
10th LUMEN International Scientific Conference Rethinking Social Action.
Core Values in Practice | RSACVP 2018 |
20-21 April 2018 | Suceava, Romania

Rethinking Social Action. Core Values in Practice

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<https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.30>

How to cite: Balaita, R. (2018). Affectivity and Social Expression. In A. Sandu, T. Ciulei, (eds.), *Rethinking Social Action. Core Values in Practice* (pp. 1-17). Iasi, Romania: LUMEN Proceedings. <https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.30>



Affectivity and Social Expression

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Abstract

An essential dimension not only of mental life, but also of relationships, the affectivity is built socially, its conventional manifestations varying depending on the social values acknowledged within a given group.

An individual relates to the world simultaneously by cognition and emotion, so that the reason/passion dichotomy which, for a long period of time, has represented a red thread in the history of Western philosophy has been revised. Emotions are not opposed to reasonable conduct, but respond to a personal logic and certain implicit social norms, being in a direct relationship with the meaning the individual gives to events.

Emotions are connected to social communication, represent “a way of affiliation to a social community” (David Le Breton) and the expression of relating to a situation, interlocutors, message. In this article we insist on the idea that affectivity, emotions correspond to certain reactions of the individual to a given situation which manifest by a series of physiological and psychological changes translated into mimicry, gestures, attitudes, words expression modalities which are acquired during a learning process and by constantly relating to the other members of the social group.

Keywords:

Cognition, emotion, affectivity, social communication, expression.

1. Introduction

The research subject of many sciences emotions have recently regained the focus of specialists' attention from the fields of neurobiology

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<https://doi.org/10.18662/Aumproc.30>

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of the conference



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and cognitive sciences, which have brought forth, from an interdisciplinary perspective, the relationship between emotion and reason concerning the way in which the human being adopts various behaviour patterns.

Although various specialists propose different concepts in order to define a wide range of phenomena from the affect realm, such as *feelings, emotions, moods, sentiments, passions, affects*, in this article we will employ the term *emotion* in a very broad sense.

In the specialized literature, researchers have identified and discussed the opposition between primary emotions and secondary emotions. Until the 70s, research focused chiefly on primary emotions, which are identifiable due to facial expressions, are common to all cultures as well as to other animal species. They are opposed to secondary emotions, which are triggered by factors with a higher degree of subjectivity and which differ from one culture to another. There are also other researchers, whose standpoint we also adopt, who believe that such an opposition is not appropriate and who support the idea that emotions cannot be grouped into different classes, which are clearly demarcated; instead, they could be represented by means of a continuum, from basic to more complex emotions: “it may be more appropriate to classify emotions on a continuum from basic to more complex (e.g., so-called secondary or higher-order emotions), rather than making either-or categorizations. Such rigid distinctions may distract attention from more careful study of the elicitors, experience, and function of specific emotions, especially those characteristics that fall outside the boundaries of basic or complex emotion attributes” [14, p. 74].

Our intention is to identify a number of elements defining emotions, with a particular focus on the relationship between emotion, self, body and social environment.

2. Theoretical Background

Even since antiquity (Aristotle, Plato), emotions have been connected with states of bodily imbalance, being opposed to reason. This opposition reason–passion represented for a long time the golden thread of the history of occidental philosophy and was revised centuries later when researchers demonstrated that the individual’s relation to the world is simultaneously based on cognition and emotion, that emotions do not oppose to reasonable behaviour modes but only answer to personal logic and implicit social norms, and they are directly related to the meaning an individual gives to the events he partakes in.

Concerned with the manner of producing emotions and with the role of the body in this process, R. Descartes [7] and, later, W. James [16] opened the path to understanding the physiology of emotions as opposed to the psychological approach. In effect, emotions became a subject matter for psychological study quite late, as emotions were hard to conceptualize and differentiate from other psychic processes.

Proposing an analysis of observable behaviour, the behaviourists claimed that, despite the differences that distinguish us from animals, human behaviour can be explained starting from that of animals, without taking into account the mental aspects involved in the process of producing emotions.

Once the cognitive theories were developed, researchers (N. Frijda [11], K. Scherer [22]) highlighted the close link between the mental representations, affects and bodily reactions, and neuroscientists (A. Damasio [5], D. Goleman [13], D. Siegel [23]) as well as those who adopted an evolutionist stance (P. Ekman [10], S. Tomkins [26]) started from Darwin's theory [6] and stressed that the emotional mechanisms have an evolutionist origin.

The study of the role of emotions in society from a sociological perspective came rather late, the sociology of emotions becoming established as a research field toward the end of the 70s. Emotions, especially social emotions, have a significant role in the socialization process, are dependent on individual sensitivity and are ritually organized (E. Goffman [12]). Emotions are thus related to social communication, represent a "mode of affiliation to a social community" [19, p. 147], constitute the expression of relating to a situation, interlocutors, and message.

In this article, we insist on the idea that affectivity and emotions correspond to an individual's reactions to a specific situation and are rendered by means of a series of physiological and psychological changes, which are translated into mimicry, gestures, attitudes, or words, expression modes that are acquired during a learning process and by constantly relating to the other members of the social group.

3. Argument of the paper

The universal nature of emotional expressions has constituted a debate subject matter for researchers. Those who have adopted a naturalistic viewpoint, a biological view upon the world and, implicitly, upon emotions, consider that the genetic programme takes precedence over the symbolical dimension, the social and cultural data that are part of the mechanisms of

producing and expressing emotions being considered as insignificant. In their view, the phylogenetic evolution selected a repertoire of *specific activity schemes* [3, p. 39] employed by individuals depending on the challenges from the environment, with a strictly adaptive function.

David Le Breton [19], whose view we share, claims that such a point of view can only establish an opposition between the individual and his/her emotional state, the emotion becoming a *substance*, which is external to an individual and common to the human species.

In line with the advocates of the culturalist theories of emotion, we hold the view that the processes of social learning influence fundamentally the innate stereotypical processes of producing and expressing emotions. Additionally, the redefinition of the concept of self has led to the new conception regarding emotions and the way in which they are created in social interaction.

Emotions should be considered as a product of culture rather than as innate stereotypical processes [19]. Social learning has a major role in the construction of emotional behaviour and the body no longer represents the origin of emotions, it becomes “a symbolical locus: in emotion, [the body] does not exteriorize its nature, it expresses a culture” [17, p. 340]. Emotions are organized ritually, depend on social and moral circumstances and on the experiences and sensitivity of every individual, and make use of modes of expression that are socially recognized.

4. Emotions: Evolutionary and cultural influences

4.1. *From Darwin to new evolutionist approaches*

The evolutionist origin of emotional mechanisms is supported by the majority of researchers who follow the steps of Darwin, his ideas being presented in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* [6]. Darwin posits the hypothesis concerning the continuity of all species, man being nothing but a mammal that evolved gradually, through natural selection. This evolution manifests itself not only in relation to man’s anatomy, but also concerning his intelligence and emotions. Therefore, emotions are not specific to the human being as Darwin identifies universal features of expressing emotions that are common to the various species. The innate character of expressing emotions lies at the basis of the adaptation of the species, an idea which is also mentioned by evolutionist psychology. Darwin insists on the inborn character of the major emotional acts that are common to all people, acts which cannot be considered as effects of a learning process.

The researchers who adopted Darwin's belief showed that human emotions have evolved with the aim of adapting the challenges of physical factors and predominantly of social ones. As adaptive reactions to a more and more complex social environment, human emotions have become increasingly diverse and sophisticated: "emotion provides the principal currency in human relationships as well as the motivational force for what is best and worst in human behaviour... More than other species, we are beneficiaries and victims of a wealth of emotional experience" [8, p. 1191].

Ekman [10] also shares the opinion that emotions are the result of adaptation that occurs during evolution. His intercultural studies have highlighted the existence of the same facial expressions associated with at least six emotions that are common to all human groups: *disgust, anger, joy, sadness, fear, surprise*. These emotions are said to be universal, and thus inborn, and they are also accompanied by specific bodily changes.

One of the researchers who influenced the way in which emotions are understood was William James. At the end of the nineteenth century, he described the emotional phenomenon as follows: "*Our natural way of thinking about these standard emotions is that the mental perception of some fact excites the mental affection called the emotion, and that this latter state of mind gives rise to the bodily expression. My thesis on the contrary is that the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion*" [16, p. 189-190]. This description establishes a reverse causal order as compared to the previous understanding of emotion. James sees an emotion as a process that starts from a stimulus and produces some bodily effects, whereas the feeling we have concerning these effects, simultaneously with their production, constitutes, in fact, an emotion. An emotion is thus the perception of the bodily answer to a certain stimulus, the essential element brought forward by James in understanding emotion being the interposition of the body between the triggering stimulus and the experiencing of the emotion. This description was criticized especially for eliminating the evaluation of the stimulus and of the situation and for limiting the cognitive aspect, which plays a major role in producing an emotional response [5, p. 133-135].

Interest in these aspects was reactivated at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the focus of attention was shifted from the purely physiological mechanisms of producing emotions to the activated mental processes and the causes that determined the adaptation of the emotional behaviour.

Antonio Damasio [5] also adopts an evolutionist perspective, postulating the hypothesis of a clear distinction between emotions and feelings. While emotions are complex programmes of automated actions that

lead to alterations of the bodily state with the aim of facing the challenges of the environment, feelings are based on *interoception* and represent perceptions of the mental state and of the state of the body influenced by emotion, they are conscious and involve the creation of complex maps of body condition. The creation of a feeling is therefore a stage that follows the creation of an emotion and Damasio defines a *body loop mechanism of feeling*, which starts with the activation and occurrence of emotions under the influence of a stimulus that is *emotionally competent* and which is perceived and evaluated by the brain. This process is transmitted to other parts of the brain as well as to the body and subsequently returns to other parts of the brain, giving birth to a feeling. A feeling is a mixed perception caused by a stimulus of a body condition and of a state of cognitive resource that involves certain mental scenarios. Even though feelings are automated actions, their production mechanisms being similar to all individuals with a normal brain, the emotional responses are different depending on the triggering stimuli. The emotionally-competent stimuli differ from one individual to another, and personal experiences, the education received as well as the culture to which the individual belongs also have a decisive role in the controlling of emotional experience, with an impact on the cognitive component of emotions. Emotions have a vital role due to their function of homeostatic regulator, but they also have a fundamental role in the process of taking decisions and in creating self-image. Social emotions, such as sympathy, shame or pride, which are more recent on the evolutionary ladder, are extremely important in the lives of social groups, including a series of moral principles and forming the basis of ethical systems. In an interview for the Scientific American Mind, Antonio Damasio [4] declared: “Neurobiology doesn’t simply help us to better understand human nature but also the rules of social interaction”.

4.2. Self-image, emotions and socialization

Behaviourists claimed that despite the differences that distinguish us from animals, human behaviour can actually be explained by starting from animal behaviour, thus omitting an essential aspect: the introspective capacity and the ability to recognize oneself as an individual (*capacity for self-awareness*), which are specific to the human being. As Mark Leary [18] revealed, this omission had a significant impact on the way in which emotions were understood during most part of the twentieth century. At the basis of primary emotions, which are common to people and animals, we find chiefly two processes, which do not explicitly involve self-awareness: an innate process of reaction as an answer to certain stimuli that endanger the survival and reproduction of the species and a conditioning process, emotions being

learned as an answer to the application of neutral anterior stimuli. More recent research has highlighted [cf. 18, p. 40] the fact that human emotions frequently have as a source the way in which every individual perceives him/herself and thinks about him/herself, as well as the store of personal experiences, the major difference regarding the way in which emotions are produced in the case of humans, unlike in that of animals (animals do not possess the capacity of self-reflection, in their case emotions being the result of concrete, palpable stimuli), being that human beings can make judgments about themselves and about the events they take part in, they have the capacity to conceptualize and to think in abstract terms.

Starting from a redefinition of the concept of self, which presupposes more types of cognitive abilities, Mark Leary identifies three types of self: the *extended self*, the *private self* and the *conceptual* (or *symbolic*) *self*, with significant implications for understanding the role of the *capacity for self-awareness* for the genesis of emotions. These self-reflective abilities generate a multitude of emotions. Mark Leary [18] even claimed that medical imagery could identify parts of the brain associated to each of these abilities.

The concept of *private self* defined by Leary is close to what D. Siegel [23] calls *mindsight*, namely, that capacity of the mind to see itself, a capacity that lies at the basis of empathy. The founder of interpersonal neurobiology, D. Siegel is one of the researchers who operate with the concept of *social brain*, a new concept in neuroscience and which emerged as a result of the simultaneous studies conducted on the brain of two persons while they are interacting. As a result of such experiments, a capital discovery was possible: the existence of mirror-neurons. They are responsible, among others, for emotional contamination, too – the transmission of emotions from one person to another. Interpersonal communication thus takes place in an emotional context by means of the mirror-neurons system, intentional communication being based on “this ability to imagine others’ reactions to what one communicates” [18, p. 41]. On the other hand, the phenomena of non-verbal synchronization, in the case of a successful interaction, are determined by oscillatory neurons that cause the gestures and movements of those who interact to influence each other [13]. J. Cosnier [3, p. 87] thus speaks about a corporal *echo phenomenon*, by means of which each partner of the interaction corporally identifies with others, thus accomplishing an *identity of affects*. After dedicating many years to researching the brain, emotions and social life, D. Goleman [13] set the foundation of a new field, neuroscience, and develops together with other researchers the concept of emotional intelligence. The model proposed by him contains four components that are tightly connected: self awareness, self management, social awareness and relations management, while also establishing the

connections between these components and the brain areas. This model has a great impact on the field of education by way of socio-emotional learning, emotional intelligence being improvable and able to be cultivated all through one's life.

Redefining the self, Mark Leary [18] identifies a special class of emotions, namely, self-conscious emotions. These self-conscious emotions are produced simultaneously with a process of self-evaluation performed by an individual but also by other subjects concerning that individual, and this leads us to the idea of their social nature. The capacity specific to human beings as thinking subjects and, especially, that of thinking about themselves and about the way in which others perceive them influences personal experiences and thus such emotions are born: *social anxiety, embarrassment, pride, guilt, and shame*. *Self-conscious emotions* differ from emotions such as *anger, sadness, and fear*, which involve only self-awareness and self-evaluation and lack in processes of subject evaluation by members of the community and they also lack the influence on the subject's behaviour and emotional state [18, p.45]. As Damasio [5] claims too, these emotions, called *social emotions*, are of a more recent date on the evolutionary ladder and are exclusively human. Jennifer S. Beer identifies the elements that contribute to the engendering of such emotions: "In order to experience a self-conscious emotion, one must have an awareness of self (self-perception), an awareness that others are judging that self (person inference), and an awareness that there are a set of rules or social norms that determine whether the actions of the self are "right" or "wrong" (social norms)" [2, p. 53].

Jessica Tracy and Richard Robins consider that the idea of self-representation is essential in defining *self-conscious emotions*, so from their standpoint "the key question is not whether social goals are at stake, but whether identity goals are at stake. These identity goals can be interpersonal or task focused, public or private, but most important, must be about the aspirations and ideals (as well as the fears) of the self" [27, p. 174].

In contrast with Tracy and Robins, M. Leary places more emphasis on the processes of permanent evaluation an individual is subjected to, an evaluation which is performed by the members of the community he/she is part of, and less emphasis on the influence of self-representations on one's own behaviour: "Fundamentally, self-conscious emotions evolved not to respond to people's private evaluations of themselves but rather to regulate their interactions and relationships with other people" [18, p. 46].

Jessica Tracy and Richard Robins also consider that self-conscious emotions represent a distinct class of emotions: "In our view, self-conscious emotions should be treated as a special class of emotions. As "cognition-dependent" emotions (Izard, Ackerman, & Schultz, 1999), self-conscious

emotions require a distinct theoretical model specifying their antecedent cognitions” [28, p. 5] and propose an inventory of the components that justify the opposition primary emotions–self-conscious emotions:

1. *Self-conscious emotions require self-awareness and self-representations.*
2. *Self-conscious emotions emerge later in childhood than basic emotions.*
3. *Self-conscious emotions facilitate the attainment of complex social goals.*
4. *Self-conscious emotions do not have discrete, universally recognized facial expressions.*
5. *Self-conscious emotions are cognitively complex.*

They also propose an *appraisal-based process model of self-conscious emotions* that allows a definition/explanation of emotions starting from the subjacent processes, highlighting the inconveniences of existing models: 1. the processes described that explain the appearance of emotions cannot also be employed in the case of self-conscious emotions; 2. These models do not incorporate reflexive self-evaluative processes [28, p. 9].

Emotions – or certain emotions, in any case – are defined in close connection with processes related to the social nature of the self, and once the ability of abstraction, conceptualization and symbolization developed, people’s emotions evolved “to facilitate interpersonal encounters [...] Thus, self-conscious emotions are involved in the maintenance of social relationships” [18, p.47].

Emotions in general, but all the more self-conscious emotions play an extremely important role in adjusting behaviour. Defining the self as a social product, a result of dramatic performances, E. Goffman [12] showed that any social action is calculated so as not to lead to loss of face, and this makes us assert that shame and pride are closely connected to the social status an individual tries to defend in interaction: “In fact, according to the Cooley–Scheff conjecture, we are «virtually always in a state of either pride or shame»” [28, p. 3].

Self-conscious emotions (embarrassment, shame, guilt, and pride) are thus dependent on social constraints and have a major impact on the type of behaviour adopted in interaction. The existence of these social emotions is attributed by certain specialists, starting from *neuronal bases*, to the existence of a *social brain*², which is specialized for interactions among individuals in a community, with a decisive role in understanding and applying social norms and in adopting behaviour that is adequate to a situation.

² The neuroscientists consider that interpersonal negotiations are managed at the level of the *frontal lobes (including anterior cingulate), the amygdala, the temporal lobes, and the insula.*

Tara Gruenewald, Sally Dickerson and Margaret Kemeny [14] proposed a *social self preservation theory* starting from the idea that subjects experience self-conscious emotions when, in a social context that is in a continuous movement, their social self is threatened; the image of the social self is thus essential in creating and maintaining social relations. Focusing their research on *shame-related emotions*, they consider that shame is a central emotion when the social self is threatened. As a “premier social emotion” [14, p. 69], shame is an emotion perceived by the subject by permanently relating him/herself to what the others think about him/her and occurs as an answer to a degradation of social status, a devalorization of the social self, social exclusion or as a result of low social attention. The other *self-conscious emotions* analysed, such as *guilt, embarrassment and pride* are also connected with a threat to the social self but, unlike shame, which is an answer to an *undesirable self*, *guilt* is an answer to *undesirable behaviour or action* that results from transgressing social norms. Although the opinions of the specialists differ and studies are still conducted for researching the differences between the types of emotions, *embarrassment* occurs as a result of breaking commonplace social norms, while *shame* involves the more significant transgression of these norms. *Pride*, which is opposed to *shame*, is perhaps the most neglected emotion by the researchers, as “a result of a focus on negative emotions contributing to psychopathology and less historical interest in emotions that might promote positive mental well-being” [14, p. 72]. Tara Gruenewald, Sally Dickerson and Margaret Kemeny launch the theory according to which pride is triggered by a *positive social evaluation*.

The outcomes of repeated threats of the *social self* are translated into consequences concerning the physical body, physiological alterations as well as the mental health of individuals. Following some traumatic experiences from early childhood (physical abuse, verbal or sexual abuse, painful experiences) or from adult life (traumatic experiences in the social environment, incurable diseases, post-traumatic stress syndrome, pathological socialization), individuals can present psychosomatic dysfunctions (dermatosis, gastric ulcer, arthritis), with consequences on their mental functioning.

The evolution of emotions is a process that is tightly connected with both the development of cognition and the development of society. In this respect, we can mention the theory proposed by Emile Durkheim [9]. Durkheim’s model consists of two types of social relations that define the social order: *mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity* and proposes a description of the transition from primitive to industrial societies. The author identifies a series of emotions for the social relations from each type

of society: in the case of a *mechanical society*, the emotions are *acceptance and happiness*, whereas in the case of an *organic society*, *exploration and fear* dominate.

Another author who supports the adaptive character of emotions as a source of the birth of culture is Warren TenHouten: “The very adaptability of the emotions has made it possible for humans to construct incredibly complex cultures and civilizations” [25, p. 114]. The development of emotions *in socialization* is accomplished, according to the same researcher, by means of four processes: *verbalization, desomatization, symbollexia, and symbolic elaboration* [25, p. 1], processes that “can be retarded or even reversed” [25, p. 197] when the individual is repeatedly subjected to significant traumas. The verbalization of emotions, together with their expression by means of gestures and mimicry, represent a form of employing affects as social signs.

4.3. The pathological development of emotions – alexithymia

Renewing interest in the concept of *pensée opératoire* defined by Pierre Marty and Michel de M'Uzan³ [21], Peter Sifneos [24] introduces the term alexithymia to describe a syndrome whose characteristics include: the inability to verbalize emotions, the absence of imaginary life, the tendency to resort to action, the adherence to the facts of concrete reality (according to Cosnier [3, p. 141]). In Sifneos' view, we do not speak about a complete inability to feel emotions, the alexithymic subject being able to experience visceral emotions, but he/she cannot experience feeling emotions. Warren TenHouten explains the appearance of alexithymia by means of interhemispheric transfer deficit theory, this affliction having neurobiological causes, namely, the lack of communication between the two cerebral hemispheres (left and right) of the brain: “if the negative affects that are cognitively represented in the right hemisphere cannot be transferred to the left hemisphere, where they can be put into the form of words, first in inner speech, then in conversation, then this emotional energy is apt to work its way into the body, with the result psychosomatic disorder” [25, p. 197]. When the two cerebral hemispheres are interconnected by means of the corpus callosum, there occurs an intensification of the processes of mental expression and representation of emotions and ideas, processes which are responsible for the creative abilities of the subjects, regarding symbolization, verbalization and fantasizing.

³ *Operatory thinking* is represented by the impossibility of symbolization and can be translated into psychosomatic dysfunctions, the subjects affected by this syndrome being unable to imagine, to express their emotions and to make subjective evaluations. Operatory thinking “is based on the functional absence of fantasizing and oneiric activities” [3, p. 140].

In the modern civilization, where violence is increasingly felt and people tend to borrow the thinking mode of computers, eliminating the expression of emotions and face-to-face interaction, preferring instead online communication, we are faced up with the emergence of a new social phenomenon, *social alexithymia*, as a form of adaptation to the requirements of modern life [3, p. 142]. But, as W. TenHouten stresses, “even vilified emotions such as envy and aggressiveness are in end of themselves neither destructive nor creative, but possess the potential to be changed or combined with other emotions in a way that contributes to their incorporation in the highest level emotions that are essential for creativity, social innovation, and for rational orientation of the world. [...] The viability of all cultures and nations depends on the development of creative expression, and of recognition that affect and rationality are inseparable for the development of a mentality able to transcend the oppressive features of our belief systems and values” [25, p. 199].

4.4. From emotion to affective culture

Without negating the existence of a phylogenetic background as well as of a form of adaptation, research conducted in the field of the anthropology of emotions⁴ reveals that emotions are created mostly in a social environment and are expressed according to cultural norms that guide behaviour depending on individual sensitivities. Individuals belonging to the same social group possess a *savoir affectif* that provides them with a collection of attitudes that can be adopted depending on the situation, social status, sex, or age. G. Bateson proposed the term *ethos*, which is defined as the “expression of a culturally standardized system of organization of the instincts and emotions of the individuals” [1, p. 119], and D. Le Breton [19, p. 179] proposes the syntagm *affective culture* to refer to the same reality.

In order to be able to communicate, to identify themselves and to be recognized in a social group, individuals resort to an affective system, which is part of a cultural code that regulates social relations, by proposing rather than imposing behaviour modes that are adequate to particular situations. Anthropological studies carried out concerning affectivity in various societies show that societies’ ethos features are extremely different and the vocabulary corresponding to the emotions of a social group is often untranslatable into another language [19, p. 175-179], with periphrases being sometimes necessary in order to convey the nuances of an affective emotion. The socialization of emotions and of their expression is a process that starts

⁴ See the excellent thesis put forth by David Le Breton in his work *Les passions ordinaires. Anthropologie des émotions*.

in early childhood, being accomplished according to different cultural modes, which are specific to each social group, a process that never ends but “continues all through one’s life depending on social and cultural changes, the experiences of personal life, the different roles a social actor must assume in the course of his existence” [19, p. 203]. A child does not acquire only a mother tongue but also a maternal language of the body, his/her affective and gestural socialization taking place in the social community to which he/she belongs and which also suggests what should be felt in certain situations and the proper way of doing it [19, p. 205]. Emotions cannot be reduced to pure psychological substances translated at a bodily level by means of physiological processes, they vary from one society to another and are part of an affective network that is circumscribed spatially and temporally.

5. Against a purely biological and naturalistic approach to emotions

Analysing the facial and body expression in the case of human beings and animals, Darwin [6] proposes the hypothesis of the continuity of the species and the universality of emotional expression. Darwin does not offer even a minimal definition of emotions but he proposes a questionnaire based on some photographs which are distributed to various parts of the world with the aim of establishing comparisons regarding the manner in which the expression of emotions is performed in various cultures. The criticism Darwin received refers first of all to the fact that his undertaking pertains to “a botany of emotions” [19, p. 219] because of its purely biological approach to emotions. Darwin believed in the innate character of emotions, resulting from the principle of natural selection, and which have adapted depending on their usefulness in the evolution of the species. Without taking account of the social and symbolical dimension of the human being, the expression of emotion is not, in his view, an effect of a learning process, thus viewing it outside the sphere of social and individual significations. Detached from the social subject, emotions are universal from a biological viewpoint and so they are reduced to mimicry and expressible gestures.

P. Ekman [10] holds the same view and proposes, together with W. Friesen, a *Facial Action Coding System* for measuring facial movements. Starting from a systematic analysis of facial muscles, the two researchers conclude by associating a certain emotion with the contraction of certain muscular fasciculi and nervous fibres of the face, establishing a number of minimal units of anatomic action. The face thus becomes “a privileged space

of conveying human affectivity” [19, p. 214], whereas Ekman is more preoccupied with identifying the ways in which emotions are produced, among which the distinct universal facial signal has a significant role. Following Darwin’s steps, Ekman considers that primary emotions are a given biological fact with evolutionist significance, wherefrom their universality arises, his declared objective being that of demonstrating the universal nature of facial expressions, also using the analysis of photographs as a starting point. Other corporal expressions such as the look, the rhythm of body movements, the inflections of the voice⁵ are not taken into account by Ekman’s analysis, so the individual is reduced to a facade or a masque that unambiguously translates purified emotions. His approach is reduced to a simple anatomy of emotions, which are studied separately, in the absence of any dimension of significance and of a socially recognized value system. However, man has always endeavoured to give meaning and to confer value to his actions, each sign or gesture being connected with others in a system from which their multiple significations arise.

Darwin’s study, along with the others done by researchers that have adopted his analysis method, describe emotions based on the notion that their support is mimics, and that expressing emotions consists just in contractions of the face muscles. By comparing ways of emotions’ expression in populations belonging to different cultures – especially to ones remote from the European culture – they draw the conclusion that emotions are universal. Such a description of emotions rests on a strictly biological view of the world, starting from the assumption that humans have an entire set of emotions which have evolved over time, thanks to their adaptive character. However, we argue that such an approach cannot explain the complexity of the emotional phenomenon, as emotions cannot be reduced to strictly biological elements; put more strongly, genetics has no precedence over culture.

Emotions have evolved in tight connection with societal evolution; indeed, they have adapted to the complexity of the social environment. We share the viewpoint according to which emotions have to do with the individual’s self-image within a community, and that they have thus a profoundly social dimension which is instrumental to adjusting behaviour and regulating social interaction.

Excluding cultural differences, social meaning, and contextual sense by objectifying human affectivity results in conceiving emotions as absolute

⁵ In his work *Eclats de voix. Une anthropologie des voix*, D. Le Breton states that the human voice is in fact an emotion, a sign of identity and of engaging in social relations [20, p. 21].

states of mind, independent of individual experience and abstraction from the concrete persons that experiences them.

We argue that emotions, and especially Self-conscious emotions, are dependent not only on certain mind and body processes in every individual, but that they are socially conditions, depending on culture and society. Ultimately, emotions are part of way in which the world is represented.

6. Conclusions

Far from being some immutable entities, emotions modify together with the alterations occurring in the manner in which one's self image develops, with the alterations taking place in the social reality they are part of, as demonstrated by the occurrence of new emotions, of those emotions that are suggestively called social emotions. Being defined in close relation to reason, the body and the social universe, emotions cannot be reduced to simple physiological alterations and they do not represent substances that are common to all individuals and that could exercise control over social actors, for a relative period of time. They must be understood as relations, relations with the self, with the world, with the others. An emotion simultaneously represents "evaluation, interpretation, signification, relation, regulation of interaction" [19, p. 246].

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