

Emotional Styles – Communities and Spaces

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How do we describe and explain the change and the variation of emotional patterns and practices across time and within diverging social settings? The workshop on „Emotional Styles“ explored possible answers to this question focusing on the opportunities (and the problems) presented by the concepts of emotional communities and emotional spaces in this respect.

The initial assumption was that there are different communities – defined by religion, gender or other criteria – and different spaces like home, the office or the countryside, each demanding and enhancing specific emotional patterns and practices. This diversity of communities and spaces accounts for the simultaneous effectiveness of varied emotional styles within one socio-cultural context. Starting from this hypothesis the presenters scrutinized interactions – conflicts, adaptations, hybridizations – between these divergent emotional repertoires.

The workshop thus discussed methodical and theoretical core issues of cultural and social science research into emotions. These issues were debated on the basis of a wide range of empirical examples that geographically spanned from Thailand to Switzerland and historically from the early 19th to the late 20th century. The organizers had assembled a group of historians, sociologists and cultural and educational scientists comprising young as well as more experienced scholars that engaged in lively and fruitful debates throughout the workshop. The main questions raised and ideas formulated during these discussions will subsequently be summarized. The first paragraph addresses general issues relevant to researching emotions, while the second and third concentrate on the notions of

communities and spaces respectively.

Emotions: terms and conditions

The phrase „emotional styles“ from the workshop’s title was welcomed by some participants as a fruitful suggestion for further analyses. Instead of concentrating on single emotions like rage or fear it might be more enlightening, as HELENA FLAM (Leipzig) observed, to scrutinize ensembles of emotional patterns and practices, i.e. styles or repertoires.¹ Other discussants turned down the term „styles“ deeming it as too individualistic.

This point hints at the first in a row of dichotomies that are particularly potent and challenging when considering emotional phenomena. Besides the divide between the individual and the social, the splits between practices and norms, the psychic and the communicative dimension as well as between body and mind are also crucial. These divergences as to what emotions essentially are make it a particularly tricky and fascinating topic. The workshop neither aimed at nor reached a shared definition of „emotion“. Some participants stressed the bodily aspect, others the communicative function or the performative dimension. Accordingly, some presenters preferred the terms „affect“, „desire“ or „feeling“ to the word „emotion“. Yet most participants accepted MICHALINOS ZEMBYLAS’s (Nicosia) statement that emotional phenomena do have an inherent tendency to collapse or at least to unsettle the above named dichotomies.

This observation is closely connected to another general issue that was repeatedly discussed. Do emotions possess a certain transformative power, and if yes, where does it stem from? Some discussants attributed the force to produce variations and change to the polysemous excesses in meaning production characteristic for emotional utterances. This argument led to yet another important methodical question: What qualifies as an

¹ The concept of emotional styles has recently been explored by William M. Reddy, *Emotional Styles and Modern Forms of Life*, in: Malte Gruber et al. (eds.), *Sexualized Brains*, Cambridge/Mass. 2008, pp. 81-100. An emotional style in the singular was decried earlier by Peter N. Stearns, *American cool: constructing a twentieth-century emotional style*, New York 1994.

emotional expression? Should one only take into consideration statements that manifestly speak about feelings or may one also read emotions into texts that do not explicitly mention them? The absence of emotional vocabulary – virtually polysemy’s inconspicuous sister – was viewed by most participants as a very interesting phenomenon worthy of careful interpretation. Such analyses could profit either from intertextual comparisons or from references to linguistic research about the expression of emotions in speech and writing, as JOCHEN KLERES (Leipzig) suggested.

Other presenters suggested that the transformative power of emotional performances was grounded in their repetitive character that enabled carnivalesque or parodistic shifts. CAROLINE BRAUNMÜHL (Hamburg) supported this point of view with her notion of the impulsive contingency of emotions. Her paper focused on processes of othering in terms of gender and ethnicity within a 1990 US criminal court case against a Chinese mother who had killed her child. She demonstrated that the strategic use of supposedly culture-specific emotional patterns by the defense was always in danger of failing because of ill-performed repetitions of these patterns by the witnesses.

Emotional Communities

This unstable juxtaposition of Chinese and American as well as masculine and feminine emotional styles already hints at the workshop’s deliberations about the concept of emotional communities.² First of all, discussants repeatedly emphasized that emotional communities should not be conceptualized in an essentialist way as fixed and given entities. Researchers should instead rather follow the ways along which emotional communities are formed by stressing a certain emotional style and opposing it to the repertoire of other groups. Thus, emotions can be viewed as a vital feature in processes of inclusion and exclusion.

A concrete and colorful example for such a process was presented by MARK SEYMOUR (Dunedin) who explored yet another court case. In 1879 a circus acrobat from Southern Italy was tried in Rome for murdering his lover’s husband who had participated in the Risorgimento as a citizen-soldier. Seymour

showed that two opposing emotional styles were clashing during the trial, with the victim’s middle-class repertoire of restraint and control winning over the murderer’s deviant emotionality that was ascribed to the Southern provinces and ultimately excluded from the emerging emotional community of the Italian nation.

A similar process of supersession within which a certain emotional style came to be hegemonic and replaced or suppressed another one was indicated in MARIA TAUSIET’s (Madrid) paper about early 19th century Spain. It described the conflict between the emotionality of rural villagers, who believed that they had been cursed by a witch and the urban representatives of the high-ranking clergy, who blamed the villagers for superstition and whose temperate emotional style prevailed in the long run.

TAMARA LOOS (Ithaca) drew different conclusions from her analysis of a trial in Singapore in around 1900. A young man from the Siamese bureaucratic elite was accused of attempting to murder his young British wife who had married him without her parents’ consent. In this case emotional identifications amongst the Singapore public interestingly did not follow racial divides. Instead, most „white“ middle-class men sympathized with the „colored“ defendant. Accordingly, Loos sketched a partly class- and gender-based emotional community that valued romantic love, as well as male honor, and that transcended the racial distinctions that were otherwise crucial in this historical context.

This is an important finding, as it shows that emotional communities are not always congruous with racially, linguistically or otherwise defined groups. Instead, emerging emotional communities can cut across and bridge pre-existing boundaries and incorporate diverse groups of people. On the other hand, social groups united by certain characteristics do not always share the same emotional repertoire as well.

The internal heterogeneity of some communities in terms of emotional styles was

² This concept was introduced into emotion-research by Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional communities in the early Middle Ages*, Ithaca 2006.

stressed by a number of presenters. MAGDALENA BELJAN (Luxembourg) described how different representatives of the gay emancipation movement in West-Germany in the 1980s either condemned „Aids-Angst“ as conservative fear-mongering aiming at curtailng sexual liberties or welcomed the HIV-anxiety, instead, as enabling a revision of gay relationship-patterns that, according to them, should become more emotional and more stable. In a similar vein, JOSEPH MASLEN (Manchester) sketched different emotional styles amongst the British Left during the second half of the 20th century. And DAGMAR HERZOG (New York) described the partially failed efforts of feminism to change emotional patterns and practices regarding abortion and sexuality that produced diverse emotional repertoires within the wider context of the second feminist movement.

These arguments involved a certain degree of unease with and serious questions about the usefulness of the concept that were repeatedly voiced within the discussion: How fixed are the boundaries of emotional communities? Are they defined by shared agency or by shared discourse? Does it make sense to assume that members of one emotional community consistently stick to one emotional style? Some discussants shared DANIELA SAXER's (Lucerne) skepticism when she questioned whether we still need the concept of emotional communities at all or whether it could be more fruitful to search for emotional styles characteristic for certain professions or institutions instead.

Other presenters suggested to do away with the problematic term „community“ and to speak in lieu thereof about groups, networks or codes. The last term was highlighted by PETER-PAUL BÄNZIGER (Zurich) who spoke about different codes of intimate communication – one stressing notions of romantic love and the other focussing on partnership. Whereas the former viewed sex as something that had to function quasi-naturally and avoided talking about it, the latter made sexual intercourse an object of permanent negotiations. In late 20th century sex counselling letters from Switzerland Bänziger observed an intermingling of both repertoires. This implied that in this context the appropriateness

of employing a specific code depended on the particular situation.

Emotional Spaces

This observation hints at the importance of situational framings of emotional patterns and practices that were also discussed in terms of the second guiding concept of the workshop, namely that of emotional spaces. This notion was generally considered to be relatively new within cultural and social science research on emotions and held to be rather promising.

A specific emotional style enabled by the institutional space of the boarding school was analyzed by SALLY NEWMAN (Melbourne) who described the „crush“ between girls and young women in the early 20th century United States. She scrutinized the very detailed rules for appropriate „crush“ behavior which also prescribed certain places for the performance of specific practices. Apart from that Newman noted the striking difference between these rules and the patterns shaping late 20th century same-sex relationships which are closely linked to homosexual identity that was not an element of the „crush“.

The potential of analyzing emotional styles by concentrating on spatial structures was also emphasized by ANDREAS RECKWITZ (Frankfurt an der Oder). In his theoretical and methodical remarks on practices, emotions and spaces he introduced the notion of emotional atmospheres as interconnected subject-object-constellations. A particularly interesting example of such a constellation was presented by JOSEF CHYTRY (Berkeley). His paper was concerned with built spaces created in order to enhance or produce a specific emotion, namely happiness. Chytry analyzed the development of Walt Disney's ideas and projects from Disneyland to EPCOT – the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow – as a series of synaesthetic emotional environments.

Two distinct emotional atmospheres were presented in ARNIKA FUHRMANN's (Berlin) analysis of the Thai independent film „Tropical Malady“ from 2004. Whereas the first part of the film, she argued, depicts the normalcy and the joy of a relationship between two young men within the rather specific setting of a small town in contempo-

rary Thailand, the second part is placed in a spectral jungle environment and pictures in more abstract and general ways the perils and yearnings of human desire. Thus, the film displays two distinct spheres for different forms of emotional communication.

Finally, RAN ZWIGENBERG (New York) and HARRY WU (Oxford) scrutinized emotional styles and concepts as they operate and move within and between the spatial levels of the global, the national and the local. Zwigenberg compared the Japanese and the Israeli discourses about Hiroshima and the Holocaust and also mentioned their somewhat problematic links with universal notions of trauma and victimhood. Wu examined diverging concepts of trauma in 20th century Taiwan between knowledge transfers, local adaptations, political strategies and international efforts at creating a universally valid standard for the diagnosis of mental illnesses.

The workshop covered and developed a number of helpful and challenging ideas for cultural and social science research in emotional phenomena. It was generally shown that the concepts of emotional communities and spaces with diverging emotional styles being available and effective at the same time within one socio-cultural context allow for conclusive and complex descriptions of changes and variations within emotional patterns and practices. Several questions need further investigation, though. Are there groups sharing the same emotional values that are permanent enough to allow for the usage of the term communities? Or might other labels be more adequate? In which ways are such emotionally grounded forms of groupness related to other registers of inclusion/exclusion in terms of religion, social status or gender? Are they congruous, conflicting or blending with each other?

As far as emotional spaces are concerned scholars only began to theorize the concept. The workshop identified at least two important issues in this respect: How can one incorporate the cultural interpretations that make places meaningful for actors and actresses into the analysis of emotional spaces? How do the emotional repertoires governing different spaces interact with each other? To tackle these questions and problems a continuation

and widening of the debate is desirable.

Conference overview:

Ute Frevert and Benno Gammerl (both MPI for Human Development Berlin, Germany): Welcome and Introduction

Panel 1: Emotions in Court

Chair: Christiane Eifert (Free University Berlin, Germany)

Tamara Loos (Cornell University, Ithaca, USA): International Affairs: A Social History of Transnational Romance

Caroline Braunmühl (University of Hamburg, Germany): 'Emotion' Between Norm-Governed Performance and Its Failure: Disciplining Gendered/Ethnicized Others in Criminal Court

Mark Seymour (University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand): Emotional Arenas: Love, Lust and Murder between Province and Capital in 1870s Italy

Daniela Saxer (University of Lucerne, Switzerland): Commentary

Lecture

Chair: Margrit Pernau (MPI for Human Development Berlin, Germany)

Andreas Reckwitz (European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder), Germany): Practices – emotions – spaces

Panel 2: Emotions between the universal and the particular

Chair: Christine Kanz (MPI for Human Development Berlin, Germany)

Ran Zwigenberg (City University of New York, USA): Anger and Guilt Between Planet Auschwitz and the Atomic Desert: 1945-1970

Harry Yi-Jui Wu (University of Oxford, UK): Vicissitudes of Trauma: Three Case Studies in 20th Taiwan

Josef Chytrý (California College of Arts & University of California, Berkeley USA): Emotional Communities and Immersive Environments for a Theory of the Artful Firm: The Case of Walt Disney's Oeuvre from the Disney Studios to Disneyland and the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow

(EPCOT)

Michalinos Zembylas (Open University of Cyprus): Commentary

Panel 3: Queer emotions?

Chair: Christian Bailey (MPI for Human Development Berlin, Germany)

Arnika Fuhrmann (Institute for Cultural Inquiry, Berlin, Germany): Affects and Aesthetics of the Ordinary: Emotional Style and Sexual Contemporaneity in Thai Independent Cinema

Sally Newman (Monash University, Australia): „The Freshman Malady“: Revisiting the Ontology of the „Crush“

Magdalena Beljan (University of Luxembourg): Aids-Angst. On the discursive function of an emotion in the 1980ies

Jochen Kleres (University of Leipzig, Germany): Commentary

Lecture

Chair: Ute Frevert (MPI for Human Development Berlin, Germany)

Dagmar Herzog (City University of New York, USA): What role do emotions play in the history of sexuality?

Panel 4: Changing emotions - the role of spaces and communities

Chair: Jan Plamper (MPI for Human Development Berlin, Germany)

María Tausiet (CSIC's Centre for Human and Social Sciences, Madrid, Espania): Enlightened Witchcraft: Impassioned States in a Troubled Spain, 1812-1817

Joseph Maslen (University of Manchester, UK): The Emotional Ambivalence of Left-Wing Youth in Twentieth-Century Britain

Peter-Paul Bänziger (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH) and University of Zurich, Switzerland): „Romantic“ love, partnership, and what's sex got to do with it. On intimate communication in the late 20th century

Helena Flam (University of Leipzig, Germany): Commentary

Concluding remarks and final discussion

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