

Swiss Center for Affective Sciences

NCCR SEMINARS: LITERATURE & EMOTION

Monday,
June 8th 2015

16:30 - 17:45

18:00 - 19:15

Conference Room
Campus Biotech
9, chemin des Mines
Geneva

Racine Reconsidered: Magnetic Bodies & Emotions on/of the Tragic Stage

Prof. Sylvaine Guyot (Harvard University)

This talk focuses on a key moment in the history of tragedy — the French seventeenth century — when the question of the emotional force of performing arts was acutely posed. A long-lived tradition has made Racine the purest symbol of the “classical” attempt to attenuate and restrain emotions with cold and verbal rationality. Building upon my recent book on the topic, I will show that the representation of the body in the drama of Racine and the theories of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture played a convergent role in the conception of visual/performing arts as an affective experience that simultaneously moves and engages the onlooker. The parallel between drama and painting reveals a pre-modern awareness of the questions of mediality and materiality, and of the importance of pleasure as a way to elicit the spectators’ interest. I will reflect on the socio-philosophical implications of this emerging distinction between emotions and tragic passions, and the development of aesthetics in the early modern period. ■

Concealing Emotions

Dr. Julien Zanetta (University of Geneva)

In this talk, I shall examine literary instances of the manners in which we conceal emotions. Whether we are led to hide a shameful secret, hush an uncontainable joy or fake a polite smile to a rival, the ways of concealing are as various as their purposes. My first aim will be to distinguish among several situations eliciting fear or delight, jealousy or contempt. On a literary ground, I intend to show that concealing, driven by specific motivations, exceeds or at least inflects the mechanisms of emotion regulation, coping or self-defence. I shall also consider the historical component of this problem – scenes of dissimulation leading to misunderstandings are likely to reveal differences according to the age in which they were written. This inquiry will take us from the courtly society of the 17th century, where masks and veils are omnipresent, to the shores of the 19th, where dandies, full of their “unshakeable determination not to be moved” (Baudelaire), pride themselves to command “at will” their emotions. ■



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