



Invitation to a guest-lecture by Dr. Marc Mehu



Dr. Marc Mehu, Swiss Center for Affective Sciences

title: Ethological questions in the study of emotional communication:
Information transfer and social influence

day: Thursday, March 21, 2013

time: 10.15 am - 12.00 pm

room: BIN-1-D-22, Binzmühlestrasse 14/7, 8050 Zürich

Email: marc.mehu@unige.ch

URL: <http://www.affective-sciences.org/users/marc-mehu>

Abstract

Ethology is concerned with the evolutionary function of behaviour, i.e. how behaviour contributes to an individual's survival and reproduction. Within the ethological framework, emotional expressions are viewed as social signals that help individuals manage their social environment. One way to investigate the evolutionary function of behaviour is to observe its context of occurrence and its consequences for the individual displaying it. In a series of observational and experimental studies, I will present how such an approach can be applied to the study of smiling, laughter, and other emotional expressions. In a second part, I will argue that clarifying the evolutionary constraints specific to signallers and perceivers leads to a better understanding of human communication because it allows the integration of two central aspects: information transfer and social influence. On the basis of previous research in animal communication and human social psychology, I will present a theoretical model that integrates these two aspects. I will conclude by discussing the utility of the ethological approach to the study of personality and psychological assessment.

Relevant references

- Mehu, M., & Dunbar, R. I. M. (2008). Naturalistic observations of smiling and laughter in human group interactions. *Behaviour*, *145*, 1747-1780.
- Mehu, M., Grammer, K., & Dunbar, R. I. M. (2007). Smiles when sharing. *Evolution & Human Behavior*, *28*, 415-422.
- Mehu, M., Mortillaro M., Bänziger T., & Scherer, K. R. (2012). Reliable facial muscle activation enhances recognizability and credibility of emotional expression. *Emotion* *12*(4), 701-715.
- Mehu, M., & Scherer, K. R. (2012) A psycho-ethological approach to Social Signal Processing. *Cognitive Processing* *13*(2), 397-414.

Short biography

After a PhD in Evolutionary Psychology and Behavioural Ecology at the University of Liverpool, I joined the Swiss Center for Affective Sciences, University of Geneva. I use a variety of research paradigms (e.g. behavioural observations, perceptual experiments) to investigate the function of emotional expression and its relations to socially relevant dimensions such as dominance and affiliation. I am also a member of the European Network of Excellence on Social Signal Processing (SSPNet).