

## Wolfram Boucsein

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Wolfram Boucsein, Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of Wuppertal, who served as president of the society from 1999-2000, died in 2012 at the age of 68 after a long and courageous battle with leukemia. He was sustained by his Christian faith, his family, his many friends, and by his devotion to scholarship and research that did not falter with his failing health. This obituary is written from the personal perspective of a friend to whom his death is a great loss.

His most profound and lasting scholarly contribution was his 1992 book on *Electrodermal Activity* the 2012 revision of which he sent to the publisher shortly before his death. He was the foremost authority on what used to be called the GSR, but is now more correctly referred to (at least partly due to his book) as “electrodermal activity” (EDA) by psychophysicologists. EDA is psychophysiology’s earliest dependent variable, and has for a long time been used to investigate psychological processes. As an investigative tool, EDA, not being under conscious control, is an ideal objective index of such psychological processes as human classical conditioning, emotions, true political preferences, and psychological factors in ergonomics.

The 1992 edition of Wolf’s book also marked the first authoritative source on EDA (for an early review see [http://www.psych.utoronto.ca/users/furedy/Papers/pi/Boucsein\\_REV93.doc](http://www.psych.utoronto.ca/users/furedy/Papers/pi/Boucsein_REV93.doc) ). The book was most welcome for experimental psychologists, who had been using EDA since the 1930s. Now that, twenty years after, the 2012 revision is out, Wolf’s book remains the sole authoritative source on EDA, and I completely agree with the praise heaped on the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition by Don Fowles. (His to-be-published foreword is available in <http://www2.uni-wuppertal.de/FB3/psychologie/physio/eda.htm> ). I predict that Wolf’s scholarly contribution will long remain the only source for those who wish to use EDA in their research.

Wolf’s chairmanship in 2010 of a committee of the Society for Psychological Research (SPR) that was tasked to provide an updated methodological assessment of EDA was another significant contribution that he made in spite of his leukemia, which he was already battling by then. This report, which is due for publication in 2012 in SPR’s official journal *Psychophysiology* (a journal that has enjoyed a very high impact factor for the last decade or so), owes a great deal to Wolf’s unrivalled expertise. His appointment to chair the committee in 2010 was wise and entirely appropriate decision by SPR.

Wolf, however, was not only a scholar, but also an active experimental psychophysicologist with a research interest in both pure and applied areas. His engagement in application is well known, as he was the founding president of PIE

(Psychophysiology in Ergonomics). Shortly after his death, the current president of PIE, Wolfgang Kallus, issued an emailed obituary<sup>1</sup> which provides an excellent summary of Wolf's contributions to this applied area.

I am more familiar with his work in the "pure" area of experimental psychophysiology, and in relation to the work of members of the Pavlovian Society. To me Wolf exemplified the Society's motto Pavlovian motto of "Observation and Observation" in the work of his Wuppertal laboratory, which continued to produce findings that were not merely tailored to fit with the latest Zeitgeist or "paradigm", but will remain relevant long after those paradigms have passed away.

Aside from these technical, professional issues, Wolf had a very well developed sense of ethical propriety. When, at the age of 50, he took a 6-months sabbatical at the University of Toronto, he had decided to take up flying, which turned out to be his favorite hobby until the end of his life. On arrival in Toronto, he (seriously) asked me whether I thought it was OK for him to take flying lessons during his sabbatical, given that he could not justify the psychophysiological, academic relevance of this activity. As I knew many academics who pursued *only* their hobbies during their sabbaticals, I was surprised by Wolf's question, but replied immediately that I thought that this was a fine idea, and also said that I would put him in contact with Ian Spence, in my department, an enthusiastic and expert glider. It was only later that I told Wolf that Ian's initial comment was that "The last time we taught a German to fly, we ended up with the Luftwaffe". At the time, Ian was very helpful, and Wolf became an expert amateur pilot following his sabbatical flying lessons in Toronto and even investigated aspects of flight in later research. He loved adventure and was propelled by curiosity both in his scholarly and personal life.

So there is much to admire in the life and legacy of Wolf Boucsein, who gave me and many others the gift of sincere and loyal friendship, and who gave the world the benefits of his scholarship and practical applications.

#### Footnote

1. The text of this email message that I received as a member of PIE is reproduced below:

**Sent:** Wednesday, January 25, 2012 7:23 PM

**Subject:** New Year Bad News

Prof. Dr. Wolfram Boucsein died shortly after the beginning of the year on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January, the day after his 68<sup>th</sup> birthday. Wolf was leader among the founders of PIE in 1993 and he served as the first president of PIE after PIE had a formal constitution in 1996. He was more or less permanently on the board of PIE officers.

Wolfram Boucsein can be viewed as the most influential German classical psychophysiological of his generation, who steadily worked on the improvement of psychophysiological concepts and paradigms mainly on electrodermal activity (EDA) with a special focus in ergonomics and related fields of application. Just some weeks ago he

managed to finish the new edition of “the book” his monumental work on *Electrodermal Activity*. It is the standard reference for EDA researchers in the world, it defines the standards in electrodermal activity research and gives an up to date view on the background and up to date research. His 4-arousal-model provides the current standard for selection and interpretation of electrodermal parameters in the concert of psychophysiological parameters

Wolfram Boucsein established a high level psychophysiological laboratory and an effective psychophysiological working group at the University of Wuppertal, which served as the home-base for his active international scientific work, PIE being one of the platforms for his international cooperation. Wolfram Boucsein spent long phases of his scientific life abroad, visiting colleagues in different countries and continents. Wolf published far more than 125 articles in scientific journals and books, ranging from his early work on personality traits and questionnaires, his contributions to pharmacopsychology to his psychophysiological work with focus on electrodermal activity.

Wolfram Boucsein had an always open ear to new and innovative ideas from his students and from his staff, and helped to test ideas in experiments and paradigms with his outstanding skills in bridging ideas, concepts and experimental set ups. This skill also allowed to bridge theory and applied research. The *objective emotional assessment of products* is one of the recent prominent examples of his applied work, which was one of the basic motives to initiate the company PSYRECON GmbH, which provides scientific psychophysiological services to leading companies. Other still relevant topics of his work concern *system response times* during computer work, and *adaptive automation*. In addition he fostered research in gerontopsychology, and served as head of the institute for social gerontology and gerontomedicine, which allowed him to conduct research together with his wife Liselotte.

Wolf became an enthusiastic VFR pilot and again he managed to bridge his hobby and psychophysiological studies in the flight simulator and even in the cockpit.

We will miss his methodological thoroughness, his constructive critical remarks and discussions, his support as mentor and organiser, and some of us will miss his “other side”: his warm and faith-based friendship.

PIE should become more vivid in remembering Wolf. A special issue of a journal with new concepts and paradigms in EDA research might be one option, another one might be a kind of symposium. Please give me your opinion.

Kind regards from Graz  
Wolfgang Kallus