

**Presentation to be delivered by Tobold Rollo at the *Ethnic Studies Student Research Conference* on April 15, 2008.**

The politics of recognition and its promise of reconciliation between ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups is at an impasse. Although the well-meaning applications of recognition (eg, land claims, public apologies, and reparations) are effective at generating the desired sense of acknowledgment among recognized communities, these institutional forms of affirmation simultaneously incite powerful episodes of shame, distrust, and anger. Subaltern communities are thus fixed in a kind of emotional ‘double-bind’, leading critics to charged that insofar as institutional practices of recognition are psychologically damaging to the recognized they represent a new and more insidious form of domination (Fanon 1967, Oliver 2001, Brown 1993).

Many hold that these failures in practice are traceable to a failure of recognition theory. Proponents of recognition are accused of neglecting the manifold complexity of identity on the one hand and the privileged position of the recognizer in dictating the terms on the other (Markell 2003). We know, for instance, that among aboriginal peoples in Canada emotional turmoil contributes to appalling levels of ‘suicide, self-injury and other self-destructive behaviours’ (RCAP 1996). And although healing continues with great success in many of these communities, it is argued that the necessity of ongoing contact and negotiations with settler communities presents a powerful contradiction. The profound sense of uncertainty tied to recognition and suspicion has led many First Nations scholars and leaders to call for a disengage from these destructive institutional arrangements altogether (Alfred 2005, Coulthard 2007).

The urgency of the problems and critiques has led many theorists to argue that the recognition process ought to incorporate issues of identity, power, and sovereignty and that this requires us to engage in a conversations that are open and unrestricted in their terms (Tully 1995, Maclure 2003). Success should be measured, not in the formal receipt of a particular right, reparation, or apology, but in whether the process generates the appropriate feelings of acknowledgment in an ongoing negotiation of recognition demands. These approaches bring into sharp relief the significance of conflicting emotions, which emerge in even the most successful negotiations. Even in cases where all parties have considered the dialogue suitably open and accommodating, our practices of political affirmation continue to produce a powerful matrix of devastating emotional states.

What is going on here? Recognition scholars have explored in broad terms the ways in which emotions feature in the negotiations over recognition. The traumatic emotional impact on communities resulting from *mis*recognition has been carefully investigated (Taylor 1994, Honneth 1996, Young 1990); feminist thinkers have elaborated on how the body is a target of power and discursive subjectivities (Butler 1993, Kruks 2001, Young 2005); and the emotion of shame has received considerable treatment as a product of discourse (Nussbaum 2002, Tarponovsky 2007). However, these accounts share a methodology which posits emotions and corresponding attitudes as the *effects* (directly or indirectly) of discourse. This predominant focus on symbolic intersubjectivity means that theoretical models of recognition take as their necessary starting point the normative claims of communities built around shared symbolic orders and narratives.

## Embedded and Embodied

The benefits of this dialogical approach are widely acknowledged, but I think the starting point prevents the proper understanding and treatment of emotional dissonance. Theorists and practitioners find themselves compelled to make sense of the conflict by speculating the existence of ‘forgotten’ or ‘hidden’ discourses, as in psychoanalytic approaches, and the temptation to formulate *ad hoc* stories to explain the dissonance seems to compound the difficulties and exacerbate suspicions. The status of the politics of recognition is thus rendered dangerously ambiguous, providing critics and communities with serious grounds for scepticism, while highlighting the immanent need for a clearer understanding of how these harmful competing emotions manifest and endure. It seems that two questions now require immediate attention: First, how do discourses which do the appropriate work of promoting positive emotions and pacifying negative emotions differ from discourses which paradoxically foster both positive and negative emotions? Second, how do we adapt our institutional forms of recognition accordingly?

To find answers to these questions I explore the extent to which recognition does not only or simply take place through the medium of symbolic intersubjectivity. For it is my belief that the demands for authenticity and sincerity at the heart of recognition are not wholly or most importantly met through discourse. Symbolic and material gestures are notoriously ambiguous. The history of the politics of recognition is replete with convenient bequests of land-claims, self-serving upholding of rights-claims, empty pledges, half-hearted public apologies, begrudgingly issued reparations, and strategically granted benefits. It is important to understand that these suspicions and sentiments on the part of the recognized may not correspond to the actual authenticity and sincerity of the

recognizer. I suggest that we can locate the problem in the institutional forms of recognition and the authenticity and sincerity that they communicate. As recognition theorist Arto Laitinen observes, “Mere actions and expressions without corresponding attitudes seem mere pretence of recognition, and mere attitudes without corresponding action do not seem sincere either. Furthermore, attitudes without expressions (at least implicitly in body-language or tone of voice) are not accessible to others, who thus cannot ‘get recognition’” (2005, p. 122).

So I would like to make a claim that will seem odd at first: that institutions admit of a body-language and tone of voice that speaks alongside and sometimes over the meanings we speak through them. Now, when I speak of institutional as communicating I do not refer as other theorists do to institutions as the embodiment of discourse, as sedimented histories, cultural artefacts, or reified symbolic orders; I am referring to the perception of institutions as embodied and intentional agents, that is, as corporeal beings. I thus speak of institutional recognition in metaphoric terms. But this is not a analysis of literary metaphor. I wish to analyze institutional recognition as structured through what is called cognitive or conceptual metaphor. I am utilizing work that has emerged over the past fifteen years to examine the structure and origins of human perception and conception. Through an application of the work in related fields of ‘embodied cognition’ I argue that human beings as embodied agents are tuned to the behaviour of other bodies (Gallagher 2007; Meltzoff 2001; Stern 1985; Thompson 2006; Ekman, 2003; Cole 1997; Barsalou 1994). Put simply, the carriage, position, posture, gesture, movement, and gazes of other bodies have profound meaning for us prior to their thematization through culture (Sheets-Johnstone 1994, 1999, 2000; Lohmar 2006; Turner 2000a, 2000b). In addition to

## Embedded and Embodied

the symbolic level of social understanding, the relations of interacting bodies themselves are always already thematized in terms of power, status, threat, affirmation, friendship, merit, shame, disgust etc.

What I wish to address is different from a simple exploration of the role of ‘body-language’ in the political domain. The concept of body-language tends to capture both physiologically and socially encoded forms of comportment. whereas a study of ‘intercorporeal semantics’ looks at the host of meanings which arise by virtue of being a human body. On this account general understandings are structured through various body schema, and many social understandings through perceptions of the bodies of others. Most important to my research is evidence which demonstrates that it is not just the behaviour of human, animal, or even animate bodies which carry meaning for us. Institutions are perceived as social actors and therefore as expressive and embodied actors. The question then becomes: what do institutional forms of recognition communicate to us that so frequently generates emotional dissonance in the recognized?

Contemporary studies on affect offer an important alternative to an interpretation of emotions as naturally coupled with narrative or normative understandings (Barrett *et al* 2005; Zahavi 2007; Haidt 2001; Zajonc 1984). Most significantly, cognitive theorists now suggest that emotions represent a kind of ‘knowing’ in themselves and do not always result from propositional understandings (Nichols 2004; Prinz 2004). Emotions and propositional understandings can make independent contributions to judgment, and emotional appraisals sometimes arise from perceptions in the absence of (or in opposition to) propositional content. In addition, contemporary neuro-phenomenological research suggests that emotional appraisals of others, especially in face-to-face settings, can

emerge in the absence of symbolic content (Bermúdez 2003; Zahavi 2005; Brennan 2004; Sheets-Johnstone 1994) and form the basis of our stories about others (Gallagher 2004). Together this line of inquiry suggests that we employ ‘emotional intersubjective’ evaluations that emerge independently (and sometimes in conflict with) understandings that are the direct or indirect effects discourse. I argue, therefore, that participants in the politics of recognition must be understood not only as embedded in their particular cultural, linguistic, and religious forms of being and interpretation, but also as embodied agents who understand the social world as populated by other intentional bodies.

In the theoretical component of my study I will develop an affect model of recognition premised on ‘intercorporeal semantics’ or ‘emotional intersubjectivity’. I am currently working on developing a more systematic understanding of how institutions are perceived as expressing a particular carriage, position, posture, gesture, movement, and gaze, and what affective appraisals that manifest from these perceptions. The model will retain most of the features of linguistic intersubjectivity established by previous recognition theorists, while also providing a framework for understanding the problem of emotional dissonance that presently confounds these theories. Moreover, this model will serve as a reply to critics who charge that residual emotional dissonance is evidence for the incoherence of recognition as a political project.

In the practical component of my study I hope to apply the ‘emotional intersubjective’ model to previous negotiations over land claims, public apologies, and reparations in order to ascertain the varieties and character of affective disagreement. I will investigate these through a comparative analysis of the environments in which negotiations took place, the medium through which decisions were made public, and the

## Embedded and Embodied

recorded testimonials of representatives and their communities. When complete my study will establish a framework of critique and enhancement that theorists and policy makers can apply to practices internationally in order to attune the politics of recognition and reconciliation to the emotional health and security of its participants.