



Deep Waters



The new issue of our newsletter is mainly devoted to cross-cultural aspects of the Centre's work and the challenges that these pose. This wasn't particularly intended – it just turned out that way.

The Swiss Centre for Affective Sciences is opening up to the world. A team of our researchers was in Singapore in December, engaging in an unprecedented dialogue with colleagues from the Far East. Our director Klaus Scherer took the opportunity to make contacts and visit academics in Burma (Myanmar) and Laos, extending the range of the “grid study” of emotion terms in languages. Among other people he met U Nayaka, a Buddhist abbot in Mandalay. Their fascinating conversation was recorded, and you can read it in this issue.

All this gets us into deeper waters, however. Especially because we are committed to the interdisciplinary study of emotion. Different disciplines in the field are striving to remind psychologists that it is not enough just to take the emotional labels of one's own time and culture, and project them into the mind or the brain. Emotion may be a neurophysiologically anchored reality, but it takes place in the context of particular cultures and epochs.

Precisely because we are an interdisciplinary group, we are well placed to provide answers to these dilemmas. A voyage of discovery is beginning...

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Emotion and Buddhism

During his trip to the Far East, Klaus Scherer visited the Phaung Daw Oo Buddhist monastery at Mandalay, Burma (Myanmar) and met the abbot U Nayaka. They conversed about the role of emotion in Buddhism accompanied by a group of participants in the library of the monastery school.



KS: Buddhism is a very psychological religion. Emotion plays important role in the teachings of Buddha and later scholars. What is the role of emotion in Buddhist teaching?

UN: Buddhist teaching is very difficult to explain. But I will try. We try in Buddhist education to reduce ignorance, craving, and anger, again and again – and the emotions associated with them.

KS: So the Buddhist approach to emotion is: regulating it down. Having less emotion. Is that right?

UN: What Westerners call “happiness” is, in Buddhist philosophy, due to craving. To us it is not really happiness. We call that “*dukkha*”, suffering. Whereas real happiness is non-attachment.

KS: Trying to detach from worldly things.

UN: We can attach, but our feeling is not a strong desire.

KS: Emotions can involve desire or also reaction to a situation. Take anger for example. Many psychologists think that anger is useful. It helps us adapt to problems. It has an evolutionary function. If you reduce anger, so as to have very little anger, isn't there a danger that the evolutionary function will not work?

UN: According to Buddhism, no. Reducing anger more and more is good, in Buddhism.

KS: Is this the case just for monks or also for normal people?

UN: For normal people too.

KS: So if they show little anger, people will function just as well?

UN: If we have no anger, we can accomplish something in a given situation.

KS: Psychologists say that, in some cases, you need to be angry so as to show the other person that what they have done is not the right way to behave.

UN: To accomplish something, such people may need anger. Our way, though, is the “peace” way. Buddhists try to remain calm and peaceful in dealing with others.

KS: The same effect achieved without anger.

UN: I try to remain without anger. Sometimes I get angry, but I ask myself: is this right or wrong? Anger for me is always wrong. That is my solution, anyway.

KS: Do you sometimes get angry?

UN: Very often I get angry. (*Loud laughter from the group*) But I try to keep it down. I evaluate it as wrong, and so I change it.

KS: Aristotle said: if you do not respond to insult with the appropriate kind of anger, you are taken for a social fool.



UN: People who do not know Buddhist philosophy cannot control their mind. It has to be learned. Aristotle did not know the Buddhist philosophy. He should have learned to control his mind. He *thought* he needed anger.

KS: Aristotle argues that emotions are social signals. In order to function normally, you must show anger. Many in the West today call this “emotional intelligence”. Do you in Buddhism have the notion of emotional skills or emotional ability?

UN: I don’t think so. Not according to Buddhism. We don’t need it. Control is much better than anger. That is our evaluation, anyway.

KS: There are differences between emotions. You mentioned three. What about other emotions like pride, disgust, sadness? Are they different from craving, ignorance, and anger?

UN: I will explain sadness to you. Sadness comes from craving.

KS: So if a close member of your family dies...

UN: ...I am sad. That comes from craving. Because I love my family. That craving is not good. That is why I am crying. It is natural. But I don’t need it. I can control it.

KS: If you are well-trained, do you avoid the emotion altogether or does it flare up and then get reduced by will power?

UN: There are four stages of this in Buddhism: the emotion, reducing it, reducing it even more, then extinction.

KS: Is that more difficult for some emotions than for others?

UN: Each of them is very difficult.

KS: Especially anger. (*Laughs*). I sometimes get very angry too.

UN: Say if my glasses get broken – someone breaks my glasses. I will feel anger. But I have learned to control my anger.

KS: I have some psychological friends in universities in the United States studying the control of emotion in collaboration with the Dalai Lama. They are also studying the electrical state of the brain during Buddhist meditation. It seems they have found that a monk in a deep state of meditation has very little brain-wave activity. Would you call that state an emotion?

UN: I don't know this scientific work you speak of, but I can tell you that we meditate in order to control ignorance, anger and craving. Meditation is a kind of concentration.

KS: Normally emotions happen to us because of things that happen – like breaking your glasses. If you have a successful meditation, you have a positive feeling. Would the end result of meditation be an emotion?

UN: Yes, but we want to reduce that even further. Even a positive emotion. We don't like it. It's good, but not *really* good. Really good is: nothing. If you are satisfied with the end state of your meditation, it can be dangerous. You may be satisfied with just that – but you should want to go further along the spiritual path.

KS: I would like to understand the difference between Mahayana and Theravada approaches to emotion. Are there differences of that kind within Buddhism?

UN: They are really the same. We all have the same goal. We have therefore the same principle. Mahayana Buddhists like the idea of Boddhicitta. They want to be Buddha. Then comes Nirvana. Whereas we go directly to Nirvana. This is all based on the First Sermon of Buddha. The goal is same, but the paths are different.

KS: Thank you very much. This is very useful indeed.

UN: Thank *you*. I am happy to try to answer all your questions.



Klaus Scherer with U Nayaka and some of the staff of the monastery school. Also in the picture (on the far right) is Ko Naung, who facilitated the discussion at several points, and who is the Burmese translator for the Grid study and runs the Grid study in Myanmar.

The Grid Study

Tour of emotion terms goes global

The Grid study is a project involving component profile measurement of the meaning of emotion terms in different languages. This project is taking advantage of a productive and fruitful network of research. It involves collaboration with the International Consortium for Cross-cultural Research on Affect (ICCRA), dealing with 10 languages in more than 15 countries. The "Grid" is an instrument to assess any emotion word. Emotion words are organized in categories with more or less prototypical exemplars. Emotions are regarded as a conglomerate of changes in the components.

Researchers here at the Centre began by collaborating with well-known scholars Johnny Fontaine and Phoebe Ellsworth in conducting the Grid study in 3 languages and 4 countries, analyzing the data, and writing and submitting a first paper. They then organized a colloquium at the conference of the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology in which the rationale and the first results of the Grid study were presented. That meeting also served to recruit new collaborators in different countries with different languages. Klaus Scherer has now prepared the translation of the Grid study into Burmese and organized data collection in Myanmar and Laos.

So far, the Grid study clearly shows that four dimensions are needed to satisfactorily represent similarities and differences in emotional experience: valence, potency, activation, and unpredictability (in that order of importance). Otherwise some important distinctions between major emotions - for example fear and anger - are likely to be obscured.

There are new collaborators working on the project all the time, which makes this ambitious study truly cross-cultural and international.

Workshop in Singapore Broke New Ground



Haizhou Li, general chair of the ISCSLP conference, and resourceful host of our Singapore workshop

Following the successful event at swissnex in San Francisco in April of last year, the research team of our Centre was invited to hold a workshop by the Swiss House in Singapore. It took place on December 14-15, 2006.

As well as Prof. Klaus Scherer, the Swiss contingent included David Sander and Didier Grandjean of our centre. Prof. Nadia Thalmann of MIRALab at the University of Geneva was there to speak too. The visitors managed to see the sights of the big city and drank Singapore Slings at the bar of the famous Raffles Hotel.

The Workshop was held in conjunction with the International Symposium on Chinese Spoken Language Processing (ISCSLP), which was being held in Singapore this year under the general chairmanship of Dr Haizhou Li.

ISCSLP is a venue for scientists, researchers, and practitioners to report and discuss the latest progress in all scientific and technological aspects of Chinese spoken language processing. It was quite an experience for our researchers to meet the Asian scientists, scholars and computer engineers with an interest in virtual emotions.

The language of exchanges was English, and it turned out to require a bit of adjustment both ways – for the visitors getting used to the sound of Far Eastern English, and for the hosts getting used to English spoken by Europeans. But with goodwill, it worked.

Prof. Haizhou Li was outstandingly helpful. He hosted the workshop on the premises of the research institute he heads in Singapore, and facilitated smooth interaction between our workshop and the main conference. Also deserving of thanks were Dr. Suzanne Hraba-Renevey and the staff of the Swiss House, who did a lot to make this workshop a successful event.

All in all, our researchers came home with the realization that Asia, too, is an important part of our future as a Swiss institution with international reach.

Book review: “The Secret History of Emotion”

There have been several recent books about emotion in a social and historical perspective. This can be seen as a sort of counter-offensive to the attempts of psychologists and neurophysiologists to appropriate the study of the emotions to their own discipline.

Daniel Gross's book “The Secret History of Emotion”, published in the past year, is a good example. He talks about taking emotion back from psychology and putting it where it belongs – in rhetoric and the humanities.



Daniel Gross

Daniel Gross is himself a rhetoric specialist at Iowa University. His choice of historical topics in the book suggests that he is interested most of all in English history, but his knowledge of the history of rhetoric and philosophy is wide-ranging.

The rhetorical tradition espoused by Gross considers emotions as psychosocial phenomena. That is to say that emotions, far from being universal, are conditioned by power relations and social hierarchies. They are dependent on social circumstances, which precisely cannot be taken into account by the experimental psychologist. Gross concludes that emotions belong not to science, but to the humanities.

Passions like anger, pride and humility were once rhetorical, but now are supposedly universal and “hard-wired”. However, as Gross points out, there is an uneven distribution of emotion in society. Emotions are markers of social distinction in an economy of scarcity. In archaic Greece, anger was the prerogative of royal personages, and in Aristotle's Athens, of freeborn men with social status to defend. In the 18th century, David Hume took it for granted that pride was an emotion felt by landed gentlemen with reference to their family background. In recent times, Princess Diana's

death caused an outpouring of grief, whereas the death of a homeless vagrant is greeted only by apathy.

Gross concludes: the history of terms like "pride" and how they have been mobilized for strategic purposes would make a fascinating new kind of history of psychology!

To sum up, this book provides a history and critique of the dominant modern view of emotions, expressed in Darwinism and neurobiology, in which they are considered organic, personal feelings independent of social circumstances.

Gross, Daniel M. *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science*. Chicago. University of Chicago Press. 2006

Again, Nothing to Blush About

The Service de Presse of the University of Geneva has organized a series of events this past year called "Le temps d'une découverte". This series features eight University institutes which present their research work in the space of an evening to a non-specialist audience drawn from the academic and administrative staff of the University of Geneva and their spouses. Among the institutes featured is our Centre. The evening on affective sciences is titled "Pourquoi rougis-tu?" This event has proved extremely popular, with a total of 80 people registering to attend. For the second edition of this event, there were 30 people in attendance.

The team on this occasion was led by our vice-director, Martial van der Linden, taking time out from his incredibly overloaded schedule as professor and chairman of the psychology department of the University of Geneva. The speakers were philosopher Fabrice Teroni, who talked about shame; Mathieu d'Acremont, who talked about adolescence; Prof. Susanne Kaiser, who talked about facial expression; archaeologist Anne-Caroline Rendu, who talked about the wrath of the gods in ancient mythology; Sylvain Delplanque, who described the brain imaging of emotions such as embarrassment; and Mina Rauschenbach, who talked about the resocializing effect of shame in various legal systems.

Afterwards at 8 o'clock there was an aperitif provided by the Service de Presse where people could interact informally and ask questions of the speakers. One could feel only wonder at the variety of topics that our guests wanted to talk about over a glass or two of wine. The party broke up quite late, as I remember...

No Snow, But Good Science



The "Alpine Brain Imaging Meeting" once again brought together neuroscientists from all over the world to Champéry (Switzerland), from January 14 to 18, 2007. Part of the attraction of this meeting is that – given the place and the season of the year – attendees

can spend the mornings out skiing on the slopes, and then devote the afternoons to poring over the mysteries of the human brain. But alas! This winter has been so mild in the Alps, there was hardly any snow to speak of, and any adventurous spirits determined to ski had to trek up to much higher altitudes. Despite the absence of the white stuff, it was a very worthwhile occasion for all concerned, because the quality of the scientific presentations was particularly high.



Patrik Vuilleumier

Patrik Vuilleumier of our Centre (aided by his colleagues Christoph Michel and Raymond Dolan) again organized the event. In the meantime, he has been honoured with a prize from the American Psychological Association (APA): the Distinguished Scientific Award for Early Career Contribution to Psychology in the area of Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience. It is unusual and remarkable that such a prize should go to (1) a neurologist and (2) a non-American! The awards ceremony at which Patrik Vuilleumier will receive this well-deserved honour will be held at the APA Convention in San Francisco, August 17-20, 2007.

Upcoming Events

Liens avec la cité reception : Le comité « liens avec la cité » souhaiterait vous inviter pour une verrée le mercredi 28 février à 17h00, dans les locaux du CISA. Ce sera l'occasion pour nous de vous présenter nos missions au sein du CISA. Plus particulièrement, nous voudrions profiter de cette occasion pour vous présenter les trois projets sur lesquels nous travaillons actuellement et pour lesquels votre implication sera précieuse.

Semaine du cerveau at the University of Geneva March 12-18, 2007. For details consult the website <http://www.unige.ch/evenements/cerveau/2007>

Annual Research Forum of the Centre on April 11 and 12 in Geneva. Prof. Gerhart Stemmler of our International Scientific Council will be there from Marburg, Germany to hear the presentations and provide feedback. He will also give a talk on his own research.

Salon de l'étudiant on May 2-6 at Palexpo in Geneva. The University of Geneva has a stand there, and this year it will feature our Centre. Volunteers are needed to "man" (forgive the male chauvinism!) the stand and answer the questions of future students and the general public.

For all upcoming events, log on to the NEW Intranet at <http://affectco.unige.ch>.

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