

Submission for WP 7 Workshop, 4-5 July 2005

a) Title: **Emotion in social interaction – a view from outside**

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b) preferred form of presentation: oral

c) Characterization of approach

1. For the moment and for the sake of avoiding definitional chaos, I can live with e.g. Scherer's definition

2. Following this definition, I am not concerned centrally with emotion. I will call this phenomenon, for lack of a better expression, „relational affective state“ (RAS), but will be happy to get suggestions for better names. RASs are no full-fledged emotions, nor moods, nor „interpersonal stances“ (Scherer), but continuously updated, short-lived appraisals of the individual's relational situation.

3. Taking an approach where not emotion, but the „self“ is socially constructed (as well as socially constructing), I try to reconcile the sociological with the psychological view of emotion. Appraisal is, then, an individual but not subjective process in that it is only via culturally shared meanings that a stimulus event can be interpreted.

4. all, if I replace „emotion“ with a some more general term, like „affectivity“

5. The problems I address: a) modeling the affective states in interaction (sometimes called „weak“ emotions) and b) bridging the gap between „rational“ planning and decision-making on the one side and emotion on the other.

I. What is meant here by „social constructivism“?

Social constructivist theories are not in favour in emotion research, as they seem to run counter almost everything that is accepted as received knowledge about emotion. It is true, a definition like the one attempted in D3c –

„Social constructivist models – suggesting that the meaning of emotion is mostly constituted or constructed by socio-culturally determined behavior and value patterns“ (p. 14)

- is certainly not helpful to bridge the gap. In Scherer (Scherer and Peper 2001), what is called „meaning and construct models“ is relegated to the communication phase of the emotion process and as such taken out of the process proper and restricted to the verbal expression of emotions.

Most of the confusion (or even irritation) stems, as I see it, from different definitions of emotions – as it so often does. Emotion is a process in the individual: „... a relatively

brief episode of synchronized response of all or most organismic subsystems in response to the evaluation of an external or internal event as being of major significance.“ (Scherer and Peper 2001) I do not contradict this definition, but, in what follows, I will try to have a closer look first on the notion of „subjective appraisal“, and then on the „needs, goals and values of the individual“.

The emotion process is individual and is perceived as subjective, and pertaining to the Self. But this very Self is to a vast degree a social product, shaped by the almost continuous stream of social interaction. Although an emotion is an acute response to an acute stimulus, it is not the stimulus itself that triggers the emotion, but instead what that stimulus implies for the person. Emotion is a meaning-based phenomenon. It may be viewed as a reflex, but as a reflexive response to an appraised meaning rather than to an objective pattern of stimulation. (Smith and Kirby 2000) Appraisal, then, is never wholly and possibly only marginally subjective, but intersubjectively grounded.

The universality of (basic) emotions is sometimes held against social-constructivist views, but this apparent contradiction can be resolved. To overcome it, it is necessary to draw a clear line between the emotion process and its antecedents, because in the latter, we do indeed find lots of cultural variation. The comparative studies e.g. of „honor cultures“ vs. „autonomy cultures“ illustrate well one aspect of variation. (Rodriguez Mosquera, Fischer, and Manstead 2004)

II. The example of Affect Control Theory

Affect Control Theory (ACT) (Smith-Lovin 1990; Heise 2002, 1990; MacKinnon 1997, 1994) is one approach to model social interaction on the grounds of affective meaning. It developed out of symbolic interactionism, and its guiding ideas are influenced especially by Goffman’s studies on „face work“ – the „presentation of self in everyday life“ (Goffman 1959, 1981) . ACT takes the idea that the „self“ is realized in interaction in varying roles or identities that the individual takes on according to the situation and the others present. The central concern of the interactants is to confirm the affective meaning of their identity in the interaction. The interpretation of the elements of interaction uses dictionaries of affective meaning, where the connotation is expressed abstractly as EPA profiles (Evaluation, Potency, Activity expressed in numerical values) (Osgood, May, and Miron 1975; Osgood 1976, 1963) . (Heise 2004) outlines in which ways ACT could be used to model the interaction of an ECA with a human user.

Of course, ACT is not a theory that can resolve all our problems with modeling social interaction. Its limitations, namely, are situation analysis, planning, personality, and „objective“ goals:

- Situation analysis: as mentioned above, ACT does not furnish the definitions of situations, but computes norms from interactants’ definition of the situation. The problem of interpreting surface behaviour, be it verbal or non-verbal, is however certainly not limited to an ACT-based simulation.
- Planning: ACT suggests what actions an individual might take to advance an interaction, but ACT does not specify how an action is elaborated into a hierarchy of subgoals.

- Personality: The individual always appears as an interactant in a specific temporary role or identity. While moods are considered in the theory, personality as underlying individual variation is not – as is not surprising in a sociological theory.
- „Objective“ goals: I use here the term „objective“ exclusively as meaning „referring to the object world“. ACT models impression formation and the maintenance of social identities, but not the pursuit of goals „in the world“ out there. These goals are inherent to the interactants' roles, and in ACT they therefore remain implicit.

III. Towards affective rationality

Continuity and pervasiveness of affect are one of the important lessons to learn from ACT. Thinking further along that line, an „emotional component“ added to a rational agent architecture cannot do justice to the importance of affect. We rather need ABDI (affective BDI) than BDI & E architectures. The extension of affect management from social goals to „objective“ goals follows from the recognition that beliefs, desires, and intentions have affective meaning in the same way as roles and actions. An „affectively rational“ agent would, for example, reflect what we know from affective decision theory (Loewenstein and Lerner 2003) that says that humans make decisions not on the base of some expected utility, but of expected emotion, and at the same time are influenced by the anticipation of that emotion as well as by incidental emotions. The outcome of affective decision making may not be „objectively“ optimal, but more realistic.

IV. Resume: the affordances of a social-constructivist view for modeling affective interaction

- affective meaning as a pervasive concept not only for emotional appraisal, but also in knowledge, planning and decision making.
- limitation of the prediction space for interpretation and planning (or choice of plans) in interaction
- simplified if stereotypical modeling of the „other mind“
- implementation and verification of agent identities, especially with a view to an extended view of usability
- continuous affective monitoring especially in social relationship (cf. „sociometer“, (Leary 2000)) resulting in „weak“ affective states that only occasionally develop into emotion episodes.¹

¹ If time allows, this point will be more extensively discussed in the presentation using „shame“ as an example (Staller and Petta 2001; Sharkey, Park, and Kim 2004; Scheff and Retzinger 1997; Scheff; Miller 2004; Fearon 2004)

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