Views of “Within”? Science, Buddhism and the Ineffable in Representations of Meditation
By Prof Brian Rappert & Dr Catelijne Coopmans

Date : 13 Aug 2015
Time : 16:00 - 17:30
Venue : Asia Research Institute Seminar Room
Tower Block Level 10, 469A Bukit Timah Road
National University of Singapore @ BTC

CHAIRPERSON

Assoc Prof Gregory Clancey, Asia Research Institute, and Tembusu College, National University of Singapore

ABSTRACT

This presentation elaborates the challenges and possibilities associated with the neuroscientific study of Buddhist meditation (and semi-secular, Buddhist-inspired practices), through attending to a specific concern: namely, notions of what is not, cannot, and should not be recounted about meditative experience. Among figures within Buddhism and those engaged in the academic study of contemplative experience, the question of what exceeds description has been a recurring topic of commentary. In stark contrast, mainstream approaches in cognitive neuroscience pay little attention to descriptions of meditation by those who practice it, let alone to the limits performed and grappled with in self-reports. Even when first-person accounts are drawn upon, scant consideration is given to what can or should not be described. We consider the implications of various treatments of the ineffable across traditions for claims to credibility and expertise. We also speculate on what experimental research could look like if participants did engage not only first-person accounts but also what is absent from these accounts.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Brian Rappert is a Professor of Science, Technology and Public Affairs at the University of Exeter. His long term interest has been the examination of the strategic management of information; particularly in the relation to armed conflict. More recently he has been interested in the social, ethical, and political issues associated with researching and writing about secrets, as in his book Experimental Secrets (2009), How to Look Good in a War (2012), and Absence in Science, Security and Policy (2015).

Catelijne Coopmans is a Research Fellow in the Science, Technology and Society Research Cluster at the Asia Research Institute at NUS. She is also a Fellow and Director of Studies at Tembusu College at the same university. Much of her research draws on ethnography and discourse analysis to examine the arrangements in and through which (new) forms of visual evidence are used and valued. Recurrent themes include revelation and concealment, expertise, and accountability. Catelijne is a co-editor (with Janet Vertesi, Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar) of Representation in Scientific Practice Revisited, published with MIT Press in 2014.

REGISTRATION

Admission is free. We would greatly appreciate if you RSVP to Ms Tay Minghua via email: minghua.tay@nus.edu.sg