

## Mixed feelings

The Phenomenology of Mixed Affect in Philosophy, Literature, and Historiography

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### Abstracts

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#### *Introduction*

The term ‘affective valence’ typically refers to the way an emotion (or an affective state) feels, i.e. the quality of the (dis)pleasure we subjectively experience: fear usually feels unpleasant, while amusement and joy feel good. Yet, in some cases affective experience feels ‘bittersweet’, i.e. good and bad at the same time, as when we enjoy being scared when riding the roller coaster or being sad when reading a heart rending novel. In these situations, mixed affect is experienced as a blended state in which positive and negative aspects of the experience cannot be pried apart from one another in any meaningful way. But mixed affect can also arise from conflicting emotions (e.g. when we experience the desire to pursue something that we also wish to keep away from), from ambivalence (e.g. when we are of two minds about something), and more. Existing models of valence have a hard time accommodating mixed affective experiences satisfactorily. In this talk we will offer an overview of the debate over the structure (unipolar or bipolar) and nature (intrinsic or construed) of affective valence, focusing on its relevance in cases of mixed affect.

**Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad (Lancaster)**

#### *Explaining (away?) the apparent contradiction of conflicting emotions: A view from Sanskrit aesthetic phenomenology*

The formal commitment of ancient Sanskrit theory of dramaturgy was to the unmixability of the dominant aesthetic essence (*rasa*) of a play as conveyed by the emotions (*bhāvas*) depicted. This led subsequent theorists of drama and literature to reconcile the undoubted complexity of artistic productions with any theory of *rasa*. From c 10th c CE, a new consideration arose that located this *rasa*, neither in dramatic characters nor literary content but in the receptive experience of the audience/readers, based implicitly on their own life of emotions. In *The Ten Dramatic Forms* by Dhanamjaya and *Observations* on it by Dhanika, the issue of how conflicting emotions can be conveyed and understood aesthetically is directly tackled. Drawing on the complex typology of emotions they inherit through the tradition, Dhanamjaya and Dhanika seek to demonstrate that what appear in a scenario as conflicting emotions (romantic attraction and heroic resolve, or attraction and spiritual calmness; or attraction and revulsion) do not contradict each other but can be explained through various analytic relationships between states and types of emotions. I present these moves and suggest that they provide us with some interesting ideas for a philosophical anthropology of conflicting emotions.

**Curie Virág (Edinburgh)**

#### *Being of two minds: the landscape of longing in 11th century China.*

One of the intriguing features that unite a number of eleventh century literary writings in China is a concern with shifting perspectives. This often takes the form of a narrative

progression from a first personal account of one's emotional experiences to a more transcendent vision that considers one's own experiences from a higher vantage point. Although the idea of shifting, "wandering" perspectives, deriving from early Daoist conceptions of enhanced cognition, had long been invoked in a variety of literati texts, during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century, it came to be applied in a more sustained way to the issue of how one responds emotionally to things, giving rise to an aesthetic of ambivalence or of being of two minds. My paper examines how this doubleness of perspective plays out in the writings of the painter and painting theorist, Guo Xi 郭熙 (c. 1020-1090) and the poet and statesman, Su Shi 苏轼 (1037-1101). It will show that, while both writers sought to balance a basic longing for connectedness with the attainment of a higher vantage point, their ways of conceptualizing the two perspectives differed in significant ways, and provide us with alternative models for envisioning how different affective states can come together in a single subjectivity.

### **Mieke Bal, Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis**

#### ***Literary ambivalence, connecting past and present in moving mutuality through characters who enact, embody, and figure it***

Literature is almost always ambivalent. This is why we keep reading it, and rather than simply enjoying the famous masterpieces, they grip us, moving us, as if squeezing us between the arms of pliers. My reflections will focus on three world-famous literary figures: Madame Bovary, Cassandra, and Don Quijote. All three have been the central subjects in films through which I have attempted to make the so-called "cultural heritage", those age-old masterpieces, vital for socio-cultural issues of relevance for today. Emma, the central figure of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, has suffered from that most mixed of issues: "emotional capitalism", a syndrome that has been undermining passionate relationships for at least three centuries. Cassandra, in the version re-written by Christa Wolf in the 1980s, could not keep up her love for Aeneas when he turned into a would-be hero, subjecting himself to the political powers; she dumps him. And Don Quijote, fond of and dependent on Sancho Panza as he is throughout his travels, gets trapped by his class-bound arrogance. These three figures become *figurations* of problematic social issues, embodying these in ways only literature can do. In each case, literary concepts participate: focalisation as a political tool turns Flaubert's apocryphal statement "Madame Bovary that's me" into a plural that entangles the reader/viewer: Madame Bovary that's us. The intense "first-personhood" of an ancient Greek heroine incapable of, as she says it, "loving a hero", end up in solitude. And the Knight Errant who wants to do good for the world ends up humiliating his loyal squire because of a lack of education. These three mixed case studies will foreground the ambivalence that emerges when concepts from literary theory and figural presentations join forces.

### **Marco Caracciolo (Ghent)**

#### ***Mixed Affect and the Difficulty of Reality in Video Game Experiences***

According to Cora Diamond, literature is well suited to probing what she calls the "difficulty of reality," by which she means "experiences in which we take something in reality to be resistant to our thinking it, or possibly to be painful in its inexplicability, difficult in that way, or perhaps awesome and astonishing in its inexplicability." In this paper, I will develop Diamond's concept in order to both specify its phenomenology and adapt it to a different artistic practice. I will argue that the difficulty of reality stems from an affective dissonance that we perceive as ethically significant--for instance, the dissonance between the values

implicated in our actions and the consequences brought about by those actions. Further, I will foreground video games as a narrative medium that can evoke the difficulty of reality in particularly salient ways. In many games, players advance the story by making decisions, but sometimes these decisions can backfire or have unexpected or tragic consequences. This implicates players in moral dilemmas that bring out Diamond's experience of the difficulty of reality. I will illustrate this discussion by drawing on a variety of examples from contemporary games, including both independent games such as Lucas Pope's *Paper, Please* and more mainstream productions such as *Elden Ring*.

### **Ernst van Alphen (Leiden)**

#### ***Identifying with Evil: Live and Die as Eva Braun***

As Kaja Silverman has argued (1996), identification takes one of two forms. One involves taking the other into the self on the basis of (projected) likeness, so that the other becomes or becomes like the self. Features that are similar are enhanced in the process; features that remain irreducibly other are cast aside or ignored. Silverman calls this idiopathic identification. The other form is heteropathic. Here, the self doing the identification takes the risk of – temporarily and partially – becoming (like) the other. This is both exciting and risky, enriching and dangerous, and on any account affectively powerful.

In the case of Israeli artist Roe Roosen's installation and book *Live and Die as Eva Braun* (1995), however, one is impelled to identify with someone one does not want to be: Hitler's mistress. It is a clear case of heteropathic identification. In my presentation I will argue that the affects resulting from heteropathic identification are productive, healing as well as responsible from a political as well as an educational point of view, even – or better, especially – when it involves identification with persons one does not want to be.

### **Eric Cullhed, Uppsala University and Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study**

#### ***Kissing the joy as it flies: the mixed valence of so-called lyrical emotions***

'We are like the leaves that many-flowered springtime brings forth' said the Greek elegiac poet Mimnermus; however, the line could have originated in almost any poetic tradition across the globe. The fleetingness of life and evanescence of things is a widespread subject of poetic meditation, so much so that the motif has been suggested to constitute the formal object of a ubiquitous specific emotion type termed 'lyrical emotions'. Salient manifestations of universal transitoriness typically engender an affective experience characterized by mixed valence and a sensation of profundity or momentousness (S.A. Howard, 'Lyrical Emotions and Sentimentality', *Philosophical Quarterly* 62, 2012, 546–68). Drawing on evocations, representations and theorizations of this phenomenon in Western literature and philosophy, this paper contributes the development of a systematic account of lyrical emotions by focusing on three related aspects: (1) the evaluative profile and unsettled unity of the phenomenon, as well as its relationship to being moved, poignancy and awe as defined in recent philosophy and positive psychology; (2) the basis for its mixed valence (in relation to the taxonomy suggested by the organisers) and profound quality; (3) and the 'over-instantiation' problem (all things are transitory and therefore fitting objects of lyrical emotions, and yet the response often appears silly and sentimental).

### **Mario Baumann (Dresden)**

#### ***Bittersweet History: Cicero on Mixed Affect in Experiencing Literature***

My presentation focuses on one of Cicero's letters, *Ad familiares* 5.12, which Cicero wrote to L. Lucceius in 56/55 BC to ask him for a historiographical treatment of Cicero's consulate.

For any discussion of mixed affect in experiencing literature, Cicero's letter is an excellent case in point. In fact, *Ad familiares* 5.12 pertains to two main categories of the conceptual framework that underpins this conference:

- (1) Cicero develops what could be called a piece of reader-response criticism relating to historiography. He highlights the emotional experience afforded by reading history, and this experience appears as *intrinsically blended* (cf. §5: "in the doubtful and various fortunes of an outstanding individual we often find surprise and suspense, joy and distress, hope and fear ..."). I will show that a close reading of Cicero's letter can help us not only to understand the Greco-Roman concepts of experiencing literary representations of the past, but also to clarify and elaborate our typology of mixed affect.
- (2) In *Ad familiares* 5.12, Cicero also performs a complex speech act (persuading Luceius to write about Cicero's deeds) that involves various "meta-affective" movements: Cicero frequently comments on his *own* feelings, and again a mixed picture emerges that combines strong desires (for praise and fame) with (rhetorical/false?) notions of modesty and shame. This, too, invites us to reflect on our interpretation and classification of mixed affect.

**Donncha O'Rourke (University of Edinburgh)**

***Odi et amo: on some ancient readings of Catullan mixed affect***

*Odi et amo. quare id faciam, fortasse requiris. | nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior* ('I hate and I love. How can I do so, perhaps you ask? I don't know, but I feel it happening and am tormented'). Catullus 85 is surely the most famous statement of mixed affect to survive from Greco-Roman antiquity. Although the Romans conceived of love and hate as disjunctive (cf., e.g., the *sententia* of Publilius Syrius: *aut amat aut odit mulier, nil est tertium*), Catullus' epigram, and its many analogues and receptions, bear witness to the lived experience of feeling emotionally conflicted. This paper will examine a selection of these analogues and responses (in Lucretius, Ovid, Pliny the Younger, and Augustine) which take up Catullus' aporetic attempt to describe the structure and nature of his experience, and which seek to compare and contrast it with other pre-theorized (but highly debated) models for mixed (or apparently mixed) affective states, chiefly Platonic and Aristotelian *akrasia*, Stoic psychological holism, and the Epicurean 'hedonic calculus'. These responses may in turn offer some guidance in locating (or in seeing how ancient thinkers might have located) Catullus 85 between or within the mixed affective categories of 'pursuit and avoidance' and 'feeling *meta*'.

**Ursula Hess, Humboldt-University of Berlin**

***Mixed emotions in emotion communication***

Emotion communication is an integral part of most everyday interactions. While there is debate about the link between underlying emotions and expression on the sender side the use of emotion expressions in the arts, films and literature demonstrates that observers use these expressions as sources of information about others' inner states. In line with the importance of emotion expressions for interaction, the study of emotion expressions and their perception by observers has a long tradition in psychology. Yet, this line of research has focused on presenting highly prototypical "pure" expressions of so-called basic emotions without context. In psychology most research on mixed emotions has focused on individually differences (who is more likely to perceive an expression as mixed) or on the study of perceptual and brain processes. In this talk, I will describe different forms of mixed emotions

as well as their impact on emotion perception, person perception and interpersonal synchronization.

**Angela Ganter (Regensburg)**

***Back to Uncivilized Roots? Ambivalent Feelings towards Pastoralism in Roman Cults of the Late Republic and the Augustan Era***

Once a year in February, a strange rite fascinated the population of the Roman metropolis. After having made a sacrifice at the grotto where the *lupa* was said to have nurtured the founding twins of Rome, the *luperci* surrounded the Palatine and crossed the Forum Romanum. Almost naked, the priests run through the observing populace by beating female participants. Ancient and modern commentators are divided in how to evaluate these rituals. It is especially difficult to pin down emotions related to the festival. On the one hand, the Lupercalia seem to fit into the proclamation of the Golden Era that was proclaimed by Augustus. Pastoralism was highly esteemed because it was a mode of integrating the pre-civilized conditions of the Romulian founding era into the culture of metropolitan Rome and thus connecting the Principate to the very beginnings of Roman culture. On the other hand, the ritual behaviour of the *luperci* could be seen as an un-civilized mode of acting, that contradicted the expected habitus of the Roman elite. In Cicero e.g., we are confronted with opposing concepts of *humanitas* and *lascivia*, controlled and ecstatic behaviour. We are confronted with emotions like *hilaritas* and *timor*. However, they do not exclude each other, but form part of ambivalent feelings towards one and the same cult. The contribution tries to describe, and qualify, these mixed feelings by relating them to concepts of civilisation prevalent at the Late Republican and Augustan period.

**Lars Koch (Dresden)**

***Fear, Heroism, Media Anthropology: Observations on Ernst Jünger's Literature of the First World War***

My presentation examines how Ernst Jünger's war texts – from „In Stahlgewittern“/“Storm of Steel“ (1920) to „Über den Schmerz“/“On Pain“ (1934) – retrospectively transform an experience of radical disempowerment in the material battles of the Western Front into a heroic narrative of sovereign agency. In doing so, I reconstruct the textual figures and overarching ideologues of "Stoßtruppführer" as an attempt to communicate and at the same time narratively contain experiences of exuberant fear. The aim of my reflections will be to profile, in an analysis of Jünger's media anthropology of "organische Konstruktion"/“organic construction," central emotional-political aspects of a fascist style that continues to co-determine the aesthetics of the extreme right today.

**Dagmar Ellerbrock (Dresden)**

***Speeding up and slowing down: the multivalent effects of mixed feelings in historical interactions and transformation***

Emotions are the driving forces in interpersonal interaction. While historical research only recently took emotions into account it eventually concentrated on single emotions (love, shame, anxiety, coolness and others). Directing the focus to mixed feelings will take emotion- and affect-research to the next level. The paper starts with a typology of mixed feelings and will examine their effect in historical contexts of violent practices; routines of security production and settings of knowledge/deliberate ignorance. Based on these empirical examples it will discuss the effect mixed feelings had on the dynamic of situational interaction as well as historical transformation.