Affective Sciences
SWISS NATIONAL CENTER OF COMPETENCE IN RESEARCH

Affect & Emotion
Newsletter of the Swiss Center for Affective Sciences

Image taken from «Only Lovers Left Alive» (2013), Jim Jarmusch

AFFECT, EMOTION AND LITERATURE

RESEARCH FOCUS

Literature and the emotions
Prof. Patrizia Lombardo

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UNIVERSITÉ DE GENEVE
Happy New Year

A new Swiss Center for the Affective Sciences in 2018!

The NCCR Affective Sciences officially ended in August 2017 after 12 years of activities, creating the foundations for the long-term Swiss Center for Affective Sciences at the University of Geneva (Centre interfacultaire en sciences affectives – CISA).

First of all, I’m extremely proud to announce that the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) approved the final report of our NCCR highlighting the outstanding research, the education and training activities and the public outreach events carried out during the last 12 years.

Given our remarkable achievements, the key involvement of the members of the Center and the projects we already launched, the Center will continue to develop and grow in 2018.

For instance, we will celebrate two key events you should not miss:

- the Annual Research Forum (ARF) on February 7, 2018. Researchers in the affective sciences will be able to present their work and discuss it with their peers. It will be a unique opportunity to get an update on the current research carried out at the Center.

- the International Summer School in Affective Sciences (ISSAS), which will welcome around 25 faculty members, and a group of around 30 doctoral students and post-docs around the theme “The development of Emotions” from July 5 to 13, 2018 at the Château de Bossey.

Our doctoral program will continue to develop in 2018, providing services for the 59 PhD students already enrolled in the interdisciplinary Swiss Doctoral School in Affective Sciences managed by the Center.

We will also continue to offer attractive outreach activities for the large public. We are particularly proud to welcome, from February onwards, 20 classes of 9 to 12 year old children who will take part in workshops on emotion expression, recognition, and regulation at the laboratory “Bioscope” of the University of Geneva.

Finally, I’m happy to highlight the beautiful art book “Emotions” realized thanks to the contribution of many CISA researchers and recently published by Benteli. Each chapter is dedicated to an emotion that is considered under the light of various disciplinary academic approaches and photographic styles.

Wishing you all a 2018 rich in emotions!

David Sander
Different disciplinary approaches are often crucial for challenging and renewing disciplinary habits. Since the 1960-70s, literary criticism has been dominated by formalist, psychoanalytic, and cultural studies approaches, paradoxically neglecting what is fundamental in literature: its intrinsic value as language, and its ability to represent and express human emotions. But in the last fifteen years, new questions have been raised in literary criticism thanks to the research on affective phenomena in other disciplines. Some analytical philosophers, who pioneered the study of emotions already in the 1980 (Ronald de Sousa, John Lyons, Peter Goldie, Martha Nussbaum, Gregory Currie), have investigated the type of knowledge offered by literature, the emotional effects triggered in readers, and the role of the imagination. There has been a rich investigation on the so called aesthetic emotions, the emotions provoked by fiction in literature and in film, about their nature and their relationship to real emotions.

My research and that of my young collaborators in the unique interdisciplinary atmosphere of the Swiss Center for Affective Sciences in Geneva owe to the contact with philosophy and psychology. In our project in literature we studied the way in which emotions are portrayed by various types of literary texts; we could blend stylistic analysis and theories of emotions. This investigation leads to reformulate questions about fiction, narration, characters, and narrators; it helps to reconnect with some Aristotelian notions, rediscover ancient rhetoric’s concern for the affective sphere, and dig out the theories on emotions explicitly or implicitly proposed by some writers.

For instance, contrasting the Romantic vision that the heart is the opposite of reason, Stendhal at the beginning of the 19th century and Robert Musil at the beginning of the 20th have a true cognitivist approach on affective phenomena. They both insisted on the link between the emotions and intelligence. In their novels, correspondence, journals, and notes they outlined the fundamental principles purported by contemporary theorists. Some chapters of Musil’s great novel The Man without Qualities consist of a short treatise written by Urlich, the novel’s main character: he sketched a modern theory where emotional episodes imply arousal, appraisals, rapid transformation, and action tendencies. Stendhal’s correspondence, in turn, is filled with remarks about what he called the human passions; with his eighteenth-century terminology, he struggled to define the difference between emotions, feelings, humors, and dispositions (which he called: the habits of the soul); he outlined taxonomies of emotions, and described their phenomenology and their rapid change. It is enough to read almost any passage of Le Rouge et le Noir or any other of his novels to see how his quick style renders the link between internal and external stimuli, and vice-versa. The relationship between the emotions and values, and the emotions and decisions are fully illustrated by his main characters’ thoughts and actions. Another illustrative example is Jane Austen, who often used in her novels the term “mind”, meaning the complex unity of intelligence and sentiment; and she mastered the depiction of the intersubjective circulation of emotions and their effects in the characters’ beliefs and behavior.

One of the great merits of literature is in fact to offer thick descriptions of emotions. Let us look for example at these few verses of Milton’s Paradise Lost giving an account of the fall of Satan: we can see his bodily movements and all he feels in a violent internal battle of contrasting and mixed emotions reaching the utmost degree of intensity:

………………But his doom
Reserv’d him to more wrath; for now the thought
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain

Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes
That witness’d huge affliction and dismay
Mixt with obdurate pride and stedfast hate.

Good literary fictions are thought experiments about emotional life as rich as life or even richer than life. In some ways they are closer to real life than laboratory experiments and tests, since, through mental simulation, they capture the complexity of human existence in the world and in society. Moreover, novels portray emotions through time: their transformation and outcome are not simply described during the emotional episode but also in their metamorphoses through time. Another extraordinary aspect of literature pertains to the continuous reflection on emotions appropriateness. Many fictional characters are wrong about their emotions or present cases of that peculiar mental phenomenon that is self-deception.

Literary thought experiments are the product of the narrators’ minds: they use their imagination to extract significant cases from real life, and re-invent them in fictional terms. Readers, in turn, have to use their imagination in order to understand and evaluate fictional characters’ emotions, thoughts, and actions, and maybe develop new ideas about ethical and aesthetic issues.

Lately, much research has been done to test readers’ responses, mainly with formularies. An experiment with 60 students in psychology and literature at the University of Geneva has shown that readers are quite capable of identifying emotional terms, but also emotions suggested by a phrase or a paragraph. Insofar as aesthetic emotions are concerned, the test brought evidence of the importance of aesthetic judgment: more than identifying with the character’s emotions, our readers identified aesthetic values or categories: tragic, comic, tragic-comic, ironic, sublime, kitsch.

In conclusion, findings in other disciplines are important to deepen literary research; at the same time, the multifarious situations designed in fictions might help to conceive more complex studies in the experimental sciences. In addition, the study of literature offers all disciplines in the affective sciences an invaluable grasp on the long term history of various conceptions or theories of emotion, and above all a better understanding of the delicate balance between universal visions and the input of cultural contexts in different epochs, countries and languages.
Completed PhDs

**Annabelle Arnould** successfully defended her PhD thesis on “Apathie et traumatisme crânio-cérébral : une approche plurifactorielle” on January 26, 2017, under the direction of Prof. Martial Van der Linden and Prof. Philippe Azouvi.

**Sélim Coll** successfully defended his PhD thesis on “Integration between emotions and actions” on December 18, 2017, under the direction of Prof. Didier Grandjean.

**Severine Cloix** successfully defended her PhD thesis on “Sparse multi-view 3D computer vision: application to embedded assistive technologies” on June 19, 2017, under the direction of Prof. Thierry Pun and Dr. David Hasler.

**Mihai Dricu** successfully defended his PhD thesis on “Perceptual decision-making on emotions” on January 23, 2017, under the direction of Prof. Didier Grandjean and Prof. Sascha Frueholz.

**Daniel Dukes** successfully defended his PhD thesis on “When social appraisal meets social referencing: A developmental perspective on interest” on June 9, 2017, under the direction of Prof. Fabrice Clément.

**Natalia Fernandez Clares** successfully defended her PhD thesis on “Influence of music on motor, cognitive, and affective functions” on December 20, 2017, under the direction of Prof. Patrik Vuilleumier.

**Sabrina Jumentier** successfully defended her PhD thesis on “La projection mentale dans le futur au cours du vieillissement” on February 10, 2017, under the direction of Prof. Martial Van der Linden.

**Frédéric Minner** successfully defended his PhD thesis on “Les fondations émotionnelles des normes sociales: le cas de l’émergence des normes dans le collectif politique “Occupy Geneva”” on February 16, 2017, under the direction of Prof. Laurence Kaufmann and Prof. Sandro Cattacin.

**Manuel André Mitsumasu Heredia** successfully defended his PhD thesis on “Computational and brain stimulation approaches to study the influence of visually guided comparisons in value-based decision-making” on September 1, 2017, under the direction of Prof. Ernst Fehr.

**Alain Pe-Curto** successfully defended his PhD thesis on “Values under Construction” on June 8, 2017, under the direction of Prof. Julien Deonna and Prof. Fabrice Teroni.

**Aurore Perrault** successfully defended her PhD thesis on “The effects of sensory stimulation on sleep and cognition” on February 6, 2017, under the direction of Prof. Sophie Schwartz.

**Vanessa Sennwald** successfully defended her PhD thesis on “Reward processing in sexual desire” on December 4, 2017, under the direction of Prof. David Sander.

**Kim Thibault de Beauregard** successfully defended her PhD thesis on “Dynamiques temporelles des émotions exprimées par la musique” on March 3, 2017, under the direction of Prof. Didier Grandjean.

**Victorine Zermatten** successfully defended her PhD thesis on “Interventions psychologiques chez des patients cérébrolésés présentant des troubles cognitifs et socio-émotionnels importants et vivant en institution” on February 24, 2017, under the direction of Prof. Martial Van der Linden.

New books/Special issues


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Awards and grants

Géraldine Coppin was appointed Assistant Professor in Psychology (neurocognition) at Unidistance.ch (http://unidistance.ch/) starting from January 1st, 2018.

Tobias Brosch & Ulf Hahnel were granted a three year (2017-2020) project by the Swiss Federal Office of Energy (SFOE) entitled “Leveraging behavioral insights to promote fuel efficient car purchases”.

Beatrice Conte received the award for best scientific presentation at the 2017 International Conference on Environmental Psychology.

Corrado Corradi Dell’Acqua was granted a two-year (2017-2019) project from the Fondazione Giancarlo Quarta (Italy) about the role played by physicians’ communication skills in patients’ cognitive control, emotion regulation and pain sensitivity.

Ernst Fehr was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Antwerp as well as the Oscar Morgenstern Medal at the University of Vienna.

Jasmin Mahmoodi received the audience award for best scientific presentation at the 2017 International Conference on Environmental Psychology.

Andrea Samson was appointed Assistant Professor in Psychology (neurocognition) at Unidistance.ch (http://unidistance.ch/) starting from January 1st, 2018.

She successfully defended her Habilitation Defense “Should emotions be taught in schools? Possible avenues for promoting emotional competences through board games” at the University of Fribourg on May 29, 2017 under the supervision of Prof. Valerie Camos.

Fabrice Teroni & Julien Deonna were granted a three year (2017-2020) Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) project entitled “Fell Bad, Live Well: The Value of Negative Emotions for Well-Being”.

Upcoming events

:emotions: (January 26 - March 16, 2018, University of Geneva, Carl Vogt). This exhibition “:emotions:”, initially featured at the Campus Biotech on May 2017, will be on display at the SEU (Salle d’Exposition de l’UNIGE, Uni Carl Vogt, 66 boulevard Carl-Vogt). The exhibition is a collaboration between the Swiss Center for Affective Sciences and the “Activités Culturelles” of the University of Geneva during the 2015 and 2016 photography courses, using emotions as a focus point. A selection of the original high-quality aesthetic pictures will be shown at this exhibition.

Annual Research Forum 2018 (ARF).

The next edition of the Annual Research Forum will take place on February 7, 2018 at the Campus Biotech in Geneva. The ARF offers the opportunity to meet peers (old and new) and get updated on the fascinating research carried out at the Center, and the last logistic developments.

International Summer School in Affective Sciences (ISSAS 2018) (July, 5-13, 2018). The eighth ISSAS will take place at the Château de Bossey, bringing together leading scholars and promising young researchers from varied disciplines working on the development of emotions (http://www.affective-sciences.org/issas).

La nuit de la science “La Science... tout un art” (July, 7-8, 2018) at “La Perle du Lac Park” (next to the Campus) and, for the first time, at Campus Biotech. This event is a good opportunity for Geneva residents to discover scientific activities in a convivial way.

On our website www.affective-sciences.org


Online Platform on Emotional Competence at http://www.affective-sciences.org/ec, including the major contributions and debates in the literature on emotional intelligence, potential applications, as well as results of the most recent research.

Other websites of interest

XPhi Replicability: https://sites.google.com/site/thexphireplicabilityproject/ The XPhi Replicability project, coordinated by Dr Florian Cova, seeks to reach a reliable estimate of the replicability of empirical results in experiment philosophy.
Publications


Lauria, F. (2017). “The guise of the ought to be”. A deontic view of the...
Publications

intentionality of desire, in F. Lauria & J. Deonna (Eds.), The nature of desire, 352. Oxford University Press.


Affect & Emotion is the newsletter of the Swiss Center for Affective Sciences, a research centre for the interdisciplinary study of human emotion.

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For further information on our work, see our website www.affective-sciences.org

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