunities as well, to have “real” feelings, neglected in other practical contexts, that find appropriate new venues for “expression.” Both sides of this elaboration require the work of formulating emotives and of coping with their effects. Individuals, insofar as they have embraced or promoted Western notions of freedom in recent centuries, may have demanded more choices of expression, more institutional differentiation, because, in part, they sought an increasingly discriminating self-awareness linked to or inspired by hopes for emotional fulfillment of the kind developed in and disseminated by the sentimentalist tradition. By learning to use emotives that foregrounded refined distinctions of feeling, they elaborated emotional “experience” and made of it an end or goal of living. My research on early 19th-century France indicates that increased freedom to express or to fulfill emotional inclinations was, however, fraught with difficulties—as it remains today—and gave impetus to a style of emotive formulation called *délicatesse*.

Ethnographers concerned with emotions have too often confronted us with timeless contrasts. Thus, Clifford Geertz (1983:59), in a frequently quoted passage:

16. Foucault’s inclusion on this list may surprise some. The underlying discursive structures upon which Foucault’s concept of discipline is built actually construct the objects that are submitted to discipline. Thus we have no desires, no sexuality, independent of the process of restraining and channeling. But, as I have argued, Foucault’s alternative vision is really an empty, ironic one that offers no real starting point for a politically meaningful reformulation.



The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion and judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes, and against its social and natural background, is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures.<sup>17</sup>

When evaluating such free-floating dichotomies, it is important to recognize that the Western person only comes into view in the context of the historical development of Western institutions. The West has a 2,000-year history of societies with state institutions, courts of law, private property, and a state-issued currency. Ascetic religious practices organized around a resolute monotheism came into vogue 1,700 years ago. For a bit over 300 years we have had a print-based public sphere dominated by for-profit printing and distribution enterprises, for 200 years or less representative political institutions, for just over 100 years mass political parties, tourism, and the department store. The term "melodrama" goes back to Staël's generation, although its enduring devices, still used in every television series out of Hollywood, go back about a century earlier. These are among the more important elements that have contributed by their historical development to that sense of inner continuity and personal responsibility that make the Western individual's slightest impulses of feeling of great interest for their potential hidden, long-term effects on choice of sexual partner, choice of employer, choice of reading matter, purchases, contracts, conversion experiences, or voting patterns.

Accounts of the Western historical trajectory and of those followed in other localities must take into consideration the way in which we have felt both "liberated" and "trapped" by this outcome—liberated by the opportunities made available for choice and expression, trapped by the necessity to formulate ever more "accurate" emotive "representations" of what we want and by the necessity to own emotionally all the things we are obliged to "choose." To be "modern" is to be, part of the time at least, oppressed by the task of choosing and owning. Foucault's work has been of genuine value for the way he attempted to appeal to and confirm this sense of pervasive oppression, even though he could not give any reason for it. The concept of emotives allows

17. In another example, Rosaldo (1984:146–47) draws the contrast of Ilongot with Western notions of personal continuity and responsibility most sharply: "In general, Ilongots do not discern intentions, trace responsibility, or reckon blame by asking if offenders 'knew' that they wronged others through their actions. Nor do they promise or hold fellows to account for failure to fulfill the expectations of their kin and friends. . . . For Ilongots, in short, there is no necessary gap between 'the presentation' and 'the self.' What is most true of individuals, their deepest sense of who they are, is located in a set of actions—hunting, headhunting, growing rice—that displays the 'energy' or 'anger' that gives shape and focus to all healthy human hearts. What is more, these deeds do not achieve the separation of the individual from the group."

us to understand such deep, surprising ambivalence toward our "liberty" without, as Foucault would have us do, rejecting liberty root and branch. The concept of emotives shows the necessity of failure inherent in all emotional utterances and points up the need for a reconceptualization of freedom that gets beyond both simplistic notions of the individual as a subject able to "perceive" and "express" internal states and a simplistic constructionism that rejects the subject as a figment. The need for such reconceptualization, in turn, can guide ethnographic work on emotions in whatever locality, work informed by a genuine search to understand the power and the limitations of emotives.

## Comments

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This article provides an engaging and well-argued challenge to the "strong constructionist view of emotion" which Reddy finds exemplified in the work of Lutz (1988), Abu-Lughod (1986), and Grima (1992). At the core of his critique lie analytical questions concerning individual agency and the relationships among emotion talk, inner experience, and politics. Reddy argues that the strong constructionist position makes impossible—for both theoretical and empirical reasons—any consideration of changes in emotional discourse over time. To support this general argument, he draws effectively upon the early 19th-century transformation of French emotional style from "sincerity" to *délicatesse* as an instance of such historical change; his discussion is descriptively fascinating and methodologically very suggestive. Central to this conceptualization is Reddy's proposed notion of "emotives," a category of linguistic practices, usually statements about emotional states, which are neither purely referential nor solely performative but instances in which "the statement's referent changes by virtue of the statement."

In my comments I want briefly to address Reddy's essay with an eye to three topics: lexicon and referentiality, individualist interpretation, and emotional change. Reddy's discussion of and movement beyond J. L. Austin are very interesting, and the notion of emotives is potentially helpful. At the same time, his overt argument hinges on the central importance of emotion vocabulary and of its descriptive (in)adequacy. Irvine (1982, 1990), Ochs and Schieffelin (1989), and Brenneis (1987, 1995), among others (see Ochs 1989), have argued that emotion discourse is more than a matter of labels and their presumed emotional referents, however heuristically valuable they may be. This is a position towards which Reddy's own historical examples actually point. What I found fascinating about the reported



transformation, for example, was not so much the change in terminology as the very different discursive and interactional practices characteristic of—and validating—the two emotional styles. One of the most interesting aspects of this shift is that both sincerity and *délicatesse* are inherently “social” emotions, relying on shared understanding for their recognition and evaluation.

A second set of questions has to do with such social dimensions of emotional language. In his characterization of emotives as being a kind of pledge Reddy implies a somewhat Gricean link between such statements and social expectations; these are not stand-alone utterances but necessarily interactively situated. At the same time he analytically locates emotional life as internal and individual. As comparative studies such as those collected in *Disentangling* (Watson-Gegeo and White 1990) demonstrate, understandings of the locus and genesis of emotional experience vary considerably across cultures; feelings are often taken to provide a social rather than an individual idiom, a way of commenting not so much on oneself as on oneself in relation to others. Apart from the particulars of local theories, there is good reason to suspect that emotion is more broadly at the same time individual and social. Particularly given Reddy’s admirable insistence on explicitly political aspects of emotion, reconsidering his French case from a somewhat less individual-centered perspective could make for an even more compelling argument.

Central to Reddy’s essay is his insistence that our approaches to emotion be able to help us comprehend the political bases of historical changes. He argues that such historical considerations are either ignored or made moot by the assumptions inherent in constructionist approaches—and that, therefore, there has been little such work. Here I think he may be overstating the case, as several recent studies have considered such transformations in both emotional lexicon and broader expressive practices. Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo (1991), for example, contrast the language and interactional styles of Anglican and born-again Kwara’ae in the Solomon Islands, linking marked variation to the contours of local political life, as well as to differences in theological assumptions. Besnier (1989, 1995) similarly examines the emergence of new affective styles associated with literacy and the specific genre of “letters home” on Nukulaelae.

Two general strategies seem helpful in such historical considerations. One is the distinction between “hypercognized” and “hypocognized” emotions first suggested by Levy (1984). Hypercognized emotions are, to quote Ochs (1986:254), “the objects of considerable attention and knowledge . . . [and] richly expressed within the culture,” while hypocognized emotions receive relatively little attention. As Besnier’s analysis of letters home demonstrates, new media or genres of expression might lead to new possibilities for—or uses of—hypercognized emotions. Certainly one way of viewing the sincerity-to-*délicatesse* transformation is in terms of political changes engendering shifts in which some

emotional styles are hypercognized and other, previously elaborated ones recede. Such an interpretation also does not necessitate strong claims about actual experience which might be difficult to sustain empirically.

A second strategic orientation for exploring historical changes in emotion would be to consider related domains within which something similar seems to be happening. I was struck, for example, by the underlying resonances between Reddy’s account and James Johnson’s recent (1995) exploration of a contemporary transformation in French musical aesthetics—the rise of the silent audience in the early 19th century. Aesthetics and emotions are often intertwined, and the two works intersect in fascinating ways, giving considerable support to Reddy’s historical claims. More generally, the political currents that shape emotional life—and for responding to and reacting against which emotion affords a significant resource—can be expected to have similar effects elsewhere in social life. Further, the domain of emotion is rarely likely to be as discrete and bounded as analysts often assume, and a somewhat broader consideration of sites and practices where and through which emotional life is lived could enhance an already very promising approach.

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Even though “Against Constructionism” is the title of this paper, it soon becomes clear that Reddy is arguing against what he characterizes as a “strong” or “pure” (social/cultural) constructionist stance. But what of less extreme theoretical perspectives involving constructive processes, such as those posited in cognitively oriented theories? Can they contribute to an understanding of “the dynamic character of emotional gestures and utterances, their capacity to alter the states of the speakers from whom they derive,” and ultimately to a historical ethnography of emotions? The converse question concerning the relevance of emotives to cognitive theory is also apropos. In recent years, cognitive theorists have become more attentive to the interdependence of thought and feeling as well as to the socially situated nature of cognition. In this regard, Reddy’s formulation of emotives as “a pledge that alters, a kind of getting-through of something nonverbal into the verbal domain,” will require careful reflection. For present purposes, an example from the paper provides the grounding for some preliminary discussion of these issues.

In the letter to Mlle. Desmares proposing a reestablishment of a close personal relationship, Thésignies reflects on their past. Reddy claims that, as “emotives,” the statements are “traces of an effort to reconfigure his feelings in a new way, in a new context,” with Thésignies “making a dramatic move to reframe his previ-

ous 'storms' as the nonessential, contingent features of an enduring emotional attachment." Because Mlle. Desmares declined his invitation, Thésignies "was not given the chance to demonstrate whether these emotives were successful, intensifying the affections they named." From a cognitive perspective, this reframing reflects constructive processes, a reconstruction which serves present objectives. This reconstruction recasts the past by drawing on cultural understandings about the nature of relationships. Although, because of the limited base of information, it is not possible to infer if this reconstruction was a transformative one for Thésignies, it does provide the underpinning for both his proposal and his subsequent communications.

Like this instance, remembering is more often a reconstruction than a reproduction. Research carried out primarily in Western settings identifies emotion, imagery, and narrative as key attributes of reflexive reconstructions of the personal past (Rubin 1996). Bartlett (1932) highlighted the guiding role of what he referred to as the "affective attitude." To be communicable, both to oneself and to others, attempts to recapture the past "must be constructed of cultural material" (Bruner and Feldman 1996:293), using culturally based narrative forms which draw upon cultural understandings or schemas. As middle-class American children acquire cultural knowledge and learn skills for recounting the past, they are also exposed to messages about the interpretation of associated emotions, and interpretations appear to vary with the child's gender (Fivush 1994). Compelling reconstructions are vivid and emotionally engaging, often phenomenally experienced as a "re-living" of a past event. Similar to the way an emotive, according to Reddy, is "an effort by the speaker to offer an interpretation of something that is observable to no other actor," reconstructions convey how an individual imparts personal meaning to the past within the context of the present. In White's (1990a) discussion of a "disentangling" session on Santa Isabel, the vivid reconstruction of a past event as evoking "sadness" rather than "anger" may well carry over into subsequent reconstructions. Cultural schemas, the act of narrating, and emotives may all have an effect on these constructive processes. If emotives "are themselves instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying emotions," as Reddy hypothesizes, this may contribute to an understanding of the interdependence of emotional engagement and constructive processes.

In addition to memory, the linking of emotives and the constructive interpretation of ongoing events can be seen in suspected incidents involving "bad medicine" in a Canadian Anishinaabe community (Garro 1996). Misfortune explained with reference to bad medicine is attributed to intentional, malevolent, and covert wielding of supernatural power by another person. In one case, a series of troublesome occurrences led one woman to suspect that someone was trying to harm her with bad medicine. Her apprehension and fear were communicated to others, and her heightened awareness

of danger contributed to a construction of ongoing events in her life as possibly indicative of bad medicine. Leaving a store one day, she asked me if I noticed how another person, one she suspected, stared at her. She also considered two divergent interpretations for a strange "dream," but a conversation with her mother intensified her concerns and contributed to her decision to seek the assistance of an Anishinaabe healer. Here, both cultural schemas and emotives interactively contribute to the interpretive construction. Attending to the interplay of constructive processes and emotives may ultimately be a rewarding path.

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Attacks on cultural constructivism and cultural relativism are frequently phrased in much starker terms than those attacked ever advocated. To my knowledge few if any social anthropologists have adopted a completely *tabula rasa* approach to the study of human sociocultural life. The claims by Durkheim and his associates in *Année Sociologique* that social classification causes symbolic classification and that the categories of the human mind are exclusively socially constructed were difficult for them to maintain and have easily been demonstrated to be untenable—if only on the ground that, while actual formulations of space, time, person, etc., show great variation, the need and ability for humans to think spatially, temporally, and so on, are anchored in the human mind (see Needham 1963, Lukes 1975). The psychic unity of humankind is a long-standing pillar of anthropological epistemology. This is not to say that we have identified what this unity actually consists of or how we can meaningfully study it in its various manifestations in alien times and places (Howell and Willis 1998). Recent work on cognition is amassing convincing evidence of *some* kind of human cognitive (psychic) unity. Reddy's deconstruction is therefore uncalled for. However, much work remains to be done—not least on definitional and methodological issues. The focus on the cognitive has tended to overlook the emotional sides of human orientation in the world. We need to refine our concepts and theories in ways that enable us to engage in comparative empirical research.

I am therefore in sympathy with Reddy's overall aim of finding concepts that allow us to speak comparatively about emotions and emotionality and take into account both the social and the universal aspects of emotionality. I am in sympathy with much of his critique of Western academic attitudes to emotions, which have been approached as "a residual, somatic, antirational domain of conscious life." I also agree with his criticism of attempts to isolate "basic emotions." His suggestion that "emotives" might constitute a bridge is therefore of great interest. However, as it stands, the ar-

gument is suggestive rather than convincing. For example, I would have liked more detailed information about the psychological experiments that form the basis for his claims. I would also have liked a more descriptive analysis of emotives; I find it difficult to grasp their qualities and how they might operate in practice. Material derived from ethnographic fieldwork amongst living people would have made the analysis more accessible. This is not to say that the case study of *délicatesse* in early-19th-century French social life is not fascinating. I remain unclear, however, in what ways emotives have contributed to an interpretation of this material. The two correspondents had presumably internalized reigning moral values concerning the presentation of self, values expressed most succinctly as *délicatesse*. Are emotives to be understood as those moral values that concern experiencing, handling, and expressing emotions? If so, this is interesting, but we need to know more.

Just as the psychic unity of humankind has been a relatively unexplored article of faith among anthropologists, so has that of human sociality. Both need specifying. One recent approach which, to my mind, is of great interest to those anthropologists who grapple with issues of relativism is work being done by some developmental psychologists (e.g., Trevarthen 1992, Meltzoff 1990, Kugiumutzakis 1994). They claim that infants from the time of birth are active partners in the construction of meaning and that interaction is inherently emotional in character. Infants appear to be competent social partners and are acutely interested in and motivated to understand others' behaviour. They respond in an adaptive emotional manner to the socio-emotional expressions of others (Thompson 1994). In other words, infants and toddlers are neither indifferent to the emotional experiences of others nor incapable of understanding them. Others' emotional expressions are important catalysts for social understanding. This approach implies human moral sense and opens for empirical investigation the moral aspects of emotions (see Howell 1996). If this is the case, then, to my mind, anthropologists have been handed a theoretical gift.

Reddy's argument appears to be founded on individual experience whereby statements such as "I am sad" constitute "stable patterns [which] repeated over years have very profound, shaping effects on one's whole emotional makeup." I would prefer to argue that emotional experience is created intersubjectively and that meaning has been subtly altered for each as a result of the interaction. This, I think, is the crux of the matter. Reddy states that emotives act on the world and that there is "an 'inner' dimension to emotion, but it is never merely 'represented' by statements or actions." Quite so. But to conclude that all ways of expressing emotions "fail to some degree" leaves too many important questions unaddressed. Sociality in action, as intersubjective communication, may fail in some absolute sense, but what sense might that be? It does not fail when the communication engages both at an emotional as well as a cognitive level.

Ultimately, the anthropological contribution to the study of cognition and emotion must be founded in empirical fieldwork. To do so we need concepts and methods. With emotives we have a potentially useful concept, but as it stands it supplements rather than replaces other approaches.

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Once again, William Reddy is at least two steps ahead of the pack. Although criticism of "constructionism" is on the rise. Reddy goes beyond the available critiques to offer a new solution to the perennial issues of agency and relativism (how is action meaningful or even possible if individuals are imagined as empty, plastic vessels entirely constructed by their culture?). Rather than posit "practice" as the resolution to the dilemmas created by overly structural and static notions of "discourse" and "culture," he points to a "third type of communicative act," which he terms "emotives." Emotives ("emotion statements") are neither descriptive nor performative; they are self-transformative because the mere act of expression actually changes what is felt. Reddy develops this analysis through a canny combination of poststructuralist insight, ethnographic and psychological research, and his own historical studies. There are many advantages to the elegant formulation of emotives he offers and some disadvantages too. Here I want to concentrate on the ways in which Reddy opens up new perspectives on a long-term historical psychology.

He does this in the first instance by scrambling the traditional geography of power; he speaks neither of material objects nor of discursive practices. For him power is located in emotional control—in who gets to express and who must repress various feelings. This is a clever line of argument because it allows Reddy to connect individual psychic patterns to the broadest accounts of historical transformation. The emotions, he insists, are not the residual, antirational domain of life but rather the very site of the capacity to effect change. Emotives never entirely succeed because they can never adequately represent or perform emotions, and this inherent insufficiency both establishes and sets limits on the plasticity of the individual self. Indeed, according to Reddy the self seems to be the area of slippage between emotion and emotive (a point to which I will return). At the same time, what he terms "cultural styles" of individual emotional management do vary over time and place. And not only do they vary but also in many instances they follow a definite historical trajectory (at least in the West). His own historical research is meant to show how this works at the cusp of Western modernity, when capitalist development, with its emphasis on choice and differentiation, entered into synergistic interaction with a politics of individual liberation.

Yet Reddy carefully distances himself from the developmental schemas of Weber, Freud, Elias, and Foucault (is Durkheim's absence from this list intentional, and, if so, why?). He rejects the simple story of increasing repression, self-control, and discipline and calls upon Germaine de Staël as testimony to a more benign account of the increasing sensitivity and complexity of emotional life. But this solution leaves many questions unanswered. Just how did "institutional differentiation," as Reddy terms it, interact with changes in "cultural style"? What are the alternatives to the Western development of self, with its emphasis on inner continuity and personal responsibility? If there are many different "cultural styles" and the Western model is not the only one, how do we avoid the problems of relativism with which Reddy began?

No doubt Reddy is right to dodge the kind of analysis developed by Freud, in which psychic development mirrored that of civilization (children and neurotics were like savages) and both were assumed to be of universal application. Still, the advantage of the Freudian position is that it offers an account of both the self's structure and its change over time. In Reddy's version of emotives, the self is much like the black box of other social theories; things may happen there, but we don't really know much more than that. Part of the problem with Reddy's nonformulation of the self comes from his uneasy effort to overcome the defects of Western social theory with a strong dose of poststructuralism and vice versa. Unfortunately, neither social theory nor poststructuralism has much to say about the self; whereas social theory relegates the self to a residual status (it is what social theory cannot explain), poststructuralism tends to make it an automatic by-product of discourse or language. Reddy's own terms share in poststructuralism's (and especially Lacan's) negative cast; our activity as a person is produced by the "failure" of all emotives. The self therefore consists largely of "forms of failed reference." "Self-concepts" might be potentially important, but Reddy construes them as social or cultural, making them a subset of "cultural styles" of emotional management rather than truly psychological in function or operation.

The intractability of these questions and their pertinence to any social or cultural analysis measure the depth of Reddy's contribution. He bravely stakes out a territory too long avoided by most of us. Will he languish out there on his own?

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Reddy has provided us with an insightful theory on emotions based on thorough research in divergent and seemingly irreconcilable disciplines. This multidisciplinary approach, taking into account and reflecting on perspectives that have been developed in more tradi-

tional as well as less traditional fields of scientific inquiry, is in itself to be applauded. Reddy aims at tackling "the postmodern controversy" that has plagued the social sciences in diverse forms—social constructionism vs. essentialism, universalism vs. cultural relativism, positivism vs. humanism—and is not entirely reducible to but closely related to the subject/object problem that all scientific activity, in its quest for "objective knowledge," shares. This area is increasingly a matter of debate. Reddy feels the necessity to take an ardent position "against constructionism" in order to avoid the inherent nihilism that the "stronger" stands imply. His research and very subject matter precisely concern those perspectives and themes that have become valid fields of social scientific inquiry in the postmodern context. Sexuality, identity, the conception of the self, and finally emotionality have thus become problematised because of a process of individualisation in Western culture, to the point that they can only be socially "captured," thus losing all ground for possible social theory building. Reddy chooses to escape this dilemma first by carefully suggesting some universals situated in the realm of psychology and then by opting for an unavoidable political standpoint or judgement. However useful the eloquently founded analytical distinction between concepts such as feeling, emotion, emotive, and emotional style, I feel that his theory succeeds because of but at the same time necessarily fails with regard to his choice of a "politically meaningful" solution. I can illustrate my unease by referring to two instances in which this essentialist critique is articulated.

Reddy criticizes Ortner's (1989) neglect to offer any judgement (approval or condemnation) about the effects of historical changes in her social history of Sherpa Buddhism and does the same in his reinterpretation of Grima's (1992) account with regard to her social constructionist approach to emotion among Paxtun women. These original products of anthropological research (taking just these two examples) are, however, to my mind highly politically motivated, the first precisely in the cultural relativistic refusal to render judgement and the second in the context of the field of feminist studies. In the latter case the critique of the oppression of women can indeed be characterised as a Western historical and political development but one without which the anthropological study of women or, for that matter, possibly even emotion would have been inconceivable.

Reddy draws on this anthropological and other research in order to build a general theory of emotions, which, as a historical ethnographer, he successfully applies by focusing on a personal relationship between two Western individuals interpreted on the limited basis of written sources. The distance between the researcher as the observer and the personal in political context as the observed is apparent. However, I believe that, taking into account the foundation of its theoretical arguments, the concept of emotives cannot be extrapolated so straightforwardly to other disciplines such as the cultural anthropology of non-Western societies, where the context and therefore conditions and ques-

tions for research are radically different (and no doubt also politically determined). First of all, ethnographic research does not necessarily focus on so vast a time scale that historical development and change are priority issues. The study of an emotional style such as *délicatesse* is possible only from a historically comparative perspective, wherein factors such as progress and increasing institutional differentiation can be rendered meaningful when observed as a whole from a position of time-distance independence. In a fieldwork situation, the application of this theory of emotives would become much more complex for yet another reason—the relationship between the observer and the observed. I am here alluding to the interaction that takes place between the researcher and the informant in any given fieldwork context, where serial time or “spatial distance” is minimized. “Objective knowledge” is not only dependent on but becomes more difficult to attain according to the topic the fieldworker wishes to investigate. As, for example, my own research on the literature on the Native American “two-spirit” has shown, Western researchers wishing to learn about the sexual orientation of the two-spirit person obtain information depending on their own attitudes towards sexuality, the degree to which they profile themselves as homo- or heterosexual, etc. The informant may or may not answer questions as he/she perceives the Anglo researcher expects. Sexuality being a “sensitive” subject for social inquiry, I feel that Reddy’s theory of emotions, even when employing the proposed concept of emotives, may well be able to serve as a guide but becomes extremely difficult to use in a context in which a personal relationship between Western subject/object and non-Western object/subject is established.

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The road to liberation is strewn with useless or abandoned theories, but the feminist work on emotions that William Reddy takes as the foil for his pitting of historical against constructionist knowledge is not one of them. I will leave it to other commentators to ask questions about the view of liberation he is working with and to detail the historical constructionist research already conducted, but in this brief comment I want to question his rendering of this literature on emotion.

His article has a salutary if conventional reminder—about the need for more historicization of cultural description—and an intriguing proposal to explore more precisely how emotion language works to shape/channel/make emotional response. But his claim that “one cannot have a politics of emotion or a meaningful history of emotion” without a universal claim about the emotional needs of individuals cannot stand against the exemplary existing work that makes no such claim (see Pfister and Schnog 1997, Cvetkovich 1992). We also have programmatic statements that say how we might

have what Reddy says we cannot (Haraway 1991, di Leonardo 1991). Reddy suggests that our goal should be “bridging the space between language and feeling” to help acquire the personal, motivational grounds for liberatory action. Just this aim was behind the consciousness-raising groups of the early second-wave feminist movement. The narrow class and race basis for the popularity of this solution, however, was one index of its failure of sociological imagination.

On Reddy’s interpretation of my own work I would simply add a correcting note. I argued (1990) for the use of the sociological imagination in studies of emotion in a context in which the psychological laboratory had claimed sole possession of the grounds for valid statements about emotional life. That laboratory continues to serve as the ground for what can be said about the emotional in the academy and in popular culture. Reddy does not acknowledge this sociohistorical formation of knowledge, and so he misreads my 1990 article as arguing that “U.S. women’s way of speaking about efforts to control their emotions actually creates those emotions.” My research centered there on the shaping of talk about women’s emotionality by the psychological sciences and the feminist contestations of it. Science and magazine journalism continue to be fascinated by the emotional correlates of premenstrual stress syndrome and late-luteal-phase dysphoric disorder, and these fascinations are funneled in some form into the lives and self-understandings of teenage girls and boys. A liberatory politics by means of universal statements about the emotives associated with the monthly cycle is not what Reddy has in mind, but it is certainly what others do, and in laboratories that are far better-funded than ethnographic work.

Inspired by the sacred and the sexual and beaten upon by the racist, Aretha Franklin had to spell out “respect” for those who could not or would not read her face or even her lips. And while this important liberatory historical figure’s singing might be illuminated by the notion of the emotive and the self-doubt she sings about by the notion of the “thought-draft,” feminist work has focused on the social dynamic by which emotions—*however theorized and however expressed*—have failed to get what Frye (1983) calls “uptake” or recognition. Moreover, it is a commonplace that the therapeutic industry has not so much given women psychobiological resources that they might use during the liberatory march as displaced a social movement with privatized counseling.

Finally, I would argue that feminist ethnographic work on emotions has worked a small revolution in the kind of analysis that can be done with emotion talk and with what can be seen in the field, Grima’s moving portrait being an example. That small revolution will be undone if, in the name of progressive anticonstructionism, psychobiological research is simply reappended to ethnographic work. There is an increasing need for studies of the psychological laboratory (see Morawski 1988) in the age of Prozac and its highly gendered emotional management. Emotions are both found and

made, and it is not the feminist ethnographers' so much as the pharmaceutical industries' emotion-making on which we might focus our research agenda.

## Reply

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No neat ideological label can be pinned on current work being carried out in psychologists' laboratories. Fischer and Tangney (1995) speak of a "revolution" in the study of emotions that has occurred in the past 20 years. While ethnographic work has played a role, the principal site of this revolution, in their view, has been cognitive psychology. They criticize the cognitive community for focusing on easily observable emotions such as anger and fear to the exclusion of what they call the "self-conscious" emotions: shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride. Numerous researchers are now engaged in correcting this neglect. But it is also instructive that cognitive psychologists have failed to agree on the difference between conscious and unconscious, between emotion and thought. Efforts to specify these differences, in Erdelyi's words, "inevitably bog down in a tangle of methodological problems that in fact are covers for conceptual problems" (Erdelyi 1992:785). Laboratory research is therefore, in a number of respects, confirming the view that Lutz (1988), among others, has so eloquently stated—that the commonplace distinctions Westerners make between emotion and reason, conscious and unconscious, are cultural rather than universal constructs.

The concept of emotives I propose is certainly ill-suited to laboratory research inspired by a positivist search for objective truth, in which emotional states are assimilated to somatic ones. I hope that, instead, it will be read as a proposal to shift the grounds of certain debates, such as, for example, the debate whether "self-reporting" is a dependable source of "information" about emotions (see, e.g., Kagan 1984, Wallbott and Scherer 1989, Tangney 1995).

While anthropologists have seldom questioned the psychic unity of the human species, concrete proposals about how to conceive of this unity have been few, as Howell notes. Rosaldo's (1989:1-21) argument for an inherent connection between grief and rage is a rare and noteworthy example of such a proposal. Other proposals of this kind are needed. The concept of emotives is itself intended to be such a proposal. I will make one more below. Most ethnographers of emotion have not confronted this issue head on; often they have taken a moderate constructionist stance, which I believe is the correct one, although when it fails to offer concrete mechanisms of interaction between cultural constructions and the template upon which such constructions

work, such a stance is highly incomplete, potentially misleading. Those few who have flatly argued that emotions are entirely local constructions have made an important contribution both by posing the issue in sharper terms and by offering rich and insightful ethnographic expositions inspired by a coherent argument. If my essay does not indicate how much it owes to their work or how important I consider such work to be, let me just say that I agree entirely that this work has, as Lutz puts it, "worked a small revolution." I am convinced, however, that these important works, along with other work in the ethnography of emotion, show us communities not constructing emotions from nothing but controlling, shaping, channeling emotional expression *and thereby*, within certain limits, emotional life itself. Here is where the political stakes come in. This research, far from being "useless and abandoned," has challenged me to come up with a conceptualization of emotions that recognizes that there is something there to be shaped and controlled, something which will only be blindly shaped and controlled in a different way if "psychobiological research is simply reappended to ethnographic work."

The concept of emotives is, if anything, better suited to the field than to dusty archives and libraries. It focuses on interaction and behavior without ceding to them an all-powerful constructive role. It focuses on uncertainties of interpretation and miscues, reassuring the fieldworker that these are not something to be overcome to get at the truth but an inherent element of social life everywhere. Garro's brief discussion of a fieldwork encounter of her own is precisely the sort of application of the concept I would hope for. I intend to expand and sharpen my conceptualization of emotives to take into account, among other things, the dimensions of gesture, intonation, and word choice discussed by Besnier (1990)—dimensions for the most part occluded for those who work exclusively with textual sources but perfectly capable of having an emotive impact on the speaker.

In the case of Thésignies, the conventional choices for a historian would be to take his emotive utterances either in a Freudian frame, as indicators of powerful unconscious conflicts, or in the historicist frame of the "new cultural history," as constructions, as a form of "self-fashioning" or "self-making" (Battaglia 1995) that was, by definition, successful. The concept of emotives invites one to set aside both these choices and to view Thésignies's emotives as an effort to shape and channel his own emotional life. Just as Austin's performatives are neither true nor false but "happy" or "unhappy," so emotives are neither true nor false but "successful" or "unsuccessful" depending on whether the emotions expressed, to a greater or lesser degree, come into being (or continue), intensify, gain sufficient focus to generate further action, or slip into the background. While one cannot know the outcome of Thésignies's stratagem, one can at least set aside the dry agnosticism of "cultural" interpretation and make a political judgment



about the impact of any widespread set of emotive stratagems constituting an emotional style, whether of a person or of a community.

The idea that emotions are the real terrain of political power is not my own but derives from feminist ethnographers as well as from feminist literary critics working on the history of the sentimental novel (see, e.g., Schor 1985, DeJean 1991, Stewart 1993). I have simply tried to resituate this idea in a theoretical framework that can be applied not only to relations between men and women but also to relations among men, among women, among men and women. The political implications of emotions were already quite clear in Staël's *De la littérature* (1991 [1800]); this may be one reason political theorists neglected her work for two centuries as a mere discussion of "literature." ("Literature" for Staël meant all written texts, whatever the subject matter.) She accounted for women's greater sensitivity to emotion, for example, in strictly political terms: "Women have discovered in personalities a crowd of nuances which the desire to dominate or the fear of subjection have forced them to perceive" (1991 [1800]:180).<sup>1</sup> A similar sensitivity was, ironically, fostered among some French males by their lack of political freedom in the absolute monarchy (pp. 274–305). The rediscovery of Staël now under way (Gutwirth 1978, Schor 1985, Gutwirth, Goldberger, and Szmurlo 1991, Denby 1994, Isbell 1994) is just one minor gain that we owe to present-day feminist scholarship.

That the self appears in this brief essay to be something of a "black box," as Hunt puts it, is partly a result of the unfinished state of my theory of emotives. There are stable relationships among emotions within the self, cross-culturally, which, properly understood, can offer a ground on which to build political critiques of local emotional styles. I have mentioned Rosaldo's proposed link between grief and rage. In addition, a number of clinical psychologists have been taking a new look at shame in recent years. Scheff (1987), Barrett (1995), Tangney (1995), Tangney, Burgraf, and Wagner (1995), and others, following the pioneer work of Lewis (1971), have redefined shame and guilt in order to clarify the distinction between them. Guilt, by their redefinition, focuses on evaluation of behavior and leads to action and reparation; shame focuses on evaluation of the essential self and leads to withdrawal. Shame, in this approach, not guilt, is the precursor of depression. It is very often difficult as well, according to Tangney, Burgraf, and Wagner (1995), even when feeling intense shame, to recognize the presence of this emotion.

Shame, I would argue, also derives from thoughts about how one is seen by others. Others almost always attribute a spurious unity to one's own complex interplay of draft thoughts and feelings. It is easy to imagine that another's view of oneself, because coherent, has

more authority than one's own multiple drafts of self. Thus, shame can lead to withdrawal coupled with action aimed at managing appearances; such action can, in turn, take the form of emotive utterances and behavior that drum up and intensify socially approved feelings and play down or deny deviant ones. Local varieties of shame are therefore, in many cultural contexts, a principal instrument of social control and political power, even where shame is disavowed. Shame is often, as Myers (1986:120) proposes, a "metasentiment," a regulatory emotion, as it certainly was among French males in the 19th century (Nye 1993, Reddy 1997). In some contexts, the emphasis seems to be more on emulation (Rosaldo 1980, 1984), in others on the danger of disgrace (Grima 1992, Wikan 1989). I would argue that one of the reasons it was hard for French males of the 19th century to recognize shame as a "sentiment"—the proper domain of women—was that they placed shame outside the self, as a control feeling that taught them what to feel and what not to feel, what kind of self to be and not to be. This is also why, today, clinical researchers find that their clients have difficulty acknowledging shame when they feel it. Political power, whether in families, village councils, or state bureaucracies, is often wielded by persons—whatever their ostensible role or office—who have become shame experts, highly skilled at eliciting or damping this emotion. These observations can give rise to many historical hypotheses that could be researched. Here is an example: In European states, the shift from absolute monarchies to modern democracies has involved a shift from experts who knew best how to elicit shame to experts who are at least equally skilled in damping it down, often by pushing blame off onto target groups beyond one's constituency. At the same time, in families and private enterprises, this shift has not occurred, or not to the same extent; often shame elicitors still rule.

While it has become conventional for anthropologists to deplore the lack of historical depth to their analyses, a great many anthropologists have nonetheless responded by becoming historians. Few among those who work on emotions, however, have made this transition. Besnier's (1995) impressive work on Nukulaelae provides a historical context for the current emotional styles displayed by inhabitants of the atoll, a context that includes imperial rule, Christianization, and, since independence, off-island wage labor. The political implications of emotional expression and control are clearly laid out, as they have been in a number of other works on the Pacific. But the characterization of emotional expression is still couched in a flat ethnographic present. A history of emotions will offer a dynamic explanation of change that examines before, during, and after, as (although it is not a study of emotion) does Lynn Hunt's recent work on the French Revolution (1992). Anthropologists have successfully combined work in the field with research in historical documents to explore many subjects; there is no reason the same cannot be done with emotions, provided there is a theo-

1. "Les femmes ont découverte dans les caractères une foule de nuances, que le besoin de dominer ou la crainte d'être asservi leur a fait apercevoir."



retical framework to guide the research. My hope is that the concept of emotives represents a step in the direction of developing such a framework.

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