

## Symposium on Mixed Emotions and Aesthetics at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics, June 29th & 30th 2017

**Pieter Desmet & Steven Fokkinga**

### The role of mixed emotions in product design

Many of the consumer products we buy and use evoke mixed emotions because they represent opportunities as well as threats. These mixed emotions have a profound influence on how we relate to designed objects: They enrich usage experiences and drive us toward behavior that is either responsible or impulsive. In our lecture, we will use design examples to illustrate the role of mixed emotions in the reality of consumer products. In the first part of the lecture, we present strategies to design with and for dilemmas. In the second part, we illustrate how mixed emotions can be used to design products that evoke richer user experiences. We discuss the contribution of mixed emotions to product experience, under which conditions mixed emotion are enjoyed, and how designers make use of this knowledge to design more engaging products.

**Valentin Wagner**

### Mixed emotions and aesthetics

While always implying an interplay of some positive and negative emotional ingredients, the concept of mixed emotions in principle leaves open whether the overall or net valence is positive, negative or neutral. At the same time, in ordinary language use, harboring or expressing 'mixed emotions' or even 'very mixed emotions' tends to lean more to the negative than to the positive valence spectrum. Similarly, psychological research often understands mixed emotional states in terms of a disconcerting 'ambivalence' and hence as an inconvenient state which we better overcome by some act of resolution. In art and entertainment, however, there is no need to resolve the underlying cause of mixed emotional states, thus opening the space for experiencing them (more) positively. We (want to) conduct an experience sampling study to test this hypothesis. We expect more mixed emotions in leisure situations (especially those of art reception and entertainment) than in other everyday situations (like working, commuting, recreation), and that these mixed emotions are more positive in their overall net valence and of longer duration. Furthermore, mixed emotions in art reception function as one way of integrating negative emotions into an enjoyable experience.

## Thursday, June 29th

- 09:00 **Winfried Menninghaus**  
Welcome
- 09:15 **Jeff Larsen**  
Beyond self-reports: The face of mixed emotions?
- 10:25 **Luis Oceja & Pilar Carrera**  
Do mixed emotional experiences bridge aesthetics and ethics?
- 11:25 coffee break
- 11:45 **Raul Berrios**  
Mixed emotions, emotional complexity, and self-revelation
- 12:45 lunch break
- 14:00 **Iris Schneider**  
Mixed feelings: The case of ambivalence
- 15:10 **Eugen Wassiliwizky**  
Being-moved: A mixed emotional state
- 16:10 coffee break
- 16:30 presentation of the ArtLab (30 min)
- 18:00 pick up at the Turm hotel
- 18:30 **Winfried Menninghaus**  
Research agenda of the institute and future cooperation

## Friday, June 30th

- 09:00 **Kirill Fayn**  
Open to feeling mixed: Individual differences in experiencing mixed aesthetic states
- 10:10 **Pieter Desmet & Steven Fokkinga**  
The role of mixed emotions in rich experience design
- 11:10 coffee break
- 11:30 **Valentin Wagner**  
Mixed emotions and aesthetics
- 12:30 lunch break
- 13:30 Discussion & Farewell (15:00)

## Address

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# Mixed Emotions and Aesthetics

Symposium

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# Symposium on Mixed Emotions and Aesthetics at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics, June 29th & 30th 2017

**Jeff T. Larsen, Nicholas A. Coles, & Deanna K. Jordan**

## Beyond self-reports: The face of mixed emotions?

Some models of the structure of affect contend that people can feel happy and sad at the same time, but others contend that happiness and sadness are mutually exclusive. There is now a great deal of evidence that bittersweet aesthetic stimuli and other events can elicit mixed emotions. All of this evidence has come from self-reports of emotion (e.g., answers to questions such as, “How do you feel right now?”), which raises several concerns. To address these concerns, we have asked coders to view facial expressions collected from research participants who had watched neutral, pleasant, unpleasant, and bittersweet film scenes. Coders’ task was to indicate whether the participants were expressing positive emotions, negative emotions, or both at the same time. Results indicate that coders were more likely to detect mixed emotions during bittersweet scenes than neutral and unpleasant scenes. They were not, however, more likely to detect mixed emotions during bittersweet scenes than pleasant scenes. Thus, coders’ ratings of participants’ facial expressions yield less clear-cut evidence for mixed emotions than do participants’ own self-reports.

**Luis Oceja, Pilar Carrera, Sergio Villar**

## Do mixed emotional experiences bridge aesthetics and ethics?

The research on mixed emotions may offer fruitful answers to the ancient enquiry about whether and how aesthetics influences on ethics. In this regards, we are focusing on three issues. First, to measure the emotional experience provoked by two kind of aesthetic stimuli (i.e., beautiful and sublime). Second, to assess whether such emotional experience moderates the influence of the stimuli on moral decisions. Third, to examine whether having to face with those moral decisions provoke, in turn, a mixed emotional experience. Specifically, we conducted a set of eight studies in order to (a) test the validity of a scale aimed at measuring the sublime emotional experience, (b) examine whether and why this sublime emotional experience may influence on moral decision that affect others’ welfare, and (c) analyze if the emotional experiences provoked by either observing aesthetic stimuli or facing with moral decisions can be characterized as mixed.

**Raul Berrios**

## Mixed emotions, emotional complexity, and self-revelation

Empirical research on mixed emotions has progressed faster than the examination of the potential theoretical foundations of this affective experience. In this presentation I will introduce a preliminary integration of mixed emotions with several other emotional complexity phenomena. A re-analysis of a recent study serves to evidencing different associations between mixed emotions, emodiversity, and emotional inertia. Drawing on these novel results and previous research, some elementary ideas are outlined suggesting that: (a) mixed emotions (and other related emotional complexity phenomena) may be represented by a reorganization of the characteristics observed in the emotional lexicon; (b) the likelihood of experiencing mixed emotions increases to the extent that perceived inner conflict is higher; (c) on occasions when the situation demands greater flexibility from individuals to appraise the stimuli, emotional experience becomes more versatile, including sui generis verbalisations of emotional experiences; and (d) complex emotional experiences may help people to address predicaments via meaning creation and curiosity. Implications of these ideas for the measurement of mixed emotions and the possibility to access some form of self-knowledge through the experience of complex emotions are finally explored.

**Iris K. Schneider**

## Mixed feelings: The case of ambivalence

Mixed feelings come in many forms. In this piece we focus on mixed feelings resulting from conflicting evaluations vis-à-vis a single attitude object, or attitudinal ambivalence. Research on attitudinal ambivalence work have led to specific measures that assess the presence, intensity, and resolution of ambivalence, shedding new light on the underlying dynamics and their moderators. This work has also spawned an interest in the metacognitive experiences of conflict that arises as a result of ambivalence and shown this factor to be an important driver of downstream consequences. The current work discusses these approaches.

**Eugen Wassiliwizky**

## Being-moved: A mixed emotional state

The focus of this presentation is an ancient emotional concept, going back to Latin rhetoric and being re-discovered several times in the centuries to follow – being emotionally moved. In contrast to its firm establishment in humanist aesthetic traditions and its presence in our everyday lives in form of critiques or adds discussing and promising e.g. a ‘moving performance’, little empirical investigation has been devoted to this emotional state. In a series of experiments that use different methodological approaches, including psychophysiology, electromyography, fMRI, and self-reports, as well as different stimuli (poems and film clips), this presentation will provide empirical evidence for the mixed affective nature of being moved states. Moreover, it will shed light on the underlying mechanisms in the stimuli which facilitate the arousal of these intense emotional experiences.

**Kirill Fayn & Peter Kuppens**

## Open to feeling mixed: Individual differences in experiencing mixed aesthetic states

Despite a growing amount of research on mixed emotions in aesthetic contexts, relatively little is known about individual differences in experiencing such states. In terms of personality traits, openness to experience has been found to relate to mixed emotions in daily life, a trait measure of mixed emotions, enjoyment of sad music, and mixed emotions in response to visual arts. In this talk we propose a number of cognitive and emotional processes that mediate the relationship between openness and mixed emotions. Particularly, we discuss the role of attitudes towards art, imaginative and introspective tendencies, immersion proneness, and the role of interest in understanding why the open are open to feeling mixed in aesthetic contexts.