# Affect & Emotion

# **Newsletter of the NCCR Affective Sciences**

EMOTION, INTEREST & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT



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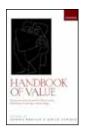
### **New Books**



Interventions psychologiques en psychopathologie cognitive par Martial Van der Linden, Grazia Ceschi et Joël Billieux. Bruxelles : Solal, 2015. ISBN: 978-2-3532-7313-3

Le monde des émotions sous la direction de David Sander. Paris : Belin, 2015. ISBN 978-2-8424-5120-2





Handbook of value. Perspectives from economics, neuroscience, philosophy, psychology, and sociology Edited by Tobias Brosch & David Sander (Eds.) (2015). New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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# **EDITORIAL**



#### 2016 promises to be rich for the NCCR Affective Sciences!

We are happy to announce the launch of the new Swiss Doctoral School in Affective Sciences! This new doctoral school is a complementary scientific training and funding program open to any PhD student in Switzerland who is doing research on a topic related to emotion or other affective phenomena. All disciplines are welcome. This new program is compatible with other doctoral programs in Switzerland. Please check our webpage: www.affective-sciences.org/sds

Another success story is the exhibit EMOTIONS, developed in close collaboration with the Museum of Natural History of Neuchâtel and visited by over than 58'000 visitors! We hope the exhibit will travel and be displayed in other venues. I'm pleased to announce that the exhibit will be displayed in the Forum de Meyrin in Geneva from March 10 to May 28, 2016. Program on http://meyrinculture.ch/evenement/emotions-une-histoire-naturelle.

This Newsletter's issue focuses on the recent research investigating "interest" as an emotion (Prof Clément) and emotional competencies (Prof Gentaz), particularly in young babies and children. Both of these projects parallel one of our research priority objectives on "Emotion and Education", with a strong focus on emotional developments in children. Moreover, by bringing together specialists from different disciplines, these projects are in alignment with the interdisciplinary specialization of the NCCR Affective Sciences that we wish to promote.

David Sander

Swiss Doctoral School in Affective Sciences with the support of

swissuniversities



# **RESEARCH FOCUS**



## WHAT DO OUR INTERESTS REALLY SAY ABOUT US?

## Interview with Prof. Fabrice Clément from the University of Neuchâtel

We tend to think of our interests as personal choices that we make on our journey to adulthood. Our preference in music, how we feel about sport or our favourite artist are all ways to express who we are as an individual. However, research at NCCR Affective Sciences is suggesting that, from a very early age, other people may be more influential than we think in our selection of interests.

The research team, headed by Professor Fabrice Clément from the University of Neuchâtel, proposes that interest is an emotion, placing it in the component process model framework that anchors much of the Centre's work. "With the philosopher Federico Lauria, we are using the model to show that interest involves different types of evaluation," explains Professor Clément. "Firstly we appraise whether an object or event is worth exploring, secondly we evaluate the gap in our knowledge about the object and lastly we appraise our potential to cope with finding out more."

Research is already underway indicating that the age of twelve months seems to be a key time when we first become aware of the interests of others. This has been demonstrated with a well-known research method where babies observe an adult looking at objects either with interest or a lack of interest. Babies younger than a year old do not make a distinction but, at twelve months, babies demonstrate more curiosity in the object that the adult found interesting. "What is important is that the interest shown by the adult was quite subtle," says Professor Clément. "They didn't make any vocalisations or exaggerated facial expressions but merely picked up the object and looked at it. It seems that, at this age, even if babies are not directly addressed they take information from their social environment and use it to explore their surroundings further."

These findings are also helping to inform theoretical work that proposes the existence of a clear distinction between the concepts of social appraisal and social referencing. Together with Dr. Danny Dukes, also from NCCR Affective Sciences, Professor Clément is suggesting that social referencing is a specific form of social appraisal that involves receiving a clear facial or vocal sign from a significant other person.

"In social referencing, babies and children are asking others about what an object is or whether they can play with it," explains Professor Clément. "There is an interaction and a clear communication from the adult, but in other forms of social appraisal babies just observe and discover

that certain events in the environment are interesting." Clément and Dukes believe it is important to make the distinction practically as well as theoretically because it is the less explicit forms of social appraisal that could have the strongest influence on our interests. In addition, the more subtle social appraisals allow us to feel we have chosen our interests of our own accord to express our personal tastes.

"I guess with very young children social referencing may be the stronger influence," says Professor Clément. "But as children get older they do not like to be explicitly told about their interests because, even at the age of eight or ten years old, they have a concept of choice and personal liberty. Therefore, as children get older, other more subtle forms of social appraisal become more influential. For example if a child is standing next to an older child and they observe that he is fascinated by some object or activity then it is very likely the younger child will develop the same interest."

By questioning how much our interests are individually driven and how much they are socially driven, Professor Clément and his doctoral student Romain Brisson are reexamining the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's research in the 1970's suggested that our interests are in fact the product of our socio-economic class and that those in upper classes can 'afford' to indulge in high cultural activities whilst those in lower classes develop more accessible interests such as sport or popular music. The theory has always been controversial and, with lesser social segregation and more mixing of cultures, its proposals are generally considered dated. However the NCCR Affective Sciences project is now looking to re-examine some elements of Bourdieu's theory to explore the social aspects of interest.

"Initially we will look at existing statistics on demographics," said Professor Clément. "To see if there are any patterns between social groups and the subject of people's interests and pastimes. Once we find a line that is worth pursuing we will start some fieldwork. This will involve going to different geographic areas to talk to children and their caregivers about their interests and then observing at what age they start to develop and how they are related to the family situation."

By bringing together specialists from sociology, philosophy and psychology, the research is hoping to question our views on interests and what drives them. Indeed the results could present some challenges to our ideals of choice and freedom, as well as providing insight into what and how to maintain a healthy interest.



# INTERVIEW



# Research Focus 'Emotional Development'

**Interview with Professor Edouard Gentaz** 

t's difficult to imagine young children understanding the complexities of emotions, but research at NCCR Affective Sciences is hoping to prove that we have a grasp of emotions from an early age.

Professor Edouard Gentaz is leading the research focus 'Emotional Development'. He joined NCCR Affective Sciences three years ago with the aim of applying his specialism in multisensory learning to the field of emotions and to introduce an emotional dimension into education. "Through my research in schools I have worked with many teachers who commented upon the need to acknowledge emotional abilities," he says. "I'm keen to explore this area and also to apply my previous research on transferring skills between different sensory modalities to emotional development."

A multisensory approach is particularly relevant to the study of young babies as there is currently a debate about whether babies can actually discriminate emotion in faces or if they are detecting something else. "Existing research agrees that after seven months babies are able to discriminate joy from other emotions," explains Professor Gentaz. "But there is a lot of discussion around whether it is also the case for younger babies between birth and six months."

The research project conducted by Amaya Roux, is using a transfer task between visual and auditory stimuli where babies are played an emotional sound – either joy or anger - and then shown two facial emotional expressions. By measuring how long the babies look at the visual stimuli, the research evaluates whether babies prefer the facial expression that matches the emotional sound, which would indicate that they can differentiate between emotions. "This is a good test for our research," says Professor Gentaz. "One of the main challenges in this area is to demonstrate that babies can distinguish on the basis of emotion and not pictorial information. By using a multisensory approach we believe we have overcome this challenge and so far the results indicate that, from about four months, babies can discriminate joy from anger after listening to an emotional voice."

The Research Focus is also developing and evaluating a training programme for children in emotional skills, which also faces some challenges. "It's very difficult to propose ecological training," explains Professor Gentaz. "That will also be continued by the teaching staff when the research has finished. As such it is important that the

teachers are involved in the development of the training from the beginning and that the research is published in professional publications that are read by teachers."

The preliminary results indicate that the training is successful, with 71 per cent of the children who received training showing an improvement in emotional skills compared to only 41 per cent of those who received no training. Interestingly the greatest benefit of the training was amongst the youngest age group of six-year olds. "The results are doubly impressive because the children only receive about three or four hours of training," adds Professor Gentaz. "This is much less time than is needed to get a similar improvement in reading or writing. And it is interesting to see that it is the six-year olds who benefit the most, suggesting this might be the optimal age to conduct the training." According to Professor Gentaz the next stage for the research is look at the impact of the training in other areas such as academic performance. "This will also be challenging since we have large samples so it will take a long time to collect all the data."

Another strand of the Research Focus is evaluating the effect of the learning environment by comparing measures such as cognitive performance, executive function and creativity between Montessori schools and traditional schools. Already the research, conducted by Solange Denervaud, is showing some interesting results with children from Montessori schools showing higher creativity and cognitive function but lower emotionality. The plan is to use the same battery of measures to evaluate emotional training in schools and then publish the results in academic journals as well as professional publications.

"It's very important that our research is both theoretical and practical," says Professor Gentaz. "These are very new subject areas that we are investigating so we need theory to provide a framework and structure, but we also need to develop meaningful and practical tools that bring together different disciplines to help children develop holistically."





## Grants received

Margherita Arcangeli (project Emotion, Attention and Value) has been awarded with a Swiss Government Excellence Scholarship. She is a post-doctoral research fellow at the Swiss Center for Affective Sciences, within the Thumos research group, for the academic year 2015/2016.

Guillaume Chanel and Thierry Pun (project Adaptative Emotion Awareness Tools for Computer-Mediated Interactions (EATMINT)) obtained a grant from the Swiss National Foundation in the framework of the Lead Agency process to work on the conception of affective virtual agents capable of managing their first impressions on users. This cross-border research project is conducted in collaboration with Prof. Catherine Pelachaud from Telecom ParisTech, France and the Natural History Museum of Neuchâtel.

Julian Gaviria (project Brain Networks of Emotions and their Influence on Cognitive Processes) obtained a scholarship from Swiss Government and Colombia to pursue a PhD thesis on emotion regulation.

Olga Klimecki, Guido Bondolfi, David Sander and Patrik Vuilleumier (Focus Emotions and Conflict) obtained a grant from the European Commission (starting date: 2016) to investigate the neuro-cognitive mechanisms in the framework of meditation training. Six others countries are involved in this "Medit - Ageing" project: United Kingdom, France, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and Spain.

Alain Pe-Curto (project Emotion, Attention and Valsuccessfully applied ue) has Conférence universi the taire de Suisse occidentale (CUSO) for a conference grant

CONFÉRENCE UNIVERSITAIRE

supporting the creation of the annual Lake Geneva Graduate Conference in philosophy and the organization of its first edition at CISA – Campus Biotech (see Upcoming Events below). The application was sponsored by Fabrice Correia (Unine), Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni.

Alison Montagrin (project Affective Relevance: Nature, Determinants and Effects) obtained an Early Postdoc. Mobility from the Swiss National Science Foundation for 18 months, to go to the Schiller Laboratory of Affective Neuroscience, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York City.

Anna Piata (Focus Language) has been awarded with a Swiss Government Excellence Scholarship. She is a post-doctoral research fellow at the Swiss Center for Affective Sciences, for the academic year 2015/2016.

Julien Zanetta (project Contempt in Literature) was awarded a Postdoc. Mobility Fellowship by the Swiss National Science Foundation for a project entitled "La biographie de peintre au XIXe siècle – Histoire et herméneutique".

# **Completed PhDs**

Sezen Cekic successfully defended her Phd thesis on "Time-Frequency Granger Causality, with Application to Nonstationary Brain Signals" on December 4, 2015 under the direction of Prof Didier Grandjean.

Ivana Igic successfully defended her PhD thesis on "Why Work Stress Matters. Examining the daily and longitudinal relationships between work characteristics, health, and well-being at the intra-individual level" on September 22, 2015, under the direction of Prof N. K. Semmer.

Rabea Krings successfully defended her PhD thesis on "Subtly offending feedback: Forms and consequences. A multi-methodological approach to conceptualize a newly construed form of negative feedback" on December 18, 2015, under the direction of Prof N. K. Semmer.

Carolina Labbe-Rodriguez successfully defended her PhD thesis on "Entrainment as a psychological mechanism of emotion induction in music listening "on September 14, 2015 under the direction of Prof Didier Grandjean.

Ben Meuleman successfully defended his PhD thesis on "Computational modeling of appraisal theory of emotion" on November 20, 2015 under the direction of Prof Klaus Scherer.

Alison Montagrin successfully defended her PhD thesis on "Emotion and memory: Goal relevance as a key of memory facilitation" on September 7, 2015 under the direction of Prof David Sander.

Christian Mumenthaler successfully defended his PhD thesis on "The influence of social appraisal on the perception of emotions." on October 14, 2015 under the direction of Prof David Sander.

Aline Pichon successfully defended her PhD thesis on "Elicitation by Odors and their Influence on Behavior and Cognitive Performance" on June 30, 2015 under the direction of Prof Patrik Vuilleumier.

Eva Pool successfully defended her PhD thesis on "The role of affective relevance in the processing of positive rewarding stimuli" on November 30, 2015 under the direction of Prof David Sander. ■





# **Upcoming events**

#### Annual Research Forum 2016

The next edition of the Annual Research Forum will take place on March 3-4, 2016, at the 'Campus Biotech' in Geneva. The ARF offers the opportunity to meet peers (old and new) and get an update on all the fascinating research carried out at the Center, and the latest logistic developments.

#### Emotions – une histoire naturelle

(Forum de Meyrin, Genève, March 10, 2016 - May 28, 2016).

The exhibit Emotions, developed in close collaboration with the Museum of natural History of Neuchâtel, will be presented at the Forum de Meyrin, Geneva. Conferences are planned on March 2016. Information on http://meyrinculture.ch/evenement/emotions-une-histoire-naturelle

#### Colloquium The Emotions and the Arts

(April 22-23, 2016) organized in Geneva by the project "Contempt in Literature" and the Département de français moderne of the University of Geneva.

#### Lake Geneva Graduate Conference 2016

(1st edition of the conference) (May 27, 2016). Philosophy conference with peer-reviewed CFPs, involving Neuchâtel, Fribourg and Geneva. It will take place at CISA – Campus Biotech. Sponsors: Fabrice Correia, Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni. Lead organizer and contact: Alain Pe-Curto, alain.pe-curto@unige.ch

#### Experience, Value and Justification

(May 31-June 1, 2016). Philosophy conference with peer-reviewed CFPs on the relations between evaluative experiences and justification



# International Summer School in Affective Science

(ISSAS 2016) (7-15 July, 2016).

The seventh ISSAS will take place at the Château de Bossey around the topic "Emotions, fictions, and virtual worlds"

www.affective-sciences.org/issas



# EARLI Conference on Comprehension of Text and graphics

(July 11-13, 2016, Geneva). Prof Mireille Betrancourt is a co-organizer. The aim of this meeting is to share and exchange ideas among researchers in the area of reading and text comprehension, multimedia learning and instructional design, including affective factors related to learners' characteristics or media design. www.earli.org/special\_interest\_groups/comprehension ■

# On our website www.affective-sciences.org

Research materials are available at http://www.affective-sciences.org/researchmaterial. Free of charge for non commercial research projects.

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 website of interest

Dynamic Emotion wheel: http://dynamicemotionwheel.ch/ The aim of this website is to present and disseminate the web service developed by Mattia Fritz (Prof Mireille Betrancourt Team) that allows users to report and share their emotions during a computer-mediated task. ■



#### Social Media



Follow us on Twitter: @NCCRAffectiveScience





## **Publications**

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