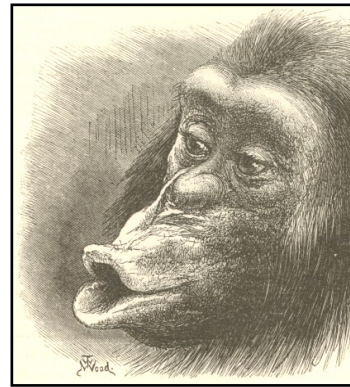


## FEELING DIFFERENTLY



Using historical images to teach emotional literacy  
in an East London school

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This document is a preliminary report, written in August 2011, on one aspect of an ongoing interdisciplinary project at Queen Mary, University of London:

**‘Embodied Emotions: History, Performance, Education’.**

The ‘Embodied Emotions’ project is directed by Alistair Campbell of the QMUL Department of Drama, and it is funded by the ‘Beyond Text’ programme of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## 'Embodied Emotions' and SEAL

My work as an academic historian had never taken me into a primary-school classroom, until April 2010, when I took part in a series of activities at Osmani Primary School, Tower Hamlets, organised by my colleague Ali Campbell.

I found myself discussing Charles Darwin, chimpanzees and romantic love with a group of seven-year-olds, and the difference between Indian and British cultures of emotional expression with one ten year-old boy (he said that in India people were more private and less expressive than in Britain). In the process I had the opportunity to experiment with using historical scientific images within a set of simple classroom exercises, designed to promote discussion and reflection on the topics of feeling, emotion and expression.

The event at Osmani in April 2010 was one of several that have taken place under the auspices of the 'Embodied Emotions' project, directed by Ali Campbell in collaboration with choreographer and director Clare Whistler, film-maker Bhavesh Hindocha, and myself.



The overall rationale of 'Embodied Emotions' is to develop techniques and exercises, grounded in the arts and humanities, to examine current educational policy goals and produce innovative classroom practices.

The UK government's initiatives promoting 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning' (SEAL) provided the immediate context for our project, which started shortly after Sir Jim Rose published his *Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum* in 2009. Rose expressed the hope that the new curriculum would help children develop 'emotional skills' such as managing their own feelings and becoming aware of the feelings of others.

The overarching aim of 'Embodied Emotions' has been to develop classroom activities that allow children to explore their feelings and emotions in

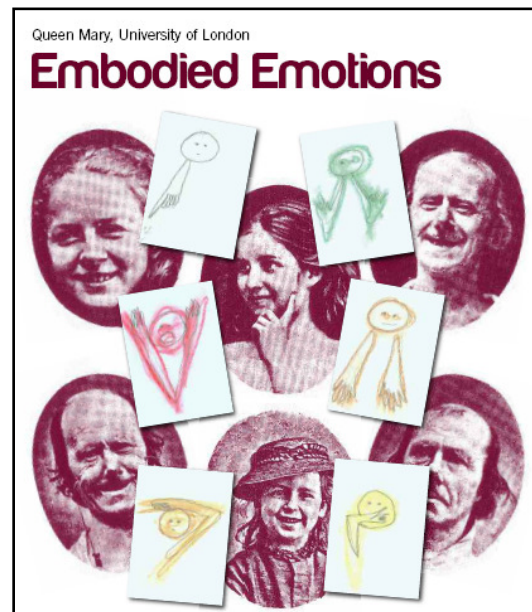
ways that are led by their own experiences and vocabularies, rather than by predefined, supposedly universal emotional templates and terminologies. In accordance with this aim, the project has explored how bodily movements and facial expressions can function as languages of feeling and emotion; how those embodied languages relate to verbal languages; and finally whether and how a SEAL agenda of the kind endorsed by the Rose report should be followed.

The activities of the project have fallen into two main categories: child-led drama workshops at Osmani School, introducing children to a set of simple movements, used as the basis for imaginative reconstructions of emotional scenarios; and interdisciplinary academic seminars hosted at QMUL involving short research papers on the history and theory of emotions,

solo performances by Clare Whistler, and audience discussion. All of these activities have been filmed by Bhavesh Hindocha, and some of the resulting short films can be viewed on our project website. Bhavesh's films are much the best way to get a sense of the work that Ali, Clare and their helpers (mainly current QMUL Drama students) have been doing at Osmani, especially their use and development of the 'X-Ray Eyes' template of physical movements as the basis of their workshops: <http://bit.ly/qqVa6O>.

The project has produced a leaflet which is another source of information about our activities so far:  
<http://www.qmul.ac.uk/emotions/docs/46763.pdf>

The rest of this paper is a report and reflection on one part of my historical contribution to the project, specifically my experiences using images from historical works of physiognomy and the sciences of expression in a classroom context. It is intended as an informal and provisional piece of writing that might be of interest to others exploring the place of emotions in educational settings. The simple worksheet that I created for the trial run at Osmani is included at the end of this report, in case others should feel tempted to try it out.



### *A Potted History of Expression: Physiognomy, Pathognomy, Paul Ekman*

My own earliest historical research in this area concerned the history of psychological language in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and especially the way that a secular psychological concept of 'emotions' replaced more morally and religiously loaded ideas about 'passions' and 'affections'. In more recent work I have been exploring the history of the idea of 'expression', with particular reference to weeping.

One persistent element of the history of expression has been the belief that there is a universal language of expression, understood by all human beings in all times and places – a language in which the words and syntax are made up of facial and bodily gestures such as frowning, flinching, smiling, or weeping, each of which signifies a distinct inward feeling.

The very fact that each historical era, up to and including our own, has produced and codified its own new language of expression, substantially different from what went before, backed up with the latest science, and purportedly universal, is a strong argument against the universality of any of them.

Another QMUL historian of emotions, Professor Colin Jones, is writing a book about the changing meanings of the smile in modern history. Colin gave a talk on the sciences of physiognomy and expression in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as part of the 'Embodied Emotions' seminar programme, with reference to works by the French painter Charles Le Brun and the Swiss physiognomist Johann Lavater. Physiognomy was a science

devoted not primarily to reading fleeting individual passions and emotions from the face (that was the aim of the related discipline of pathognomy), but rather to reading character and personality. It was a kind of facial astrology.

In Britain in the nineteenth century two authors did more than any others to promote new theories of expression and emotion, namely the surgeon, anatomist and painter Sir Charles Bell, and the naturalist and evolutionist Charles Darwin. These four writers (Le Brun, Lavater, Bell, Darwin) provided me with the historical images I used at Osmani School, and I will say more below about the images I chose, why, and with what results.



Image of Tim Roth as Dr Cal Lightman, from the Fox website.

But since Darwin's time the science of expression has changed yet again and in recent decades it has come to be dominated by the work of the American psychologist Paul Ekman. His ideas have been made famous not only through academic publications but also by a Fox TV drama series, *Lie to Me*, in which the main character, a crime-fighting applied psychologist called Dr Cal Lightman (played by Tim Roth), uses Ekman-style techniques.

You can get a taste of the kind of training that the real-life Paul Ekman offers through his website. The Ekman package is called 'FACE', which stands for 'Facial expression. Awareness. Compassion. Emotions'. A sample session is available online: <http://face.paulekman.com>. The task is to match facial expressions with emotion words. Each expression (posed by an actor) appears only fleetingly, although you are allowed to make it easier for yourself by holding down a key to prolong the expression. The task is then to click on one of the seven buttons on the right of the screen labelled: *happy, sad, surprise, angry, contempt, fear, disgust*. The encouraging online instructions tell you not to worry if you get it wrong, you can look at the expression again and 'keep going until you get it right'. This method – matching photographs of posed expressions with a limited list of emotion words – is at the heart of Ekman's work.

When I took the online FACE training test, I did not do well. In response to the face for which the right answer turned out to be fear I guessed first happy and then surprise. For another oddly contorted face I guessed fear and then, having taken advantage of the button which allows you to study the 'micro-expression' for longer, I decided it must be contempt. The right answer was 'happy'. Perhaps I need to pay for the full version of the FACE training package in order to improve my awareness of emotions and my compassion.

Or perhaps the Ekman method itself is flawed. Perhaps there is not a universal language of basic emotional expressions. Two eminent American scholars, the historian Ruth Leys and the psychologist James A. Russell, have both delivered lectures at the QMUL Centre for the History of the Emotions on the serious methodological problems with Paul Ekman's work, and references to their publications are given in the further reading section below.

While Ekman is right to think that we do indeed try to read others' feelings through their expressions, he is surely wrong to imply that the way we do so is by our knowledge of a universal language of expression related to a small hard-wired repertoire of 'basic emotions'. Our faces and bodies clearly have a role not only in communicating but also in creating and

maintaining our feelings, but it is a complex role, and one that can only ever be played out in a particular culture with its own distinct linguistic and representational conventions, and within particular narrative contexts. An arrangement of the face, like a word in a language, takes on its meaning largely from its context. In real life, we read a facial expression not in immobile isolation, but as attached to a particular body, as part of a dynamic series of movements, often in connection with verbal expressions, and as part of a social and personal situation. It is this sort of complexity that the 'X-Ray Eyes' template is designed to bring out.

So, in short, when I came to start designing some simple materials and exercises for the children at Osmani School, the one thing I was sure about was that (even if I'd been able to afford to pay for it) I did not want to offer them the FACE training package. And I would not be giving the children the instruction to 'keep going until you get it right', since, there is no right answer to what a facial expression taken entirely out of context actually means.

My plan instead was to use historical images of human (and animal) expressions to stimulate the children's own imaginative responses, with the aim of getting them thinking about feelings for themselves and using and extending their emotional vocabularies (rather than giving them a set list of seven words to choose from). In other words, I hoped that the historical images could serve the same function as the template of bodily movements designed by Ali and Clare, namely to provide an initial framework around which the children could build their own narratives in their own words.

## **2. Into the Classroom**

The worksheet I designed (included as an appendix below) included sixteen images, all taken from scientific or artistic works about expression produced between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The images are primarily of human faces, but also include a horse, a dog, and a chimpanzee. Some show a relatively simple expression that I imagined might result in quite a lot of agreement (such as the crying baby or smiling girl photographs from Darwin's book) and others show expressions that, without further context, could mean almost anything. I recorded separately what the original authors of the works thought the expression conveyed. In my time in the classroom, I rarely had recourse to these original designations (except in a dispute with some of the group of ten-year-olds about whether one of the images was a chimpanzee, a gorilla, or an orang-utan). My aim was not to get the children to match their answers with those of Charles Le Brun, Johann Lavater, Charles Bell or Charles Darwin, but to explore their own responses.

I made dozens of copies of the 'What are they feeling?' worksheet and circulated them throughout the different groups (in effect the whole school) who participated in the special half-day of activities at Osmani. At the end of that day I collected 70 completed or partially completed worksheets, from which I selected the 25 most complete for further analysis.

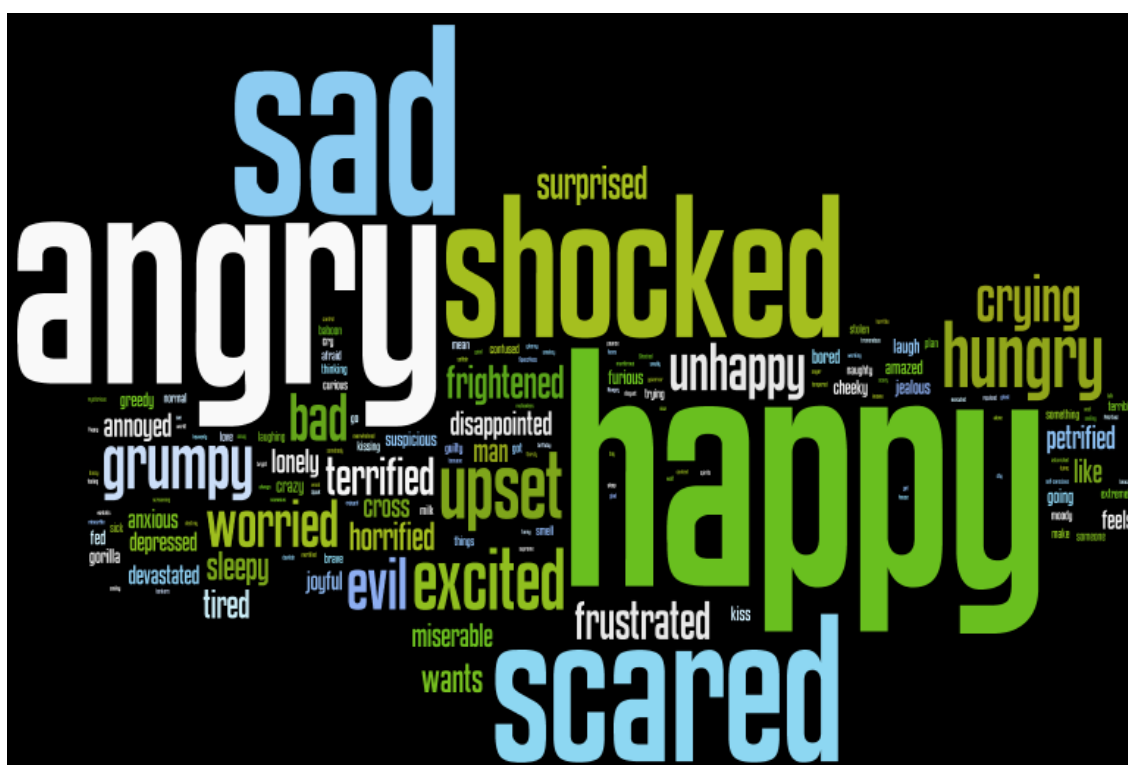
Many further responses were gathered by a team of Year 6 students (ages ten and eleven) who went out into the playground as roving researchers armed with an enlarged version of one or more of the images and a mini-whiteboard, on which they recorded the responses of their interviewees (mainly children, but also some teachers and parents). Two further sources of material were an open-ended discussion I conducted with a Year 3 group (ages

seven and eight), and two one-to-one interviews about all sixteen images with two individuals from the Year 6 group.

I have chosen just a few aspects of this material to give a flavour of the rich, varied and imaginative emotional vocabularies and ideas that these exercises elicited from the children at Osmani School.

### Vocabularies of feeling

Since the responses to the images were unguided, rather than made in response to a pre-defined set of emotion terms, the resulting list of all the terms used on the 25 sample worksheets, constitute a rough guide to the core vocabularies of feeling and emotion available to the children who took part. Such vocabularies are central to the generation and experience of feelings, as well as their interpretation. They constitute the varied emotional repertoire from which items can be performed and felt. The following image is a word-cloud (created using [www.wordle.net](http://www.wordle.net)) based on all the responses to all the images from the 25 worksheets I analysed. The bigger the word, the more frequently it occurred.



The children whose responses I analysed used nearly 150 different feeling terms, including words for bodily sensations such as 'nauseous', 'hungry' or 'sleepy' as well as a plethora of emotional terms from 'alone', 'angry', 'anxious' and 'ashamed', via 'devastated', 'depressed', and 'disappointed', to 'upset', 'up-tight' and 'worried'. Other responses went beyond any simple conception of feelings and emotions to encompass moral characteristics such as 'brave', 'dangerous', 'bossy' or 'cunning'.

The five most common terms among all this variety were 'happy', 'angry', 'sad', 'scared' and 'shocked'. I compared these results with the answers I received on 25 sample worksheets completed by an audience made up primarily of academics and post-graduate students at an evening seminar at Queen Mary. The QM answers yielded up a very similar top five, the



only differences being that 'scared' and 'shocked' were replaced by the more grown-up terms 'fear' and 'surprised' respectively.

There were 21 feelings terms that were used more than once by both groups, which might be taken to form part of a core emotional vocabulary in early twenty-first century London. These were the terms reached for by young and old alike when thinking about feelings that might be read from faces:

*afraid, amazed, angry, confused, cross, disappointed, evil, frightened, grumpy, happy, hungry, love, sad, scared, shocked, sick, surprised, terrified, tired, unhappy, upset, worried*

Terms used quite frequently by the children but not at all by the QM adult respondents included 'excited', 'bad' and 'crying'. Terms used by both groups but disproportionately frequently by the children included 'shocked', 'hungry', 'grumpy' and 'evil'. Broadly speaking, the children's answers suggested a greater preoccupation both with the body and with morality than that displayed by the QM seminar audience. For those acquainted with the concerns of both schoolchildren and academics, this may not come as too much of a surprise. There was one bodily urge, however, which registered in the QM seminar responses but not, reassuringly, the Osmani worksheets: 'lust'.

Inviting undirected responses to these images also left open the possibility that respondents, whether adults or children, would be more inclined to read their own feeling states into the images than if they were choosing from a pre-defined menu of 'basic emotions'. In reading through the worksheets I wondered several times whether the question that had really been answered was not 'What are they feeling?' but 'What are you feeling?' Among the QM worksheets, one included several references to 'lust', another to 'frustration', and another to 'nausea' in places where others had not seen traces of those particular traits. In the case of one of the Osmani worksheets, answers had been given for only nine of the sixteen images. Of these nine answers, four were 'hungry'.

### Reading faces across the centuries

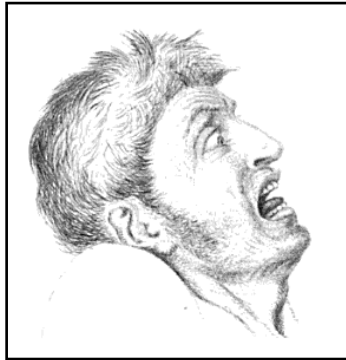
Although I did not refer to the original descriptions of the images while conducting the exercises, and had no intention of making this a quiz with right answers, I was nonetheless interested subsequently to compare the responses of the children with the labels attached to each image by its original author.

There were two images where not a single response matched the original label. Both of these came from the work of Charles Bell. One was the face of horse which he had reproduced from a painting by Giulio Romano. According to Bell this horse looked 'thoughtful and suspicious'. It doesn't look that way to me, and nor did it to the children at Osmani, whose most common responses were 'happy', 'excited', 'smiley', and 'proud'. Other suggestions were 'ecstatic', 'fantastic', 'supreme', and 'bonkers'.



The other image with zero overlap between nineteenth-century intention and twenty-first century perception was Bell's depiction of 'remorse after an act of revenge'. The closest to this idea in the Osmani responses was one which suggested 'angry, sad, bad'. The most common responses were simpler answers such as 'angry', 'grumpy' and 'sad'; others thought

the man 'doesn't want to talk' or was 'worn out'. The term 'remorse' was not used at all, for this or any other image, in any of the responses I looked at from either QM or Osmani.



At the other end of the spectrum, there were two images with an 80%-90% overlap between the original description and the Osmani responses. These were Bell's image of 'Fear of immediate danger' (left), and the photograph of a laughing girl used by Darwin as an image of simple joy or happiness. Virtually all the responses to Bell's man with hair, eyebrows and tongue all extended mentioned fear, horror, or terror. A few answers even coincided with Bell's idea of 'immediate' danger: 'frightened because he is going to be executed'; 'scared because he saw a ghost'; 'about to die'; 'snake attacking'.

And it is perhaps unsurprising that the photograph of the laughing girl (right) generated much agreement, with the standard answers being 'happy', 'joyful', and 'excited'. But there was another method, developed by the children themselves that elicited a much wider range of thoughts about this image of Victorian infant joy.



Unbeknownst to me, until I watched the films of the day subsequently, some of the roving researchers in the playground had added their own new rule to the 'What are they feeling?' exercise, insisting that respondents must come up with a new word for the picture – one not yet used by anyone else. Adapting the game to ask each person for a different word in this way resulted in a fantastic range of vocabulary being generated. Rather than just describing the photograph of the laughing girl as 'happy', in this version of the exercise, the emotional thesaurus of suggested alternatives produced in the playground ranged from *alive*, *brilliant*, *cool*, *delighted* and *eager*, via *fabulous*, *funny*, *gleeful*, *good* and *graceful*, to *well-dressed*, *wonderful*, and *youthful* – almost 50 different terms in all.



Darwin's *Expression of the Emotions* (1872) was one of the first scientific books to be illustrated with photographs. The production and use of those images make the subject of a fascinating history (which has been explored by Phillip Prodger in a book included in the further reading list below). In some cases Darwin used photographs of expressions produced by children, actors, or asylum patients, and in other cases engravings based on photographs. The depiction of 'Terror' falls into the latter category. The original photograph (left) showed the French neurologist Duchenne de Boulogne and an assistant using electrical stimulation to study what Boulogne considered universal and God-given mechanisms of expression.

Darwin reported:

*'The original photograph was shown to twenty-four persons, and they were separately asked without any explanation being given, what expression was intended: twenty instantly answered, "intense fright" or "horror;" three said pain, and one extreme discomfort.'*

The responses from Osmani School in 2010 were somewhat different. Ten out of twenty-five answered with something in the ballpark of fear, fright or horror. But several others suggested 'shocked' or 'surprised'; others thought 'mortified', 'disgusted' or 'upset'. One person suggested: 'This man is trying to make someone laugh'.

Darwin records that he adopted the same method that I was using – giving his respondents a totally free choice in how they answered an undirected question. Yet he found that 80% of his informers voted for fright or horror, as opposed to about 40% among my Osmani respondents. Why this discrepancy? It might be that Darwin's respondents were simply working within a different set of conventions about emotional expression – that they understood a different visual language than that which prevails a century and a half later. I am sure that is true. But another important reason must be that Darwin showed his participants the original photograph, whereas I used the engraving as published in his book (right).

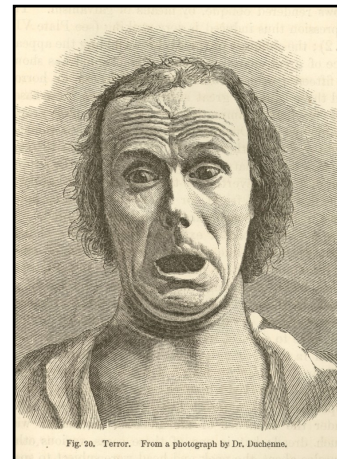


Fig. 26. Terror. From a photograph by Dr. Duchenne.

And it is not hard to spot the difference. The original photograph shows an experimental subject being, in effect, physically assaulted by two forceful medical gentlemen who are coolly attaching electrodes to his face. If ever there was a set of visual cues to suggest an experience of fright or horror, then this must be it. But this image is instructive for just this reason: no facial or bodily gesture can be supposed to have a single clear meaning as an emotional expression until it is placed into some further visual, social or narrative context – in this case a context of something akin to torture.

### Moralized responses

Several images produced responses couched in explicitly moral vocabulary. This was interesting to me, since one of the most important trends in the history of education has been the state-sanctioned secularization and demoralization of emotional learning during the twentieth century. Explicitly moral and religious instruction has now been almost completely displaced by teaching that aims at the moral detachment and neutrality characteristic of 'social and emotional aspects of learning'.



The two images that generated the most overtly moral reactions were Le Brun's depiction of 'Laughter' (left) and Lavater's 'Horrible Face'. Only four of the 25 sets of answers I analysed mentioned 'laughter' in response to Le Brun's image, and in all cases it was specified that the laughter was 'evil' or 'cunning', as in the suggestion: 'wants to do an evil laugh'. Although 'laughter' was a minority reaction, over half of the respondents invoked moral terms, including 'bad', 'selfish', 'sinister', 'murderous', 'bad guy', and most often of all, 'evil'. One even said the face was 'devilish'.

Lavater's 'Horrible Face' (right) elicited an equally moralized reaction and, in contrast to Le Brun's 'Laughter', this reflected the original ideas behind the image. Unlike Paul Ekman, whose exercises are designed to match facial expressions with simple one-word emotion labels, Lavater described his chosen faces at considerable length and, in this case, in highly moralized language:



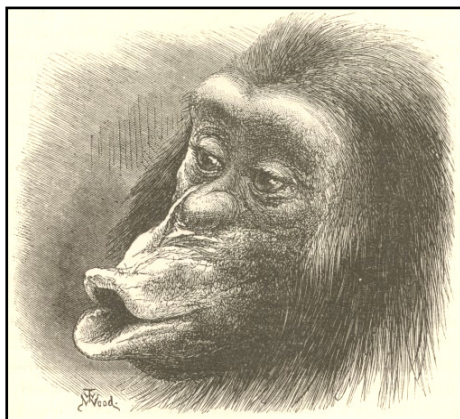
*'It is not virtue which that horrible face announces. Never could candour, or a noble simplicity, or cordiality, have fixed their residence there. The most sordid avarice, the most obdurate wickedness, the most abominable knavery, have deranged those eyes, have disfigured that mouth.'*

In short, Lavater concluded, this face told a story of 'perversity turned into habit, and become incorrigible'. The children of Osmani School may not have had such eighteenth-century phrases as 'obdurate wickedness', 'abominable knavery' or 'incorrigible perversity' in their moral vocabulary (although I suspect they would enjoy learning them), but they nonetheless registered their moral disapproval of this face, calling it variously: 'bad', 'evil', 'mean', 'slimy', 'sly', 'smug' and 'sneaky'. A couple were quite specific: 'he's thinking of a plan to destroy the world!'; 'this man feels like he wants to do a burglary'.

### Year 3: Chimpanzees , goldfish and tears

The most rewarding part of my time at Osmani came in the form of a round-table discussion with a group of about ten Year 3 children (ages seven and eight). For this session, instead of asking the students to fill out the worksheet, I wanted to have a more open-ended discussion, using the images as starting points.

At the start of the session, I asked the children how old they thought the images on the worksheet might be. Guesses ranged from a hundred to a million years, and there was some, although frankly not excessive interest in talking about how people might have felt in earlier historical periods and about where these images came from.



But it was the picture of the chimpanzee, described by Darwin in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) as 'Disappointed and Sulky', that proved to be particularly fascinating to this group. It was this chimp (left) that really got our conversation going.

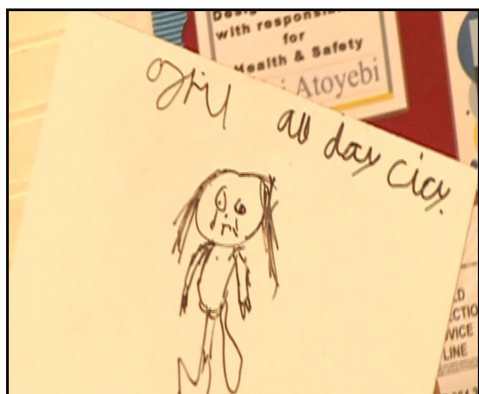
The name of Darwin provoked a few glimmers of recognition. One of the group said that Darwin had been an 'author', another went further and suggested 'scientist'. When I mentioned the theory of evolution, and the idea that human beings were related to other animals, this was greeted with a mixed reaction, ranging from interested curiosity to open-mouthed astonishment and, I sensed, not a little outrage. To move our discussion on to expression and emotions I started by getting us all to mimic the chimpanzee's expression. So, we formed our faces into comparable simian

pouts, and then made noises we thought the chimpanzee might be making. This seemed like an appropriate way to link the visual and verbal languages with the embodied ones at the core of Ali's work with the 'X-Ray Eyes' template.

I then asked each of the children in turn to say what they thought the chimpanzee might be feeling. Some suggested the chimp was happy. One boy said that he thought the chimp looked sad 'because of his eyes'. A girl who looked very shy said that she had two ideas, either the chimp was calling someone over or – and here she put both her hands over her face in embarrassment – he was 'kissing'. This provoked a lot of giggles, and once the topics of kissing, romance and marriage had been broached, the conversation became even more animated. The rest of the answers all focussed on the idea that the chimp was in love, and either kissing or having an 'imaginary kiss'.

The discussion of the amorous chimpanzee and its feelings led on to a broader discussion about whether animals and human beings could have the same sorts of feelings. When put to a vote initially, about half voted that animals could have human-like emotions and half that they could not. One member of the group started off quite confident that 'Animals can't be happy or sad'. But after a few minutes discussing monkeys, bereavement, and pets, including goldfish, the whole group had come round to the view that animals could have feelings. Even a goldfish, it was now agreed, could fall in love: 'with another goldfish'.

One of my own current projects concerns the history of weeping and especially British attitudes to tears, so I was interested to find out what this group thought about crying (as illustrated by the image of a weeping infant from Darwin's book). After some initial reticence, the whole group (myself included) soon got talking about things that had made them cry recently. The majority of instances (not in my case) involved squabbles with friends or siblings that had turned into physical fights and ended with one or both protagonists in tears. The most common occasion for these incidents seems to have been disagreements over the use of televisions, laptop computers or games consoles. Other examples involved physical pain caused by accidents in the playground and, less frequently, tears produced by emotional upset rather than physical pain. One boy said he cried when his Mum had told him there was an Easter egg for him in the cupboard but it turned out that there wasn't.



There was general agreement that parents' attitude to tears was, as one boy put it, that 'no-one should cry'.

The question of whether boys or girls cried more created even greater animation in the group. There seemed to be total consensus (among both boys and girls) that girls cried more than boys. One boy commented disdainfully: 'If you pull a girl's hair she starts to cry'. Another, to illustrate his point, did a drawing of a girl crying above which he wrote 'girl all day cry'.

My main helper for the day was a ten year-old boy (three years older than the rest of the discussion group), and he offered some more mature reflections on the subject of tears. He thought that girls cried when their feelings were hurt (he gave the example of a girl who had cried when someone called her a 'devil') but that with boys, on the other hand, the cause was generally physical pain. He added: 'you'd expect girls to cry more, but really it's the boys who cry more.' When I asked him why this was he replied: 'because the boys do a lot

of fighting'. It was also on the subject of tears that the same boy offered his impressions of the differences between India (where he had visited his grandfather) and England. He thought that in India when people were really sad they would lock themselves in a room and cry in private, whereas in England 'people just burst out with their emotions' rather than trying to hide them.

This contemporary observation about different cultures of emotional expression contrasts strikingly with the ideology that was dominant from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries in Britain. During that period, when Britain was constructing and defending a huge global empire, the predominant theory was that while the 'Anglo-Saxon' colonizers were stolid and restrained it was the colonized indigenous people, the 'savages', who were prone to burst out with their emotions. As Darwin put it in his book about expression, 'Englishmen rarely cry', whereas 'in some parts of the Continent the men shed tears much more readily and freely', and 'savages weep copiously from very slight causes'.

### **3. The Bigger Picture**

The 'Embodied Emotions' project has represented a welcome opportunity to connect the work of the QM Centre for the History of the Emotions ([www.qmul.ac.uk/emotions](http://www.qmul.ac.uk/emotions)) with the research of colleagues in other disciplines, with contemporary policy debates, and with the wider community. The project has been intellectually fruitful for me, allowing me to connect my historical research with educational theory, the sciences of emotion and expression, and the theory and practice of drama and performance. Taking part in Ali's workshops and watching Clare's performances has opened my eyes to new ways of seeing the emotions and their history.

So, do my experiences during the 'Embodied Emotions' project suggest that emotional education, whether under the banner of 'SEAL' or of whatever might succeed it in the realms of educational policy, is something that should be pursued, and if so how? My provisional view is that it should be pursued, but not necessarily for the reasons or through the educational programmes and academic disciplines that are currently dominant, in the UK at least. In short, I think that the long-standing idea that schools should be in the business of educating children's emotions as well as their intellects, their hearts as well as their minds, is generally sound (although based on a series of unhelpful dichotomies). But I am suspicious of the reliance on scientific psychology and social science, to the exclusion of humanistic and artistic disciplines, that seems to bedevil this aspect of schools policy. So, I will conclude with a few thoughts, first in defence of emotional education, and secondly in support of a more philosophical, artistic, and humanistic approach.

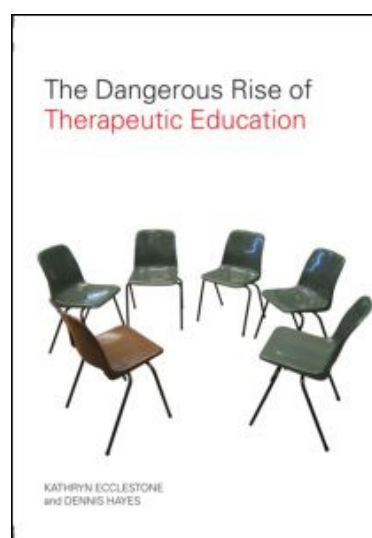
#### *Therapeutic education?*

Those who deny that emotional education is a proper goal for schools tend to endorse one or more of the following views: first, that thought and emotion can be separated and trained independently of each other; secondly, that feelings, unlike intellectual ideas, are provided by nature and will merely develop unaided; thirdly that emotions fall into broadly the same category as morality and religion and should therefore be taught by families or religious groups rather than by state schools, whose proper business is purely intellectual. There is a complex and interesting historical story to be told about the emergence of all three of these views during the last two hundred years, and that story will be the subject of one or more

of my future publications. But whatever we may think now of the idea that schools should educate children emotionally as well as intellectually, it is certainly not a new one. The infant school movement of the early nineteenth century was founded on the ambition to provide 'moral culture' for the youngest children, cultivating 'the kindly affections' in a way that would 'awaken them to a life of love and intelligence'. And emotional education has had intelligent and prominent advocates throughout the intervening two centuries.

Leaving that longer history of education policy to one side, I will confine my thoughts on these bigger issues here to some remarks inspired by a hugely stimulating recent book entitled *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education*, which I read right at the start of this project. We were fortunate to have the book's co-author, the educationalist Professor Kathryn Ecclestone, deliver a talk at one of our 'Embodied Emotions' seminars in 2010, during which she explained the basis of the book, which she co-wrote with Dennis Hayes.

The essence of the argument is that education at all levels in the UK, from primary schools to universities, and beyond into the workplace, has become perniciously dominated by a 'therapeutic' ethos. By this the authors mean that we are taught to think of ourselves as mentally fragile, psychologically damaged, emotionally unstable creatures who will need regular medical and psychological interventions in order to function successfully in the world. The rise of the SEAL agenda in primary and secondary schools is seen as a symptom of this larger trend. Ecclestone and Hayes blame this therapeutic educational trend for the creation of a generation of needy and inward-looking young people, taught to think more about their own feelings than about academic attainment, and to operate passively rather than actively – as patients rather than agents. They see 'SEAL' as an attack on reason, and the closing sentence of the book encapsulates their own educational credo, which is based on their belief in the superiority of thought over feeling: 'What makes humanity is the intellectual and an education based on *cogito ergo sum* not *sentio ergo sum*.'



I have sympathy with much of what Ecclestone and Hayes have to say, and share their sense that there are all sorts of unexplored assumptions behind SEAL and related educational endeavours. I therefore agree with them that it is of huge importance to uncover and examine the models of human nature at play. I also agree that any initiatives that spread an assumption of universal psychopathology and an attitude of dependence on psychological professionals or, even worse, on psychiatric medication, is to be resisted. I also share their admiration for a, broadly speaking, Stoic philosophy of life, and their suspicion of attempts to educate the emotions that purport to be quite independent of moral values.

I part company from their analysis, though, in two ways. First of all, I do not think that emotional education *per se* is the right target. It is possible to teach children to think and talk about feelings in ways which do not promote the 'therapeutic' attitude that Ecclestone and Hayes rightly object to. There are spaces in the curriculum, for instance during 'Circle Time', 'P4C' (Philosophy for Children), or indeed the kind of workshops and activities that Ali, Clare, Bhavesh and I have been developing, within which emotions and feelings can be directly or indirectly dealt with in beneficial ways. These need not be based on a therapeutic ethos but can encourage children instead to be reflective, articulate and resilient.

The potential educational benefits of these activities are manifold, and not restricted to an inward-looking reflection on personal feelings. Even in my brief experience at Osmani School, I had the opportunity to see children exercising and extending their vocabularies (including teaching each other how to spell words such as 'flabbergasted' and 'quizzical'); exercising their imaginations; discussing the theory of evolution; thinking about history and science; and exploring gender and national stereotypes. So, exercises in emotional literacy can help develop other kinds of literacy too, including straightforward English literacy, as well as political, historical, artistic, and scientific literacy.

These exercises undoubtedly have a further, pastoral side, having the potential to let children discuss conflicts or concerns in the realms of friendship and family in a secure environment, possibly alerting their teachers to troubles that might otherwise remain unarticulated. This is by no means to assume that all children always have emotional problems, let alone mental illnesses, but it is to assume that it is sometimes helpful for children to be able to talk about their feelings (whether 'ecstatic' and 'wonderful' or 'exhausted' and 'overwhelmed') with their teachers and peers in a relatively focussed, semi-structured way. And there is little doubt that children who have learned to articulate and reflect on their feelings are likely to perform better academically than those who have not.

So, one argument for emotional education is that it facilitates academic learning, but we can go further than that, and this is where I come to my second disagreement with Ecclestone and Hayes, namely my rejection of their assumption of a dichotomy between intellect and emotion. More emotional education does not amount to less intellectual education.

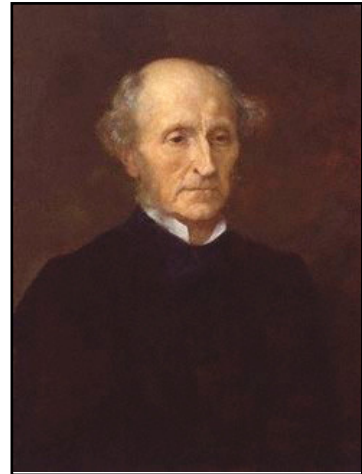
### *Philosophies of emotion*

Within the philosophy of emotion, which has been an established sub-discipline in its own right for some decades now, there are two schools of thought: the physiological and the cognitive. The physiological philosophers look to neuroscience to answer the question of what emotions really are, while the cognitivists find the essence of emotions instead in appraisals and judgements about the world – in other words, in thoughts and beliefs. On this model, experiencing fear of a snake, for instance, is equivalent to assenting to the beliefs that a snake is present and is endangering me. To feel happy is to believe my desires have been fulfilled. Aristotle and the Stoics taught that the passions were forms of judgement (often, but not always, false judgements). Admirers of Stoic resilience might have something to gain by thinking of emotions in neo-Stoic vein too, as forms of judgement. This point of view has been argued for by influential philosophers including Robert Solomon and Martha Nussbaum. And if emotions are themselves, in Nussbaum's phrase, 'upheavals of thought', rather than upheavals of mere feeling, then training the intellect and training the emotions cannot be separated. Thinking and feeling are two aspects of the same thing, namely the activity of representing and responding to the world.





One of my favourite philosophical documents arguing for the importance of emotional education is John Stuart Mill's autobiography. The young Mill's education was nothing if not academically rigorous. His father James, an ardent utilitarian political philosopher, had John Stuart learning ancient Greek at three; reading Plato's dialogues in Greek at seven; and Roman histories in Latin at eight. The young Mill had written a book-length study of the history of government in ancient Rome before he was twelve. In later years Mill blamed this intensive and purely intellectual training for the mental breakdown he suffered as a young man, and thereafter he advocated a quite different educational philosophy from his father's. 'The cultivation of the feelings', Mill recalled, 'became one of the cardinal points in my ethical and philosophical creed'. Mill believed that the 'habitual exercise of the feelings' was a necessary prerequisite for the 'general culture of the understanding'. In short, Mill denied that intellect and emotion could be separated, and advocated the joint training of both. He used the example of a beautiful sunset to make his point: 'The intensest feeling of the beauty of a cloud lighted by the setting sun, is no hindrance to my knowing that the cloud is vapour of water.'



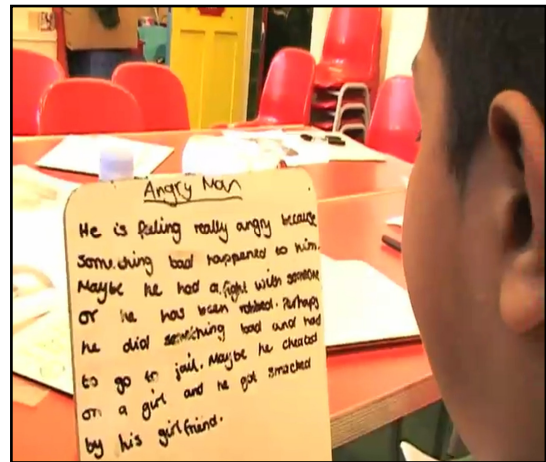
While Mill was the spokesman for a cultured but austere kind of Victorian liberalism, another great philosopher of emotion, G. E. Moore, spoke for the more decadent values of the Bloomsbury Group of artists and writers who held sway in cultural circles in the early twentieth century. In his *Principia Ethica* of 1903 Moore defended an ethos which would come to define a twentieth-century hedonism in which the main end of life was to achieve emotional intensity. Moore thought it self-evident that experiences of 'personal affection and the appreciation of what is beautiful in Art or Nature' constituted 'all the greatest, and by far the greatest, goods we can imagine'. Whether or not Moore was right is a good philosophical question about the place of feelings in the good life, which educationalists and schoolchildren alike might benefit from debating.

### The sciences and arts of expression

Philosophy is just one of several humanistic disciplines which, it seems to me, have been under-used in the development of programmes promoting the 'social and emotional' aspects of modern learning. In one sense, any successful lesson in philosophy, history, literature, drama, art or music will result in improved 'emotional literacy'. And if schools continue to be either encouraged or required to deliver a curriculum with elements explicitly devoted to emotional learning and the development of 'emotional skills', then it is worth remembering that such outcomes are already intrinsic to all the arts and humanities.

The reason that the emotions continue to prove such fertile territory for interdisciplinary research and practice, across the sciences, arts and humanities, is that they are palpably both of the body and of the mind. You cannot have an emotion without a brain. But equally you cannot have an emotion without a mind. And our mental lives exist to us in the form of narratives. While scientists can tell us about our neurones, it is down to the arts and humanities to tell us about our narratives, and to provide the languages with which to articulate and analyse them.

The responses of the children at Osmani School, both to Ali's 'X-Ray Eyes' workshops and to the 'What are they feeling?' exercise, confirm that, whatever we think we are talking about when we refer to unseen feelings and emotions, they are entities which are known to us linguistically – in the broadest sense. Feelings are not only understood and articulated but are created and constituted by languages, bodily, visual, and verbal. That can take the form of relating a bodily stance or facial expression to a particular word such as 'shocked', 'devastated', or 'quizzical', or it can involve constructing a whole narrative, as Johann Lavater did for his 'horrible face', and as several of the children at Osmani School did when given the opportunity. Several responses to another of Lavater's faces, one which he labelled as belonging to an 'angry, wicked man', inspired the children to produce mini-narratives: 'Maybe had a fight with someone or has been robbed'; 'Perhaps he did something bad and had to go to jail'; 'Maybe he cheated on a girl and he got smacked by his girlfriend'. A more elaborate scenario was that this man was one of five brothers, whose mother favoured the other four brothers, and he was as a result 'feeling grumpy and envious'.



**N** NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

AFTER DARWIN  
**contemporary expressions**

Gautier Deblonde, Jeremy Deller and Matthew Killip in collaboration with Richard Wiseman, Tina Gonsalves, Mark Haddon, Ruth Padel, Diana Thater, Bill Viola

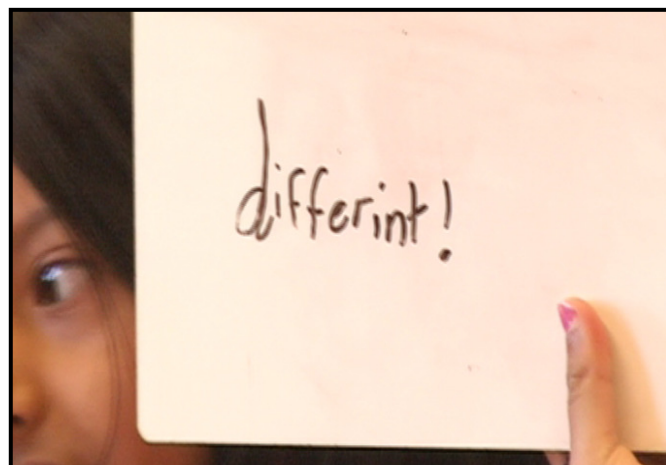
There is no correct answer to what feeling or emotion a particular face is expressing. The emotional meanings of faces and bodies are produced only by placing them in context, and the most relevant contexts often take the form of particular, personal narratives. This aspect of expression was brilliantly brought out in an exhibition at the Natural History Museum curated by Bergit Arends in 2009. The exhibition, entitled *After Darwin: Contemporary Expressions*, revisited Darwin's famous book on *The Expression of the Emotions* through specially commissioned responses by contemporary writers and artists. These included a piece of writing called '24 Emotions' by the novelist Mark Haddon, comprised of 24 powerful short narratives (only a few sentences each), inspired by some of the illustrations in Darwin's book. So, for instance, the 'disappointed and sulky' chimpanzee is juxtaposed with a story about a boy who stops talking for three weeks in an attempt to get his family's attention. The image of 'terror' based on Duchenne's photograph is paired with a description of a terrified boy hurtling dangerously downhill on a go-cart to impress his older brother. Haddon's piece is followed, in the book that accompanied the exhibition, by an appreciative short response by the eminent neuroscientist of emotion Antonio Damasio, which

emphasises the multifaceted nature of emotions as forms of action and thought as well as feeling. I hope to have the opportunity in future work in schools to try some exercises emulating Haddon's '24 Emotions', involving children writing short narratives inspired by historical images. There will hopefully also be ways to combine this with the 'X-Ray Eyes' template.

The *After Darwin* exhibition, and accompanying book, seemed to me exemplary in the way that they brought scientific and artistic perspectives on emotion and expression into conversation with each other. There are undoubtedly tensions between scientific and humanistic approaches to emotion, and it is good to try to use that tension creatively. What the arts and humanities have to offer is a more open-ended, exploratory and imaginative kind of engagement with the subject.

While some scientific approaches to the mind can seem worryingly reductive, as in the case of Paul Ekman's attempt to discover a universal set of 'basic emotions' which exist independently of any particular language, culture, or philosophy, not all psychologists approach the topic that way. Many, perhaps including Ekman himself, would accept that the idea of such a truly universal emotional language is, at best, an over-simplified fiction adopted by professional psychologists in certain research contexts. In the real world, emotions are produced and constituted by categories, narratives and belief systems that exist only as cultural and linguistic particulars. While some scientists tax themselves with imagining what being a culture-free brain attached to a universal face might feel like, historians, philosophers, performers and artists can get on with making sense of what being a person feels like.

At the end of my discussion with the Year 3 group at Osmani I asked whether anyone had anything else they wanted to say before we finished the session. The shy girl who had been embarrassed about broaching the subject of kissing put her hand up. She wanted to say that sometimes people say that everyone should feel the same way about someone or something, 'but I think that we should feel, like, differently'. I didn't have time to ask her to say any more about what she had in mind, but she had written something on her board to emphasise the point.



## **Acknowledgements**

I am very grateful to all of the following for support, collegiality and ideas: the staff and students of Osmani Primary School, Tower Hamlets; Ali Campbell, Clare Whistler, Bhavesh Hindocha, Rose Sharp ('Embodied Emotions'); Evelyn Welch and Ruth Hogarth (AHRC, Beyond Text); all the speakers and performers at our 'Embodied Emotions' seminars, namely Kathryn Ecclestone, David Spendlove, Richard Schoch, Martin Welton, Colin Jones, Ginevra Castellano, Fay Bound Alberti, Tiffany Watt-Smith, Ansuman Biswas, Sudipto Chatterjee, and Clare Whistler and her colleagues whose performances transformed all our discussions; Rhodri Hayward, Elena Carrera and Jules Evans at the QMUL Centre for the History of the Emotions; the Young Foundation and Kathryn Ecclestone (University of Birmingham) for invitations to give talks about my work; Bergit Arends for arranging a tour of her *After Darwin* exhibition at the Natural History Museum; and Emily Butterworth for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this report.

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<http://www.beyondtext.ac.uk/>

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- James A. Russell, 'Is there universal recognition of emotion from facial expressions? A review of the cross-cultural studies', *Psychological Bulletin*, 115 (1994): 102-141

### 'What are they feeling?' worksheets

The first four pages, with images numbered 1-16, are designed to be reduced and photocopied in such a way as to produce a single-page double-sided worksheet.

The larger images are designed to be used on their own for various different exercises.

What are they feeling?

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What are they feeling?

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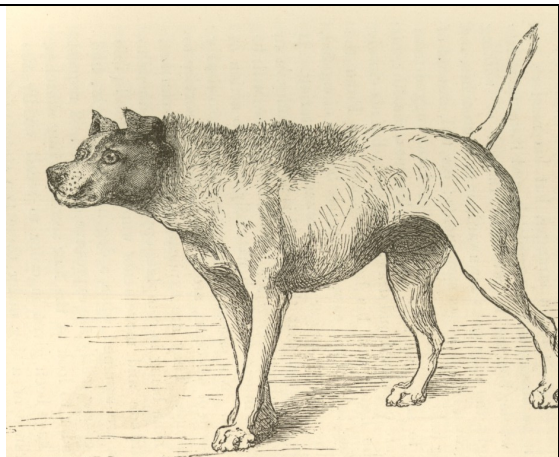
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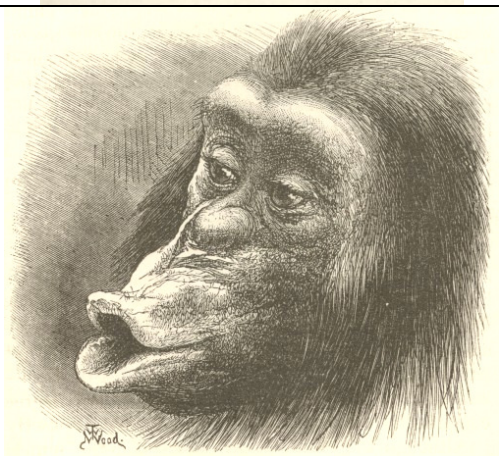
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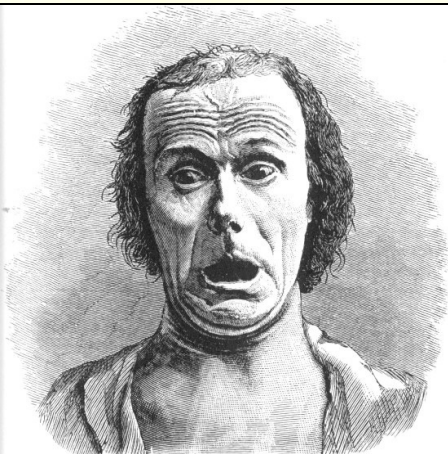
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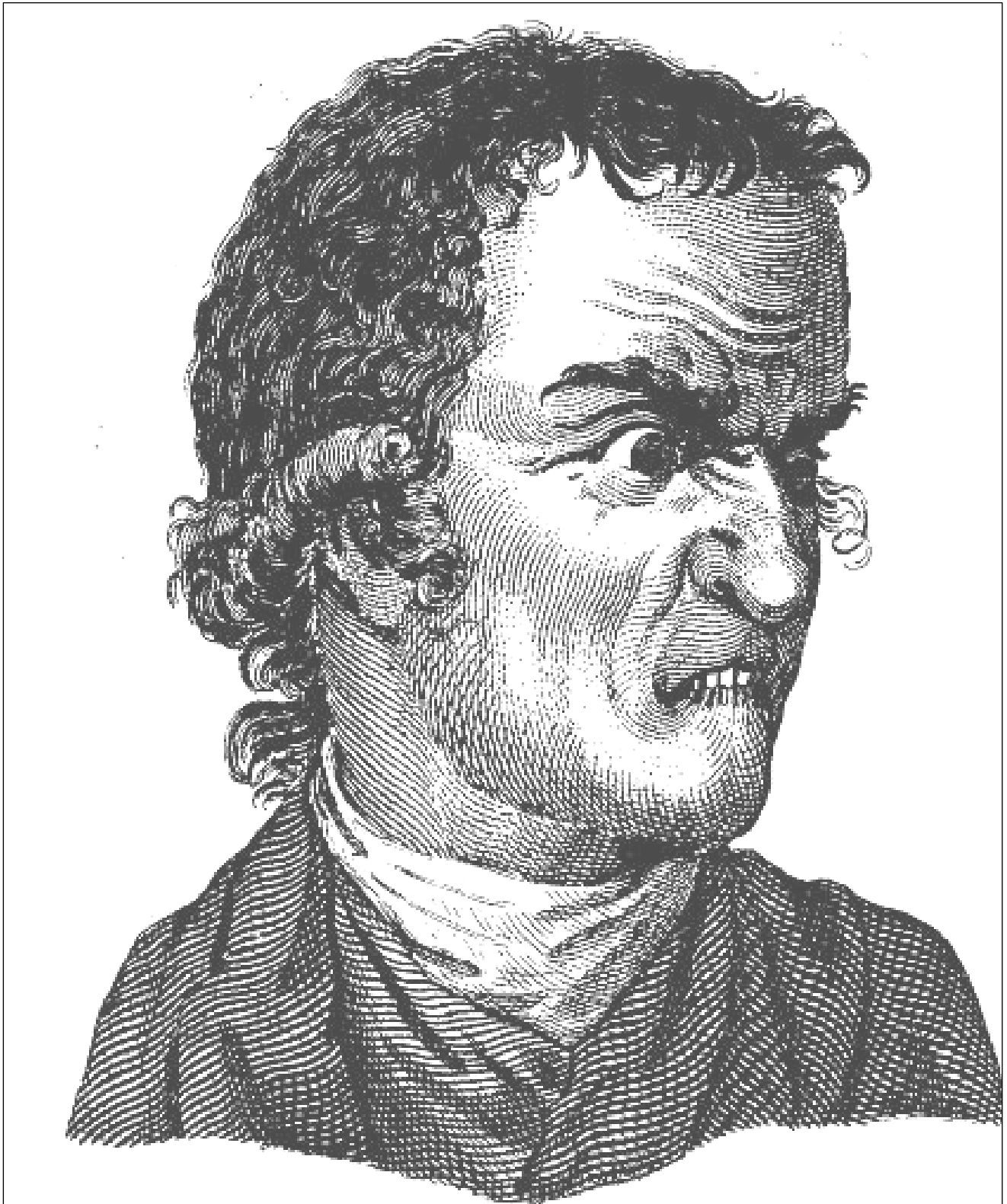
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What are they feeling?

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What are they feeling?

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What are they feeling?

14.



What are they feeling?

**15.**



## What are they feeling?

### SOURCES AND ORIGINAL DESCRIPTIONS

#### **Charles Le Brun, *Méthode pour Apprendre à Dessiner les Passions* (1698)**

1. Wonder
2. Laughter

#### **Johann Caspar Lavater, *Von der Physiognomik* (1772)**

3. Fear, terror and vexation in an ordinary and very weak woman
4. The timid astonishment of an idiot who discovered some occasional sparks of genius
5. Horrible face – wickedness, knavery, avarice, perversity
6. An angry, wicked man
7. Profound affliction and grief in a great character

#### **Charles Bell, *Essays on the Anatomy and Philosophy of Expression* (1824)**

8. Thoughtful and suspicious (from a painting by Giulio Romano)
9. Fear of immediate danger
10. Remorse (after an act of revenge)
11. Rage

#### **Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872)**

12. Slight pain, moderate hunger, or discomfort as shown in infant screaming
13. Hostile intentions
14. Laughter (joy, happiness). “The figure of the little girl, with the hat, is by Dr. Wallich, and the expression was a genuine one.”
15. Chimpanzee disappointed and sulky
16. Terror (based on photograph of Duchenne)