

# Affect & Emotion

Newsletter of the NCCR Affective Sciences

## FOOTBALL: THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY



### RESEARCH FOCUS

Tom Cochrane investigates the sublime and its payoff in terms of neutralizing the fear of death. He studies aesthetics and emotion. Profound reflections...

PAGE 2

### INTERVIEW

NCCR psychologist Katia Schenkel talks about the work of her team analyzing the passion and the joys and sorrows of professional association football.

PAGE 3

### NEWS

- Events
- Staff
- Achievements
- Publications
- Just off the press

PAGE 4-5



RESEARCH FOCUS

# Life, Death and the Sublime



Philosopher **Thomas Cochrane**, who works on the NCCR research focus “Aesthetic Emotions”, is investigating the extent to which emotional experience of the arts, notably the sublime, may help us live better lives and free us from the fear of the inevitable end. Here he talks about his work.

I have been strongly attracted to the arts, particularly music, since a very young age. In my early teens I started to get into philosophy; partly because it dealt with the big questions of life and death and partly because it seemed like the hardest possible thing to study. Since then one of the goals of my life has been to combine my philosophical and artistic interests.

I did a degree in philosophy at University College London, and then went straight into an M.A. in music composition at Birmingham Conservatoire. After that, I eventually found a reasonable balance with a PhD in the philosophy of music.

I had a specific idea that I wanted to justify from the very beginning. It had occurred to me that historically, humanity was moving inexorably towards greater and greater social integration. At the same time I was impressed by the classic sceptical problem of how I know whether other people have qualitatively the same experiences as I. My resulting idea was to see if the collective performance of music offered the quite radical possibility that humans can share single experiential states (thus disproving scepticism, at least in this instance). Reports by musicians and my own experiences of performance made it seem likely, and I found a way to explain and justify the possibility.

A paper derived from my PhD entitled ‘Expression and Extended Cognition’ is now about to be published in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Fall 2008. It describes how an improvising musician can exploit the expressive capacities of music such that the music is actually a physical part of his emotional state.

It was because of the special expressive powers of music that my research became gradually focused on emotions. I discovered that emotions were an amazing topic not just because of their relevance to virtually every aspect of human life, but also as a philosophically fascinating realm in which we find the front lines of mind-body interaction, the emergence of con-

sciousness and a host of other mental faculties. At the same time, emotions are profoundly subtle and complex. After more than three years of serious philosophical research into this phenomenon there still seems like conceptual problems and possibilities I have barely touched.

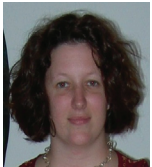
I completed my PhD in philosophy in May 2007, and was very lucky to be accepted for a job at the NCCR soon after. My research is part of the focus on aesthetic emotions, which are a peculiar class of emotions relating to aesthetic values like the beautiful, the sublime, the comic and so on, and which seem to engage practical behaviour and the imagination in ways contrasting with other emotions. In particular, I have been researching the sublime, which really taps into those big issues of life and death.

For example at a conference on Romanticism and the Emotions, held in Geneva May 2008, I presented a paper describing how the experience of the sublime can rationally allow a person to conceptualise death and his place in the wider universe. I claimed that this can provide a practical means to overcome the fear of death by replacing that emotion with a more pleasurable experience.

My job has also been exciting since we have started to collaborate with many of the museums in Geneva to organise exhibitions, workshops and the collection of psychological data relating to emotions. This has afforded me a closer insight into the cultural life of Geneva. I have also been busy with various conferences. For example my supervisor Patrizia Lombardo and I organised a very interesting conference on character and emotions as they appear in literature, and I am in the process of organising a big international conference on music and emotion with Bernardino Fantini, the director of the Institut D’Histoire de la Médecine et de la Santé. I’m optimistic that the research into the aesthetic side of emotions will continue to grow at the NCCR and that I’ll get to collaborate more and more closely with my colleagues in the experimental sciences. ■

INTERVIEW

# Football: The Agony and the Ecstasy



As we go to press, the Euro 2008 soccer championship games are being played at various venues in Switzerland, including Geneva. **Katia Schenkel** of NCCR Project 2 spoke to Terence MacNamee about the research she and her colleagues (see “News”, page 4) have done into the emotions associated with the game of football.

**TMcN: Why on earth is the NCCR engaging in research about soccer?**

**KS:** Sport is interesting to the psychologist of emotions because of the characteristic emotions it generates. There is a whole range of emotionally expressive behaviour in human beings, and sport is an ideal window to study it. As the Euro 2008 was coming up in Switzerland, the NCCR approached Télévision Suisse Romande (TSR) with an offer to contribute to their coverage of the event. The slogan of Euro 2008 is after all (in French) “l’émotion au rendez-vous”. This seemed to us to be a good way to make the NCCR and its work better known to the public at large. Here we can apply our knowledge of emotions and their expression to a particular event that is of great interest to the public.

**TMcN: So what exactly have you been studying about the game?**

**KS:** There is a lot that we could study using the archive footage provided to us by the TSR, but we decided for simplicity and effectiveness to focus on three things: (1) Gestures specific to the game of soccer (known as “emblems”) and familiar to spectators from seeing them used by the players; (2) Penalty shots at goal (these are filmed in a standard way by the TSR, and they have been able to provide us with footage of 68 of them). Our aim was to get to a point where we are able - from non-verbal communication alone - to predict whether the player taking the penalty shot will score or miss; (3) Issuing of the red card (this is again filmed in a fairly standard way by TSR, and the archive has 22 instances).

We want to see what happens from the point of view of expression of emotion and non-verbal communication on the part of the player sent off, the referee, and the player’s team-mates.

**TMcN: Which scientific method or methods have you applied to analyzing this footage?**

**KS:** In the case of “emblems” (characteristic gestures), we reviewed the literature at the same time as studying the sample. We were able to inventory typical gestures - some of which are the signature of particular players, or of several - like rocking a baby, meaning that this shot or this goal is for his own young child or new baby.

In the case of penalties, we focussed on the coding of non-verbal communication - gestures, looks, body language and so on - based on the Facial Action Coding System (FACS), which is a scientifically recognized way of identifying emotional expressions. We used the sample provided by the TSR, and we were able to run each of the films in slow motion, stopping and starting it when we wanted. We looked particularly at what happens when the player scores and when he misses. We analyzed the behaviour leading up to the shot. There are certain differences between behaviours leading up to scores and misses. It should in fact be possible to predict, from a player’s previous behaviour, if he will score or miss.

In the case of red cards we studied not so much facial expression, this time, but non-verbal communication of the whole body (notably displays of dominance and authority) by the referee or the player,

interrupting the film every 2 seconds to analyze what is going on in the interaction. There are tell-tale signs such as the distance between the two men. It is also important to study looks and the direction of the gaze, and whether one of the men touches the other. It is of course forbidden to touch the referee. We found, in fact, that the referee rarely touches the player affected, nor the player affected touch the referee. It is mostly the affected player’s team-mates who are likely to touch the referee in a face-to-face confrontation (which puts them at risk of getting a yellow card).

**TMcN: What about you? Do you like soccer? It seems like a very male-oriented sport.**

**KS:** I love it. I got the fascination with the game first from my father, and later from my boyfriend, both of whom are fans. As a young girl, I often went to soccer matches with my father. It’s true that women are not traditionally interested. It was really only at the 1998 World Cup that women started to be interested in the game. That was because it was in the media, there were major events going on, a festive atmosphere, and displays of national pride. So soccer is starting to interest us women more than it used to. That doesn’t mean that we are going to see stadiums filled by women in the near future! But I notice that there are more and more families going to soccer matches together. I guess women’s interest is typically captured more by big soccer events that they can get caught up in, such as a World Cup or this Euro 2008. ■

NEWS

Events, Awards, achievements and staff changes

| EMOTION OVER A GLASS OF WINE |

A workshop on “Vin et Emotion” was held on April 4 2008 at the Institut National Genevois in Geneva. Among the speakers on this convivial topic were Prof. Anne-Claude Luisier of Sierre, who was the originator of the workshop, and Prof. Klaus Scherer of the NCCR.

| NCCR ON THE BALL |

On May 7, few weeks before the Euro 2008 soccer championships hit Switzerland, a team of speakers from the NCCR led by Prof. Guido Gendolla provided a general audience with some insights

into the emotions belonging to the game. This was an evening in the series “Le Temps d’une Découverte” organized by the Press Office of the University of Geneva for the university community. Using specific examples from the world of football, they explained the kinds of emotions that can arise and the behaviour they trigger on and off the field. Why does football absorb us so much? How does a player just after getting the red card control his emotions? What happens inside a referee when he has to make a tricky decision in a few seconds? All these questions and more were dis-

cussed by the emotion researchers.

Our NCCR has been active on the subject of football in collaboration with Télévision Suisse Romande (TSR), the local TV broadcaster. Involved in this team are Marc Mehu, Marcello Mortillaro, Martijn Goudbeek, Nele Dael, Birgit Michel, Prof. Susanne Kaiser - and Katia Schenkel, who is interviewed on page 3 of this issue.

Events contd. on page 5

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For upcoming events at the NCCR, see our website [www.affective-sciences.org/events](http://www.affective-sciences.org/events)

Publications

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Rendu, Anne-Caroline (2008). “Cri ou silence: deuil des dieux et des héros dans la littérature mésopotamienne”. *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions*. 2/2008.

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**NEWS**

**Events, awards, achievements and staff changes**

**| AESTHETICS CONFERENCES |**

On April 25 in Geneva, there was a workshop on “Character and Emotions” organized by Patrizia Lombardo and Tom Cochrane of the NCCR research focus on Aesthetic Emotions.

The term “character” is used to refer to the distinctive features of a person or of a group and to the protagonists in a play or a novel. Literary criticism in the last half-century has moved away from what were once central questions about character and characters. But, challenged by analytical philosophy, by works in psychology on the fragmentation and lack of character, as well as by other interdisciplinary perspectives, literary criticism is now returning to such questions. What can the representation of characters tell us about ethical dilemmas and problems? What is the relation between art and life, reality and fictional worlds? What are the differences between characters and character in the theater, film and the novel? What can art tell us about the relations between character, personality, temperament and the emotions?

This colloquium drew its audience from philosophers, art historians, film and theatre critics and literary scholars.

Among the speakers were Prof. Kevin Mulligan of the NCCR, and Prof. Peter Goldie from Manchester.

Then on April 16, the aesthetic emotions research team organized another colloquium entitled “Le Romantisme et les Emotions”. Here the emphasis was on 19th-century literature.

For more background, see Tom Cochrane’s article about his work on page 2 of this issue.

**| AWARDS |**

On May 8 in Philadelphia, the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences inducted Prof. Ernst Fehr of our NCCR as their John Kenneth Galbraith Fellow.

The American Academy of Political and Social Science was created in 1889 to promote the progress of the social sciences. Each Fellow is designated to a position named after a distinguished scholar and public servant who has written over the past century for the Academy’s Annals.

On July 21 in Berlin, the Director of our Centre, Prof. Klaus Scherer, is to be presented with the lifetime achievement award of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychologie (DGPs). The citation honours Klaus Scherer’s decades of contributions to emotion research, which have become known not only to academic researchers but to the wider public. The DGPs is the professional association of psychologists active in teaching and research in Germany. The award will be presented to Klaus Scherer at a ceremony to take place during the International Congress of Psychology 2008, which is being held in Berlin.

**| STAFF CHANGES |**

On June 1 2008 Agnes Moors came to us as a postdoc from Ghent. She is studying the automaticity of appraisal variables as well as the relation between appraisal patterns and specific emotions using behavioral tasks (variants of priming tasks). She is working with Didier Grandjean. The main purpose is to investigate the relation between intrinsic pleasantness and goal conduciveness. They will address questions like “is intrinsic pleasantness always processed prior to goal conduciveness?”, and “can

goal conduciveness override intrinsic pleasantness?” To that end they will use behavioral tasks and measure neuroscientific correlates (EEG). Agnes Moors is also looking forward to discussing theoretical issues with members of the NCCR.

On July 31 2008 Francesca Prescendi of the “Myths and Rites” project is leaving us to take up a “professeur boursier” position..

On August 31, 2008, Gilles Pourtois will be leaving to take up his new ERC-funded research position at the University of Ghent.

For vacancies at the NCCR, see our website [www.affective-sciences.org/positions](http://www.affective-sciences.org/positions) ■

**JUST OFF THE PRESS**

Grandjean, D., Rendu, A.-C., MacNamee, T., K. R. Scherer (2008). The wrath of the gods: Appraising the meaning of disaster. *Social Science Information*. 47(2), 187-204.

This article is a notable example of interdisciplinary cooperation within the NCCR between psychologists and a specialist in ancient religious history.

Beginning with the Flood story from ancient Mesopotamia, which is related to similar Biblical and Greek accounts, the authors focus on the genre of disaster myths, in which man is overcome by divine retribution for his misdeeds. In the case of myth, the psychological mechanism of appraisal led ancient man to supernatural explanations for natural disasters, namely divine retribution. The psychological perspective of appraisal theory can thus contribute to the understanding of myth at work in human thinking. ■

**Affect & Emotion**

is the newsletter of the NCCR 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](http://www.affective-sciences.org)



The National Centres of Competence in Research (NCCR) are a research instrument of the Swiss National Science Foundation