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Circulating Emotion: Race, Gender, and Genre in Crash

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"I wake up like this every morning. I am angry all the time . . . and I don't know why."
—Jean, *Crash*

Crash (Paul Haggis, 2005) follows a range of diverse but intersecting characters who, in their entirety, are meant to represent a social landscape: modern American urban existence. Through an ensemble cast and a multi-story structure, the film depicts a circuitous society in which one part affects other parts that, in turn, affect all parts.

The film is structured by means of three entangled, sometimes complementary, sometimes competing, cultural discourses. The first discourse is race. In a deeply troubling way, race is most overtly what the film is "about." In the world of the film, virtually every character is at some point explicitly racist. Additionally, in certain subplots, racial discourse is inextricably intertwined with gender.

The second discourse is law and order. Again, the majority of characters take up a role in this discursive range. Some are the designated upholders of law and order: District Attorney Rick Cabot (Brendan Fraser); uniformed police officer John Ryan (Matt Dillon); police detective Graham Waters (Don Cheadle). Other characters are either criminals like Anthony (Ludacris) and Peter (Larenz Tate), or victims of crime like Jean Cabot (Sandra Bullock) and Daniel (Michael Peña). Over the course of the film many come to occupy more than one position in the law and order spectrum. The effect is a kaleidoscope of police officers, detectives, criminals, crime victims, police officers who become criminals, criminals who become the victims of crime, and so on.

The third discourse is anger. Although specifically voiced by Jean Cabot, her words, "I wake up like this every morning. I am angry all the time . . . and I don't know why," represent a moment of insight into the motivations of many of the people in this social landscape. The film's representation of anger is varying and nuanced, taking the form of outrage, frustration, distrust, or fear, provoked by different causes, and acted upon in different ways. Yet, it is a common denominator that further binds together the individuals who make up this metaphorical microcosm of contemporary society.

In this chapter, I take up the complex, multi-discursive world depicted in *Crash* in order to explore the place—or absence—of emotion in genre studies. Looking specifically at the moments of collision between characters in which the issues of race and gender are inseparable, I consider how anger specifically, and perhaps emotion in general, can be understood to ignite and fuel complex social relations. Such an analysis tells us about the ways emotions as cultural phenomena are understood or, equally, overlooked in media and other social representations.

EMOTION AND GENRE STUDIES

For the most part, and surprisingly, emotions have not been incorporated as a fundamental element in the analysis of genres. Rarely discussed in detail, emotion is often noted. For instance, Corrigan and White note that "horror films are about fear—physical fear, psychological fear, sexual fear, even social fear" (2004, 309). Similarly, from Bordwell and Thompson: "Thrillers obviously aim to thrill us—that is, to startle,

shock, and scare" (2004, 113), and "some genres are defined by the distinctive emotional effect they aim for: amusement in comedy, tension in suspense films" (109). Despite this widespread identification of emotional values across genres, and the "obviously" emotional component of specific genres, little systematic study has been undertaken on the place and function of emotion as an integral component of "genreness," or on the role particular emotions might play in the development of specific genres.

There are exceptions to this, for example, in the study of melodrama. Even so, emotion in melodrama too often has been considered in terms of its usually problematic "excess." Steve Neale, citing Daniel Gerould, describes the dominant tendency of melodrama as involving "the subordination of all other elements 'to one overriding aesthetic goal: the calling forth of "pure," "vivid" emotions'" (1995, 179). While seeming to celebrate the presence of emotion in melodrama, this view constructs it as dominant to the detriment of all else.

In contrast, Linda Williams (1998) argues that characterizing melodrama as emotionally excessive obscures the pivotal and complex role of emotion in melo dramatic forms and in American popular culture in general.

> We are diverted, therefore, from the significance of melodrama if we pay too much attention to what has been condemned as its excessive emotionality and theatricality. . . . They are the means to something more important: the achievement of a felt good, the merger . . . of morality and feeling. (55)

The achievement of a "felt good" is the recognition of a commonly held notion of morality through the narrative establishment of guilt and innocence. In popular cinema, we are led to feel the pathos of "protagonists beset by forces more powerful than they and who are perceived as victims" (42), and we come to believe that "virtue and truth can be achieved in private individuals and individual heroic acts" (74). In Williams's argument, the narrative *mode* of melodrama, featuring the dialectic of emotion and physical action, enables us to recognize and deeply identify with victimization, innocence, and redemptive acts of justice. Emotion is, therefore, an integral part of most popular film genres that seek to determine or reinforce principles of morality and justice. However, she argues, due to the critical association of particular melodramatic genres, like the woman's film and the family melodrama, with excessive sentimentality and female audiences, melodrama itself is often perceived as the antithesis of supposedly non-emotional masculine genres, such as the western or the gangster film (50).

As a result, in many popular genres, particularly those understood as masculine, the relationship of emotional action to physical action has been overlooked. The separating out of emotionality and physicality in film studies, each to be positioned as the antithesis of the other—present only where the other is not—leads to a misreading of much popular American cinema. The significance of the coupling of emotional and bodily action is that it enables the impulse for justice to be represented. Williams suggests it is time to return to an understanding of "moving pictures" in both senses of the term: as movement in action and as the ability to move us emotionally (47). Following Williams, I consider the role of

anger in Crash and, in particular, how it relates to the film's central concern with the impulse for justice in the context of the injustices of racism.

JUSTICE GENRES

Through its multi-storied structure, *Crash* evokes a range of police, detective, criminal, and legal genres. It appears less concerned with fulfilling the expectations tied to a single genre than in accessing the discourses of law and order within which all these genres are embedded, seeking in particular the factors that produce obstacles to the impulse for justice. The film's multiple generic citations cohere because they share a common foundation in the processes or failures of juridically established right and wrong, innocence and guilt.

In the justice genres—the representational forms that reinforce and sometimes call into question widely held conceptualizations of justice—the emotion of anger plays a pivotal role. Sometimes it is the criminal who is motivated by anger, turning to transgressive behavior in response to perceived offenses, whether personal or social, committed against him or her. If not motivated by comprehensible, "reasonable" anger, the criminal wrongdoer is often deranged—"mad" in both senses of the term. Anger, mixed with sorrow and grief, is a common emotion felt by the victims of crime, or by the victims' surrogates, their family and friends, who seek justice on behalf of themselves or their loved ones, normally manifested as desire for the detection, arrest, and prosecution of the offender—a juridical reckoning for their personal loss.

Police officials, detectives (public or private), and legal personnel are often motivated by anger: moral indignation at the transgressions committed by the offending party; sympathy for the victims that becomes displaced as outrage at the perpetrators. Anger, then, often motivates behavior leading to the capture of the wrongdoer and the reinstatement of an equilibrium of law and order. In turn, physical action is the typical form in which representatives of law and order offer comfort and consolation to crime victims and their surrogates.

Given *Crash*'s preoccupation with injustices around race, it draws on genres that closely link justice and anger. The film portrays the way people interact with one another in contemporary American urban society as analogous to a car accident. Sometimes the crash is a rear-end collision, sometimes head-on, but rarely are people depicted as interacting with others through tenderness, sympathy, concern, curiosity, affection, and so on. The "feeling angry all the time" identified by Jean produces encounter-as-collision: the only form of human contact available in this depicted world. So Anthony, the car thief, rails against the social injustices of racial discrimination. Jean, the victim of a carjacking, is angry at having been made to feel afraid. Graham, both detective and victim, seeks his
brother's murderer both as law enforcer and avenger of his family's loss.

Although originating within generic foundations of crime and punishment,anger in the film is not limited to the specific purpose of pursuing wrongdoers and reinstating an equilibrium of justice. In the first place, no equilibrium of justice seems attainable in Crash's social landscape of encounter-as-collision. Second, anger in the film is elevated into a force that propels social relations, most notably racism. The fact that anger is not solely a property of the individual, either a personal flaw that leads to criminal acts or a

personal strength that enables law enforcement officials to do their jobs, is precisely what renders *Crash*'s depiction of anger notable. Instead, anger in *Crash* is a climate of the times, dispersed and shared across the social landscape, connecting otherwise estranged individuals, and helping to form a community of sorts, "in anger." Emotion as represented in *Crash* functions as a cultural, not a personal, property.

RACE/GENDER

In order to explore how the film envisions anger as propelling social relations, I focus on a specific series of events in which the issues of race and gender are complexly interwoven and inseparable. This race/gender sequence involves insurance representative Shaniqua Johnson (Loretta Devine), police officer John Ryan, and married couple Christine (Thandie Newton) and Cameron Thayer (Terence Howard). Like the ensemble metaphor underpinning the film in which one part affects all parts, their stories function as a relay of action, moving from one to the other to form a circuit, motivated by anger, exercised through racial and gendered identity, which then escalates with stunning consequences.

We are first introduced to Shaniqua Johnson, an African American administrator for a medical insurance company, and John Ryan, a white, uniformed Los Angeles police officer, during a phone conversation intercut between them. Ryan calls Johnson's office after-hours to complain that his father is in a great deal of pain and can't sleep. Johnson is unhelpful, insisting that because his father's urinary tract infection does not constitute an emergency, she can't help outside daytime office hours. In subsequent scenes, we learn that his father's pain is due to misdiagnosis by his insurance-company-assigned doctor. Ryan's anger, therefore, resonates as understandable. A frustrated Ryan asks for her name.\

Johnson: Shaniqua Johnson.
Ryan: Shaniqua. Big fucking surprise that is.

Johnson abruptly hangs up on him, both characters exiting the phone conversation in states of anger.

Singling out Johnson's recognizably African American first name, Ryan's angry reaction is to suggest that the problem (whether her unwillingness to help or her insurance company's incompetence) is attributable to the fact that Johnson is black. Conflict over a medical issue has shifted to a racial confrontation, leaving both parties angrier than when they began. Ryan's anger is partly motivated by his frustration in failing to help his father but also by his powerlessness in the situation. Ryan is a man used to exerting power over others, a cop accustomed to being listened to, as his later behavior makes clear.

The fact that Johnson is both African American and a woman is not incidental. Ryan's inability to compel Johnson to do as he wishes challenges his sense of authority as a police officer, as a white person, and as a man. Thus his next act attempts to reinstate his shaken sense of masculinity as much as it is intended to reestablish his racial and professional authority. Hanging up the phone, Ryan returns to his police car

and waiting partner, Tommy Hanson (Ryan Phillippe), and pulls over a black SUV driven by an African American man.

Ryan has stopped an affluent African American married couple, Christine and Cameron Thayer. In retribution for his experience with Johnson, he proceeds to harass them with the skill and efficiency of practiced methods. Unlike his recent phone demeanor, he never raises his voice, staying calm and superficially polite the entire time that he provokes, threatens, and humiliates them. His composure, in this instance, seems to return with his control over the situation, control that he lost when dealing with Johnson.

Christine and Cameron are initially polite and accommodating; indeed, they find amusement in the situation because Christine was in the process of giving her husband oral sex when they were pulled over. However, as the harassment escalates, Christine becomes vocally angry. For his part, Cameron attempts to placate Ryan by being as compliant and nonconfrontational as possible.

Failing to render Christine docile, and on the pretext of performing a body search to check for concealed weapons, Ryan proceeds to sexually assault her. Returning from a party, Christine is wearing a cocktail dress that conceals very little, negating the necessity for such a search but making Ryan's hands all the more intrusive. The assault begins with a wide shot of all four characters present—two civilians, two officers—as Ryan runs his hands along Christine's breasts under her dress. It continues in close-up on rotating shots of each of the four faces, intercut with tight shots of Ryan's hands as they violate various parts of Christine's body. Crouching down behind her, Ryan fondles Christine's buttocks, runs his hands slowly down her legs, caresses each ankle, then brings his hands back up between her legs and reaches into her crotch. In a close-up on her face, we see Christine flinch and gasp at the moment of penetration.

However, the assault is not visualized primarily through shots of Ryan's hands on Christine's body. Instead, the scene plays as a relay of close-ups on the faces of the four people present. Though thirty-two tight shots comprise the scene, only three of these directly show Ryan's hands. The remaining twenty-nine close-ups focus on the characters' facial expressions as they watch, perform, or endure the assault: a total of ten shots on Cameron, eight on Ryan, seven on Christine, and four on Hanson. The focal point of the scene is on the characters' emotional responses, rather than on the physical occurrence of the sexual assault.

During the entire time Ryan is violating Christine's body, he is—calmly, "politely"— looking at and talking to Cameron. The content of Ryan's remarks focus on threatening Cameron and his wife with arrest for reckless endangerment and lewd conduct. Finally, his hand penetrating Christine's vagina, Ryan asks Cameron, "What do you think we should do, sir?" In the moment of final defeat, Cameron apologizes to him: "Look we're sorry and we would appreciate it if you would just let us go with a warning. Please." Only at this moment, when Ryan has completely subdued and humiliated Christine and, the text suggests, emasculated Cameron, thereby supposedly regaining his own masculine status, does Ryan step back from Christine and let the couple go.

The encounter between policeman John Ryan and Christine and Cameron Thayer is established as egregiously racist. Ryan's behavior towards the couple generates one of the most disturbing sequences in the film, especially horrific because his actions are so purposeful—intentionally racist, intentionally humiliating—and

deriving from the motive of misplaced vengeance. However, while the narrative purpose of the Ryan-Thayer confrontation is a deliberate critique of the debilitating effects of racism, what the encounter represents about gender relations is not exposed in a similar manner. In its construction as a relay of close-ups between characters, the scene works dominantly as an interaction between Ryan and Cameron. Christine's body and person serve as the surface upon which this showdown between the men takes place, explaining why the greatest number of close-ups and screen time belong to Cameron, followed by Ryan. In one sense, Christine has become a witness to the events happening to her, akin to Hanson who, through his own series of close-ups, registers his angry disgust at Ryan's racist abuse of power.

The main event occurs between the two principal male characters, one white, one black. Christine's body is separated from the integrity of her person—displayed as discrete, tight fragments under the control of Ryan's hands—primarily to make a point about male power and authority between races. Ryan is able to humiliate Cameron because, if Cameron doesn't possess Christine's body outright, as her husband his identity is inscribed upon it. Ryan controls Christine's body through touch, but as the direction of his gaze and words make clear, Cameron is the person he is challenging. In the confrontation between Ryan and Cameron, the stakes are played out over race *and* masculinity.

As part of the relay of emotion, in which the circuit progresses from person to person, the encounter with Ryan also incites conflict between Christine and Cameron. In a bitter argument once they arrive home, Christine explicitly ties the confrontation with Ryan to the issue of masculinity, taking up and articulating the basis of Ryan's unspoken challenge to and defeat of Cameron: "What I need is a husband who will not just stand there while I'm being molested" and "[do] you have any idea how that felt? To have that pig's hands all over me. And you just stood there. And then you apologized to him."

Christine and Cameron's disagreement brings up issues concerning race, in their case what it means to "be black," as professionals and upper-middle-class African Americans. But the accusations based on gender, on what Christine has the right to expect from her husband, are as pointed and hurtful. Like Ryan, Christine attacks Cameron on the grounds of his virility, or lack of it. In the process, by taking up the argument in Ryan's terms, her character reaffirms her "feminine" identity as principally the body or ground upon which masculine relations are determined.

Simultaneously, Christine and Cameron dispute different approaches to social relations, particularly the appropriateness or inappropriateness of anger when dealing with conflict. Christine's strategy is to fight back rather than acquiesce. The fact that Cameron has apologized (and apparently not the sexual assault itself) is what most upsets Christine, and what she believes humiliates Cameron as a man and as an African American. When Cameron walks out of their bedroom in anger, Christine has the last words of the scene: "That's good. A little anger. It's a bit late but it's nice to see." In contrast, Cameron conceals anger, conciliates, in the hope of defusing the situation. Acting out anger or suppressing it are generally stereotyped as, respectively, masculine and feminine modes of behavior. In this instance, however, it is Christine who takes up the stereotypically "masculine" position while Cameron is aligned with the conventionally "feminine" stance. Christine's character finds fault with her husband on the grounds of his apparent failure to exhibit "authentic" masculinity, rather than calling Ryan's

structuration of race *and* gender to account. Similarly, Cameron's alignment with a more acquiescent "feminine" position makes his encounter with Ryan all the more humiliating. This leads to a later, highly confrontational scene completely at odds with his earlier demeanor, when he attempts "suicide-by-cop," taunting several police officers with provocations to shoot him. His death or injury is prevented only by the intervention of coincidentally present Officer Hanson.

In narrative terms, though, Cameron saves himself. As Hanson works to defuse the situation, Cameron refuses to acquiesce this time. He defies Hanson's instructions to put his hands on his head, sit on the curb, or engage in any other action that Cameron believes is demeaning. Through his newfound anger Cameron establishes a renewed equilibrium of masculinity for himself. A significant aspect of the representation of anger in *Crash*, confirming a commonly held social perspective, is that anger is most appropriately male, indeed, an essential property of masculinity. Cameron's humiliation and dignity have become the principal issues, leaving Christine's arguably more humiliating experience of sexual assault to fall by the wayside. The degradation of the sexual assault is primarily Cameron's, and only secondarily, Christine's.

Through the complex dealings among this subset of characters, we begin to understand how *Crash* depicts anger as a force shaping social relations. Anger functions like a relay, traveling from one person to the next, altering its manifestations and effects in the process, but constructing an ongoing social circuit.

CIRCULATING EMOTION

Recently, cultural theorists have begun to explore the organization and functions of emotions as social events. Sara Ahmed, for instance, argues that the pertinent question is what emotions do and how they circulate, rather than what they "are" (2004, 4). Under the dominance of psychology, most models have posited emotions as interiority, as the effects of individual self-expression, in which the question, "How do I feel?" is understood as the most penetrating means of locating and analyzing the meaning of emotions (8). In contrast, other scholars have begun to argue "that emotions should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices" (9).

In Ahmed's analysis, emotions occur through the movement or circulation of subjects, objects, or concepts that have become "saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension" (11). Crash takes up the issue of race precisely in terms of its extensive and tangled saturation of affect. In the film's world, anger is not simply an individual flaw or failing, or a motivator to jump-start law enforcement action. It is, in Raymond Williams's terms, a "structure of feeling," a culturally widespread complex of emotion by which social relations are negotiated and exchanged (2009). Emotional experience, then, is a pivotal means by which the individual and the cultural are seamlessly interwoven and simultaneously produced. I would add that because social relations never occur beyond or outside of social differences, structures of feeling are also a means by which power circulates, establishing and reestablishing its discrepancies.

In order to determine what the film has to say about anger as a structure of feeling that shapes contemporary social relations, we need to turn to the inverse, the

matched action, of the sexual assault scene: the fiery car crash in which Ryan rescues Christine.

NARRATIVE PAIRINGS: EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL ACTION

The most prolonged, elaborate physical action sequence of the film, the rescue scene, requires the heightened intensity of bodily action to offset the emotional and moral depths to which Ryan has descended in his encounter with the Thayers, thereby functioning as dramatic compensation for Ryan's sexual violation of Christine. In this sequence, Christine finds herself in a life-threatening car accident and Ryan, her recent aggressor, manages, at great personal risk, to free her in the nick of time, dragging her to safety seconds before the car bursts into flames.

Three aspects of the rescue sequence are particularly pertinent in a consideration of the relationship between emotional and physical action. First, the rescue sequence transforms the emotional tension between Christine and Ryan into the corporeal tension of the last-minute escape. Ryan behaves in a generically familiar way as a male officer in a police drama, performing as a "man of action" rather than confronting his own shame or regret. This suggests that one of the roles of physical activity is to offset the necessity for emotional action and accountability. In this sense, bodily endeavor may be used as a defense against recognizing feelings. Physicality in place of emotional encounter dispels the necessity of acknowledging difficult feelings, allowing for some kind of resolution to the problem, although an indirect one.

The second aspect is that in rescuing Christine, the film suggests that Ryan has redeemed his previous racist and sexist violent behavior. In other words, the transformation of emotional conflict into physical action enables a particular ritualized redemptive process to occur. Once Ryan extricates Christine from the car, he walks her to an awaiting ambulance as Christine leans her head against his chest, crying. When the emergency medical specialists lead Christine away, we watch an out-of-breath Ryan as he continues to look after her—looking after her visually now, as he looked after her physically moments earlier. The scene cuts to a close-up of Christine as she reciprocates Ryan's look. Then, in arguably the most manipulative shot of the scene, the camera returns to Ryan down on one knee, in his police uniform, a fire truck and smoke filling the background behind him. This is *Crash*'s "9/11 shot," an image reminiscent of the first responders at the scene when the World Trade Center towers collapsed. This iconic reference appears intended to engage audience empathy for Ryan and admiration for what he has done in rescuing Christine.

The lingering exchange of looks between Christine and Ryan conjures up the familiar exchange of gazes between parted lovers in romance genres. In the mutual relay of gazes, we are meant to understand that something has transpired between the two, something of an intimate nature. If, however, the final exchange of looks suggests that Ryan, through the exchange of physical exertion for emotional engagement, has redeemed himself, there is no immediate correlation between the act of redemption and the earlier transgression for which he must morally account. That is, his physical exploit does not directly address the nature of the earlier conflict between the two. As a result, how redemption through physical activity occurs remains unclear. We might assume

that Christine looks back at Ryan in gratitude for saving her life. Perhaps we are meant to interpret Christine's return gaze as her reciprocating action, the act of forgiveness.

Ryan's motivations and emotions, and therefore his current moral status in the narrative, remain murkier. Does his physical effort negate the necessity for articulated or performed emotional exchange because, in saving Christine, he has canceled out his previous debt? Has he effectively apologized, his extraordinary efforts to rescue Christine the acknowledgment of his errors? Does he go to such extremes in the rescue attempt, placing his own life in jeopardy, because he feels guilt? Remorse? Shame? In light of the 9/11 shot, are we meant to understand that the job makes him heroic despite his other flaws because in the final analysis he follows the dictum to serve and protect? Or does his previous conduct endanger his professional competence because, in losing Christine's trust, he nearly fails to save her? All of these are credible interpretations, leaving indeterminate how, precisely, physical display reinstates moral equilibrium.

The third aspect of the rescue sequence significant to a consideration of the relationship between emotional and physical action is that Christine's character is not afforded a similar enlightening, compensating, or clarifying feat. The car crash rescue scene is most centrally about Ryan and his redemption that, like his most egregious transgression, occurs upon the ground of Christine's body. She is "the rescued one," serving the role of victim, to be dragged back to life through the literal and figurative wreckage that surrounds her. Since Christine has not erred as Ryan has, she does not require the same degree of redemption. However, narrative physical action functions not only to redeem individual moral failings but also to right social and personal imbalances. Bodily acts also operate as a way of dealing with emotional events, providing the means to survive such events, as in the case of Christine's husband, Cameron.

Cameron's racial and masculine identities are recouped by the physical act of standing up to the second set of police officers he encounters, affording him the opportunity to reclaim his identity as an African American and as a man. In the process, Cameron also reclaims his emotional and psychological equilibrium by regaining his dignity and, therefore, his will to live. No similar action sequence is offered Christine. She is always *acted upon*. Both Cameron's and Christine's lives are physically threatened; his in the suicidal confrontation with the police, hers by the car crash. Both their lives are also threatened in metaphorical terms, by the loss of a sense of self. However, Cameron finds his own way back. Christine, on the other hand, is "rescued"—and by the very character who jeopardized her well-being in the first place. She is the ground or site for others' realizations: for Ryan by assaulting her body and then rescuing it; for Cameron in losing his own identity as a result of what occurs upon her body, but then acting to retrieve his self-respect.

That some characters are provided with the possibility for self-redemptive physical acts, while others are not, suggests that action itself is culturally gendered. Privileging action as the rightful realm of certain characters maintains an interconnectedness between masculinity, generic anger, and physical action. Although susceptibility to emotions in general is socially coded as feminine, anger, a highly potent emotion for concepts such as justice, is more likely in the law and order genres to be coded as masculine.

The narrative interconnectedness of masculinity, anger, and action allows the justice genres to utilize anger as their propelling emotion while continuing to be perceived as a masculine genre. Further, the transformation of emotional into physical action enables the narratively vital presence of emotion to be concealed, resulting in the false perception of action-based films, such as the justice genres, as non-emotional forms of storytelling. As Linda Williams argues, this has led to the historic tendency in film studies to establish an erroneous dichotomy between genres—*either* emotion *or* action—instead of tracing the crucial relationship *between* emotional and physical action in popular film.

POWER AND SATURATION

Anger is depicted in *Crash* not as a property of the individual—as barometer of a personal psyche—but as a structure of feeling that propels social relations. This distinction is exemplified by the degree of and access to anger allowed specific characters, as defined by social differentials and unequal power relations. Power is a critical element in the cultural exchange of emotions. As Ahmed's work suggests, the saturation of words and actions with cultural affect is pivotal to the mechanisms by which emotion circulates, generating social relations that *affect* others.

In the argument between Christine and Cameron in the aftermath of Ryan's assault, Christine's claim that Cameron's behavior indicates a lack of self-respect is based on a complex network of racial relations in which individual and racial pride are linked to angry defiance in the face of socially enforced racial inequities. The non-expression of anger in this context is a sign, then, of surrender to or compliance with racial injustices. The attack on Cameron's self-esteem succeeds as a result of a mutually understood context of social insult and debasement in the operation of race relations.

Functioning in a similar manner is Ryan's remarkably concise response to Shaniqua Johnson when she tells him her name: "Shaniqua. Big fucking surprise that is." This can only be understood—by Ryan, Johnson, and the audience— as a deliberate racial insult on the basis of knowledge of African American names and, more importantly, historical and contemporary racist assumptions in the United States that question African Americans' competencies. We cannot understand or participate in cultural configurations of social power without a complex network of knowledge about one's own and others' social standings in the context of a prevailing set of social relations and constructed identities. It is this knowledge that enables our words and behaviors to be saturated with affect.

Anger, as an experience or expression, cannot be understood if removed from its anchoring social relations and practices, hence the different consequences of expressing anger for Christine, Cameron, and Ryan. Christine is portrayed as losing her dignity and notion of self-worth by expressing her anger to Ryan, while Cameron manages to preserve something—their safety?—by relinquishing his anger and performing obsequiousness. Further, the expression or non-expression of anger does not determine whether the exertion of power through anger is successful. Its demonstration is effective between Christine and Cameron—she manages to wound

him—but ineffective between Christine and Ryan, while the greatest exertion of power in this particular subplot occurs when Ryan's anger is not overtly exhibited.

The ineffectiveness of Christine's rage at Ryan has much to do with the gendered Identities of women characters. The association of women with disproportionate emotionality, as in the "excessive" emotion of melodrama, allows the perception of women's deployments of anger as uncontrolled and uncontrollable—fits of passion. Conversely, a cultural association between masculinity and controlled rage—a cold, "reasoned," anger—helps account for the biting effectivity of Ryan's calm, "polite" assault.

The majority of characters in *Crash* have clear psychological reasons for their anger. However, the film doesn't delve deeply into their individual psychological states, nor does it question the validity of their psychological motivations. Instead, it takes individual psychological manifestations—the reality that in this world everyone is angry, and mostly for good reason—as a starting point from which to narrativize the effects of anger as they are exerted and circulated in the social context of the film.

CONCLUSION

As a final note, I would like to return to Linda Williams's idea of "a felt good," a commonly shared morality recognized through the establishment of narrative guilt and innocence. In this argument, one of the benefits of the melodramatic mode is that it enables audiences to identify with representations of innocence and redemptive acts of justice as a reaction against the guilts of victimization, injustice, and immorality.

Speaking of the specific case of theatrical melodrama, Christine Gledhill notes that throughout the nineteenth century it functioned effectively as a central cultural paradigm (1987, 19). Melodrama's qualities of sentimentalism and spectacle and its moral dilemmas based on binary antagonisms of good and evil could articulate the values and conflicts of the age. Yet, its widespread critical acceptability in the nineteenth century declined fairly abruptly early in the twentieth century, no longer making sense of the world in as compelling a manner.

Instead of melodrama's "felt good," the prevalence of the law and order genres, in their stories based on justice, anger, and failed or limited redemption, indicate something akin to a "felt guilt," in the juridical sense, a shared culpability that represents a more resonant contemporary cultural paradigm. While nineteenth century melodrama emphasizes the recognition of innocence and moral virtue through pathos, contemporary justice genres privilege an ideological structuration that calls forth the identification of moral guilt by means of both justifiable and unjustifiable anger. In these terms, *Crash* points to an alternative cultural paradigm in which concepts of a harsher form of justice, impelled by anger, supersede an earlier moment dominated by the possibility of innocence and moral virtue.

In comparison to anger, pathos is a naïve but, simultaneously, more forgiving emotional paradigm. Moral virtue remains attainable through pathos. In contrast, justice, in its more contemporary conceptualization, is preoccupied with the establishment of a shared notion of guilt. As *Crash* indicts, all parties, in some way, share in the collective cultural guilt of racism.