tina gonsalves:
unleashing emotion
The beauty within. The English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins coined terms such as *inscape* and *instress* in the late 19th Century to capture the coherent inner wholeness or essence of a thing, whether it is a person, a tree or his favourite topic, nature. For Hopkins the world radiated its inner wonder through its external appearances. I'm not so sure about that anymore. In an age of digital simulation, reality is now codified as image, not reflected through its images. The once reliable equation of *surface equals depth* has abstracted into the deceptive algebra of CGI, the hyperreal, the simulacrum. But I'm especially dubious of the wisdom of this historical axiom, the beauty within, in the light of the ongoing work of media artist Tina Gonsalves.

For the past decade Gonsalves has been wrestling with appearances, experimenting in a startling body of visual, interactive and time-based works with the aesthetic dilemma of expressing inner states, or, as she describes it, 'externalising the internal'.

The stricture of whether or not an image is visually pleasing, beautiful or seductive is just the starting point in Gonsalves' work. She is interested in the problematic nature of all inner states, or rather the historical belief that concepts such as mind, beauty or emotion reside within. The adage, beauty within, in the light of the ongoing work of media artist Tina Gonsalves, is presently honorary artist in residence at the Wellcome Department of Imaging Neuroscience and visiting artist at the MIT Media Lab. Drawing on advances in the cognitive and neurosciences, psychophysiology, network theory and emotion computing, Gonsalves' recent work is interested in adaptive, rather than expressive approaches to mental and emotional states. The capacity to feel is, for Gonsalves, empathic, relational and bound up with the intricacies of human interaction and group dynamics. In other words, it's not all about me. The complexity of the relations between arousal and response explored in her work suggests that one person's anxiety or ecstasy is the transference and embodiment of someone else's sensation of the same emotions. In this her work has far more philosophical allegiance to Deleuze and Guattari than Aristotle, for whom *quiditas*, or the whatness of a thing, shone outward for all to see in moments of epiphany. Gonsalves situates emotional states as rhizomorphic and emergent, coalescing into being through their charged interaction with others. Like a trail of ants passing an informational current through the collective body, individuals become intimately connected in social contexts through a range of signifying channels (posture, gesture, facial expression, tone, etc.). Within a rhizome, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, any point can and must be connected to any other point within the network.

But Gonsalves is no theoretical polemicist. There is nothing didactic about her work. It is far too visceral for that. It invokes, entices and 'claws' (to use a term of Samuel Beckett) at anyone who enters its intimate, ambiguous and at times confronting realms. Since 2006 she has been working on an ambitious series of inter-connected works that explore this adaptive notion of emotional states. Collaborating with neuroscientists, psychiatrists and professors of affective computing, Gonsalves is developing interactive works that respond to the emotions of visitors to the gallery. Part interactive video installation, part activated environment and part theatre of cruelty, these works sense and translate through bio-sensing technology the relative stillness or animation of the participant into the projected image of the artist's face on the gallery wall. Immediately we are reminded of the long tradition of portraiture in the visual arts, but with a difference. In *Feel: Insula* (2006/2007), for instance, she is encountered in a hypnotic state, at peace, silent, yet vulnerable. The scale of the projection is itself unnerving, provocative. She is very much, to use another colloquialism, in your face. The simple act of entering the gallery prompts her to wake up, as if in direct response to your presence. You keep still, vigilant. The artist, comforted by this quiescence, drifts back into hypnosis, speaking from beyond your presence. You keep still, vigilant. The artist, comforted by this quiescence, drifts back into hypnosis, speaking from beyond your presence. The more still you remain, the more intimate this uneasy intimacy. Through responsive bio-feedback, video of the artist's face changes from states of sadness, distress or calm in direct response to the participant's monitored vital signs, movement, in *Feel: Inside*, 2006, heart rate, in *Feel: Trace*, 2006/2007 and sweat in *Feel: Perspire* (in production).

Gonsalves' current practice involves innovative dialogue and engagement with researchers in science and technology (she is presently honorary artist in residence at the Wellcome Department of Imaging Neuroscience and visiting artist at the MIT Media Lab). Drawing on advances in the cognitive and neurosciences, psychophysiology, network theory and emotion computing, Gonsalves' recent work is interested in adaptive, rather than expressive approaches to mental and emotional states. The capacity to feel is, for Gonsalves, empathic, relational and bound up with the intricacies of human interaction and group dynamics. In other words, it's not all about me. The complexity of the relations between arousal and response explored in her work suggests that one person's anxiety or ecstasy is the transference and embodiment of someone else's sensation of the same emotions. In this her work has far more philosophical allegiance to Deleuze and Guattari than Aristotle, for whom *quiditas*, or the whatness of a thing, shone outward for all to see in moments of epiphany. Gonsalves situates emotional states as rhizomorphic and emergent, coalescing into being through their charged interaction with others. Like a trail of ants passing an informational current through the collective body, individuals become intimately connected in social contexts through a range of signifying channels (posture, gesture, facial expression, tone, etc.). Within a rhizome, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, any point can and must be connected to any other point within the network.

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In these works, Gonsalves has given the media art world a new concept, the 'emotional algorithm'. It synthesises the well-established symbiosis of work and participant associated with...
the interactive paradigm, but extends and amplifies it in ways that were unthought of in the formative years of the early 1990s. Unlike video art, which sustains the emotional distance of the viewer as voyeur, these works foreground the absolute proximity of the visitor to the subject. There is no escaping the intimacy of the subject's face, its ambience and intrusive, raw exposure of skin, hue and mood. There is none of the psychic or somatic ambiguity of Gonsalves' earlier imagery here. The visitor's empathy becomes a powerful form of agency, whereby they become increasingly aware of and sensitive to the consequences of their interactions. This engenders a problematic ethics, in that the visitor to the gallery must consider the degree to which they feel responsible for the subject's changing emotional states.

Gonsalves' current work in progress, *Feel: Chameleon* (2007/2008) expands the scope of the earlier *Feel* series by introducing multiple subjects, both projected images and people, into a panoramic installation that is technically and aesthetically ambitious. This work is a complex exploration of ideas drawn from the emerging discipline of 'social neuroscience', which is interested in the ways in which people tend to connect with the emotional state of others. *Feel: Chameleon* seeks to put into play the idea of 'emotional contagion', the spread of emotions from one person to another within a social group. Gonsalves describes this as a bio-social mechanism that 'highlights how we innately and continuously synchronise with the facial expressions, voices, postures of others, unconsciously infecting each other with our emotions'. As the work's name suggests, it interprets this concept in terms of the reptile that is capable of changing and camouflaging its appearance to blend in with its surroundings, effectively making it disappear (perhaps a metaphor for empathy itself). It is arguably Gonsalves' most elegant and forceful critique of the idea that inner nature and outward appearance are fixed and unchanging. If there is a beauty to be associated with the chameleon, it cannot be found in one place. Like emotions within social neuroscience, it is dispersed, contextual and entirely unpredictable.

In the title of this piece I have alluded to Francis Bacon's famous observation that in his paintings he was trying to 'unlock the valves of sensation'. Bacon believed that the unconscious was a vast storehouse of feeling that could only be tapped by chance and accident. I have deliberately substituted the more active verb unleash to describe Gonsalves' work, for it brings with it the resonance of disruption, of powerful, even violent emotional states and impromptu interactions emerging out of contexts over which we have no control, but nonetheless have an investment in. The words she uses to describe her varied output in visual imagery, animation and time-based media, interactives and installation, are highly suggestive. Feel, perspire, lure, swelling, touch, immerse, endure, humid. They are indicative of the artist's vision that emotion, or beauty for that matter, is not something that emanates from within, but is rather a bio-social condition; like the reflex, for example, to smile when a stranger smiles at you. Gonsalves doesn't need a quantum physicist to tell her that the observer is part of the observed. The next time you step into one of her responsive installations, you will see why.

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