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rational emotional

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editorial

rational emotional

People often observe that the world is an irrational place, though it is more accurate to say that it is we humans that make it so. There are many intelligent people today who seem to sincerely believe that coal is clean.

The idea of an issue of *Artlink* exploring the tension between reason and emotion in humans through the work of artists led me to seek out and invite psychologists and psychiatrists to explore the area of relationships. These professionals deal daily with people and the problems they experience when there is conflict between the rational mind, which tells us to act on what is known and commonly agreed, and the emotions which can throw events and relationships into a maelstrom of imagination.

In attempting to address aspects of the rational/emotional nexus and its reflections in art, questions arose: is there an art vehicle outside the cinema which does justice to such a complex set of meta-emotions? How does the stretched sinew between rationality and the emotions manifest in works of visual art? The research in this issue may offer some tentative answers.

In her keynote essay, psychologist Doris McIlwain talks of 'emotional labour'. This is people exerting control over their emotional responses so that they can function in everyday situations like dealing with difficult customers or your boss. She also tells us that emotions are an 'intuition pump' and without regularly exercising their full range we fail to lay down vivid recollections of our life experiences, we live 'palely'.

Artists are generally typed as the kind of people who acknowledge and exercise their emotions, without which they would not be able to reach deep into the psyche to find forms which will speak to others. It seems possible these days that emotional labour is close to what artists do. Instead of using emotions as the trigger for say expressionist paintings they unpick the layers and threads of memories and sensations and use them to represent the radical changes that humankind is working through today. Events as far removed sociologically as gender reassignment and familial honour killings can appear in the same news broadcast. We are surrounded by tribalism, urban and otherwise, the forming of new kinds of families, bands of singles, coupling and uncoupling, child-rearing and split households. Being part of diasporas of various kinds, away from our motherlands, from our progeny, from our elders, is now not the exception but the norm. We see societal groups made up entirely of the very old, as seen in some

Japanese villages. We see new attitudes to mental illness such as autism and bi-polar conditions. A massive cult of beauty and youth stares down the naked reality of the typical human body.

Clinical psychiatrist Dawn Barker and psychology researcher Eliza Muldoon agreed to think their way through bodies of strong new art made by Toni Wilkinson and Astra Howard respectively. Having approached some of the art writers in this issue with a novel commission, to think like a shrink, Hannah Mathews' confessional chat with Sanja Pahoki turned out to only need a switch from coffee shop banquette to couch. Janet Maughan's long sessions with Ann Newmarch reveal an emotional life lived in full glare. As Pat Hoffie talked to William Kentridge on the phone, he spoke of waiting for the work to find its own direction while his brain and body create the right conditions, and while he talked he paced and circled. Stephanie Radok's ambition – to address two 'cases' in the same breath, brings us a rich juxtaposition of Richard Billingham's caged animals and trapped humans with Patricia Piccinini's so vulnerable and yet monstrous human/animal bodies. Robert Cook assumes another take on Boris Eldagsen, less as his 'subject' than as his fantastical alter ego.

Want to make friends and have fun? Close yourself up in a small room most of the day and night for a year or two and create a version of yourself (possibly much younger and of the opposite sex) who moves around on a screen, chats to other similar chimeras about things of mutual interest and tries to avoid being molested by them. This is *Second Life*, patently more art than life, as related by Charity Bramwell and Daniel Mounsie. The friendships were a bonus.

The reason that women are veiled is, according to feminist Muslims, because of men's fear of losing control when they see a non-veiled female, effectively giving women in Muslim society greater sexual power than men – as claimed in Catherine Wilson's account of her meeting with courageous artist Raeda Sadeeh in the Occupied West Bank this year. In a remote Aboriginal community, as related by Henry Skerritt, as the men are taken by alcohol and disease, responsibility for painting the designs has for the first time been handed from male to female elder, a seemingly rational decision to ensure that the culture survives.

In the male-dominated world of contemporary art there is a global cluster of exciting new shows by women artists: *elles@pompidou*, the current rehang of the Pompidou Collection, sans male artists; *Global Feminisms* at Brooklyn Museum and WACK at MOCA in LA; *The Body in Women's Art Now* at Rollo in London and Cambridge. This is a heartening sign that more diverse ways of seeing and being are being embraced as a key to the cultural ecology we need right now. ☺



doris mcilwain

living palely

and the rationality of a certain
fullness of feeling

Plato's motif of rationality as a beleaguered charioteer reining in, only just, the diversely passionate horses captures the reason-emotion challenge. Research suggests how we might regulate our emotion, challenge its extremity, query its basis, minimise its expression. The Stoics may have taken rationality too far in their resolute minimisation of all feeling. Are emotions no more than disturbances in the logical landscape? What of Pascal's 'the heart has its reasons that reason is not acquainted with'? Perhaps the rationality/emotion divide is overdrawn, risking battle lines forming around pure opposites never found in real life examples. Yet the issue has bite, relevance to intimate features of our life: our friendships, our sense of safety in the world, how much we give of ourselves and give up of ourselves to our working life and the living texture of what it feels like to be us: fugitive, or having the 'warm antiquity of self'.

Kelli Connell *Getting up* 2002. from the *Double Life* series 76 2 x 101 6 cm.
digital Lambda print Courtesy PICA and Yossi Milo Gallery, New York

Leaving the ancients to experts. I suggest that rationality lies in having full acquaintance with feelings, reflectively aware of the messages they have for us, rather than living palely and ignoring or suppressing them. To be rational is to be alive to the way emotions tinge our memories and our view of life now - for they do have that power - especially if we leave them as unconscious influences. The temptation to live palely, to minimise feeling, is costly for our bodies and for intimacy.

Friendship and love are not fully rational enterprises. They become strangely symptomatic when we approach them as if they are. Simmel (1950) suggests 'modern man has too much to hide to sustain a friendship in the ancient sense'. By this he means friendship and love 'do not centre on clearly circumscribed interests, but are built upon the total person'. Yet the split between home life and work, the separate communities of friends and colleagues we would never invite to the same dinner means we often are different people across context. We live by diary, slotting in short encounters. We treat others as narcissistic supplies rather than as whole people valued as such. Describing the ascendancy of narcissism, Lasch (1979) suggested self-sufficiency is our symptom. Certainly bonds have diminished in the West. We have stopped looking for intimacy and trust. But it is our defence against failed intimacy that has made the symptom, false self-sufficiency, worse. Defensive individualism means others are courted for use-value. To me the sign that you really like someone is when you cannot quite offer a full answer when asked why. You could offer reasons, but they would not be the full story.

The perennial appeal of religion is only one example of broad emotional needs not readily met. Explanation does not

readily stand in for consolation. Adam Phillips suggests that psychoanalysis attests to the fact that there is something intolerable about being human. Unlike other animals, says Freud, we live knowing we are finite and relatively powerless in the face of nature. We witness suffering in those who have done nothing to deserve it. Science provides understanding, not consolation. The need to feel safe in the world makes for all sorts of interesting belief systems that attempt to solve the problems of finitude, powerlessness and suffering. But our cultural requirements add surplus repression to that suffering (Whitebook, 1996). 'We don't just give up personal pleasures to produce enough to stay alive and not impinge on others. Historical culture dictates require excessive competence and renunciation. In Australia we have among the longest working hours of the developed world. Men wear dark suits in a warm climate. Culture robs us of leisure and sells it back to us in adverts for material possessions we must work to obtain. It seems hardly rational, yet in the midst of it is a compelling contract. We work hard and long, deaf to the question posed by poets like Mary Oliver: 'and what will you do with this your one wild life?'

Modern variants of the ancient question of balance between reason and emotion reveal rationality is not a unitary thing. Neither is emotion. Neither are they 'natural kinds': they blend in fuzzy ways like paints merging on a canvas. Each anchoring notion offers something unique. We take reason and emotion apart to think about them even if nowhere do they exist separately. Pure feeling is hard to find outside of a Camille concert. Pure rationality is assumed by some to be achievable and desirable. Its definition often entails neglect of emotion, living palely, on the assumption that the control or exclusion of feeling is a good thing, that in this way one might

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Futoshi Miyagi LEFT: *Strangers #17* 2006, digital c-print, 16 x 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist, Daniel Reich Gallery, NY and PICA. OPPOSITE TOP: *Strangers #12* 2006, digital c-print, 16 x 20 inches. OPPOSITE BELOW: *Strangers #1* 2006, digital c-print, 16 x 20 inches. Images courtesy of the artist and Daniel Reich Gallery, NY and PICA.

in Australia we have among the longest working hours of the developed world. Men wear dark suits in a warm climate

achieve more unbiased conclusions. There are costs to this, as I will show. Moreover, the hot, less thoughtful bits of emotion can contribute intuitive information that we couldn't get in any other way, as when we experience an inexplicable discomfort at what someone has just said and realise we are being lied to. Reason in turn can take us to places mentally we have never experienced, make us compassionate to those who have suffered things we never will.

The nature of emotion – a snapshot

Different theorists put different parts of these composite beasts of emotion and reason under magnification, and I am no exception. I like emotions. In my discipline, psychology, the debate is carved up between emotion and cognition. Does this really map the problem? Both thoughts and emotions can be irrational. We readily have irrational beliefs: confabulating, overgeneralising by believing that problems in one domain are true for all parts of our lives, catastrophising by drawing far darker conclusions than we have evidence for, deluding ourselves with sweet lies that fit few of the facts. It is harder to have irrational emotions, even though they often fail to fit what others require of us in the moment. Emotions are hard to handle, residual reminders that we are animals. They once were actions, says Darwin: fear a flight from a rival, rage his or her destruction. Emotions form in a zigzag between ancient limbic structures (innately wired for survival) and sober, inhibiting integrating zones. Biologically grounded yet culturally sculpted, we compress the range and intensity of our experience of emotions. Bewildered by them we have sophisticated ways of ignoring them, but they don't go away. If we can let them form fully, they have an *expressive* and signalling function to others and to ourselves. Less fur flies if one can sort out who is top dog by baring teeth and thumping chests. But despite their signature ways of grasping every bit of our body – muscle, breath, glands and the neurotransmitter soup surging in our brain – some of us just don't pick up the bodily broadcast about what we feel.

We each inhabit emotional space differently. That's one reason emotion theorists don't agree much. Belief systems are never dispassionately held. Theoretical animals like theories that capture their emotional (dis)fluencies. They take what is true for them to be true of emotion in general. That applies to me as well: in writing this, the intertwining of the personal/theoretical has had me as tangled as a kitten in a ball of wool. To render emotions reasonable, to control something, we need to have full acquaintance with what is there. If we bypass our feelings, they will shape us in ways unknown. They may taint what we see and remember, or spill and leak from us, like guilt chattering out of our fingertips, or a blush betraying stray desires.

Assembling the parts of emotion

Most of us are born with the full potential stock of basic affects (Tomkins, 1962, 1963). How good an affective cocktail you mix depends on the range and intensity of your stock.

Many of us leave ingredients past the use by date, or don't restock them. Why? Because it is a challenge to deal with emotions; they stir us around, and taint our view of things.

Emotional taint

The bodily broadcast is not the full story of what makes up emotional experience – how we attend to it makes a difference (Lambie & Marcel, 2002). Pretending they aren't there doesn't help. If we don't attend to emotion it can taint memory of things past and perception of things present. We can mistake fear for desire, finding a person more attractive after walking across a shaky bridge. Immersion in emotion can lead to a mood-congruent sampling of the past, where we recollect only those memories and facts that fit our current mood (Bower, 1981). When sad, we remember events that whirl and eddy around that sadness. Emotional stimuli presented so fast one couldn't report seeing them can nevertheless set the stage for things to come in ways that we don't realise at the time, and may never realise. If a person resembles someone who has been harsh to us, we will like him less, though we may not realise why. Bad news if he is interviewing for a job with your firm.

Emotions intertwine with beliefs to form schemas: knowledge structures that seem apt summaries of life so far. However, they can divorce us from reality, make us selectively rummage through our past and present. We don't notice the schemas themselves, yet see the world through them, like tinted lenses. Anxious, I see threat everywhere. If fear gets cognitive 'fame', its network of associations readily primed in my mental economy, it robs me of peace. Schemas can be self-perpetuating, at times producing features of irrationality. For instance if they remain inflexible in changing circumstances, they make us hold views that no longer fit the facts, or insulate us from evidence that reveals they never did.

Family whispers

We acquire schemas early, and often from our family. Early exchanges with parents may leave us not knowing what to do with our emotions, unable both to have them and use them wisely. An unsafe home may teach us not to rely on or draw close to others, to hide from full friendship and avoid awareness of feelings with expert flair. These people are called 'dismissively avoidantly' attached. They can calmly contemplate their partner leaving them; even indicators of physiological arousal are silent. If interviewed directly about their early life, that bodily calm is gone. Left to their own strategies, they turn emotions off at the mains. They live palely in life, suppressing emotions without knowing how else to handle them. Emotions fade. We lose that ingredient of the affective cocktail, become strangers to joy and anger: one response to emotions not fitting in. They are a chorus often off-key to the song we think we are trying to sing. When they are out of tune, many treat them like unwelcome whispers.

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ignore them, relabel them: bring them under the control of reason. In this way some stumble upon a trick of bodily control that the world has a use for

The management of feeling entails knowing what to do with inner signals excessive to contextual requirements. Culture introduces us to 'display rules', values concerning the appropriateness of emotional displays communicated from one generation to the next, rules absorbed in early infancy. We learn which are 'proper feelings' to express and which to inhibit or modulate. Cultural misunderstandings arise when suffering is politely masked and the unknowing audience sees the other as lacking 'proper feeling'.

Facework – knowing but not showing

Display rules can edit our feeling potential, though we may gain culturally acquired self-reflexive emotions like pride, shame and guilt. Display rules reveal flexibility of emotional experience and expression. Some people are expert at knowing but not showing what they feel. Some work situations require precisely that skill I call here *facework*. Skilled hospitality workers, subordinates listening to a boss intone flawed arguments – all have to engage in 'facework'. In facework, we uncouple what we feel about a situation, what our bodily responses, thought and heart are telling us, and we make our expressive output conform to a top-down command as to which emotions we should display and how genuinely. The work entails bringing expressive movements that are organically part of an emotion under control often via dissociating the component processes. Facework must be relatively automated, yet contextually sensitive and able to be changed when no longer needed.

Facework shows how seemingly automated expressive movement is brought under reflective control. The smiling waitress controls her fatigue or anger at grumpy customers. Her smiling demeanour, though rationally required of her, is a result of actions and experiences which have become habits to her. Her expressive displays have been explored and taken apart at some level, then, like a good actor, re-automated as chunks to fit changing situations and open to change if she comes to believe they are no longer working for her.

Facework is a skill in modulating expressive display and the inner impact of emotion. It can be put to quite different uses depending on the motivation of the person. Some minimise emotional displays for manipulative advantage and minimise the impact of compassionate feelings for the same reason. To conceal artfully and ruthlessly to reveal is central to a Machiavellian personality style (Christie & Geiss, 1965). Characterised by having 'the cool syndrome' of being able to keep their feelings out of the picture to maximise their chance of successful exploitation, this dark personality style has championed the skill of knowing but not showing.

Prosocial roles like hostage negotiation require such skill (as do some forms of psychotherapy). Successful negotiation entails being able to sense others' feelings, and one's own, yet keep control of reactions which may harm the process or the other if revealed too soon. 'Emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983) is top-down control of the bodily economy. It entails the art of producing on one's own surface something the workplace requires, transforming or omitting parts of

emotion. Hochschild acknowledges the increasing demand where employees are 'required to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper states of mind in others', becoming expert in 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display'. Craft definitions of 'work as producing objects' miss out on this control of affectivity which constitutes real work in service industries: it remains invisible and affects many of us, particularly women. It entails acknowledging your emotion without showing it; reflectively bracketing it and containing it rather than expressing it. It is hard emotional labour, needing recognition.

Some people stumble upon ways to control movements that are organically part of the expressive and experiential manifold of an emotion. For others emotion work requires ongoing mental effort with bodily costs. Everyone pays to a degree the price of living palely: the costs of emotional suppression include poorer memory for emotional events and a taxing of hormonal systems. It promotes alienation or lack of authenticity in life or work.

Dissociation, letting experiential and expressive processes come apart, is not a cop out – it can be a courtesy or a skill. It may be preferable to being found full of feeling in the wrong environment; left fragile and vulnerable to those who are not open to understanding the full message. Bypassing feeling when no-one wants to hear has personal and political consequences.

Dismissing emotions

Sue Campbell (1997) moves attention from the readily named feelings (for which culture has readily available linguistic categories) towards feelings that are more personal, local, or idiosyncratic. The stuff of poetry, you might say. Yet she reveals the politics of emotional expression.

In academic circles, emotions often get bad press, however tacitly. Emotions are likely to be controlled, ignored or excused – defensively disenfranchised.

After a vibrant academic meeting the other day, a revealing array of words was offered for emotions animating us. We called the session a 'good vent', a 'whinge' and our legitimate disappointments 'gripes'. Eyes were alive in finding we shared emotional orientations and concerns. These feelings melded us into an instant group, pointed to future issues. Yet we dismissed them (Campbell, 1997) with derogatory labels minimising their importance. We seemed ashamed of having them – meta-emotions. Having emotional significance dismissed is 'like being told to leave the room before a conversation starts'. 'Audience uptake', as Campbell

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calls it, helps feelings form; the inner story needs outer reception. Hostile interpretative practices can be emotional manipulation. For example, calling a person 'bitter' takes the focus off a history of past wrongs to that person and replaces it with a personality problem – theirs. No reasoned argument, just a swift label. It shifts the focus from the past actions of the dominant group onto the psychology of the person filled with feeling. There is power in refusing uptake, in insisting on which emotions can be shown when, as in 'display rules'. It can undermine the struggle for group memory, preventing personal story from becoming public record. She says the bitter are the angry disadvantaged of society, visible minorities who are not in a position to influence politicians, bring lawsuits, make threats or otherwise express anger irresistibly. Presciently she wrote in 1997, 'No-one calls someone holding a bomb bitter.'

Having feelings and reflective awareness

There are all sorts of ways of having one's feelings. Good actors are open to what is going on in their body, squeezing the juice out of the body without being impelled in ways that run counter to the requirements of the play. This ability to experience emotion fully without sacrificing discretion or decorum by being impelled into expressive action keeps in the picture the message emotions have for us. Consciously picking up on inner processes and finding words for them can change them. This moment's pause for reflection offers us opportunity to be reasonable. Reflection can bring parts of emotion together or dissociate them – depending on our life texture, our skills, what the world requires of us now, and how

open our audience is to our personal processes. Reflection can save us from repetitive immersion in feelings that solve nothing and animate scenarios that were tangled, painful and perhaps in hindsight handled badly. Reflective awareness of even the most bodily bits of emotion can save us from getting caught in a ruminative rut, where we have the same old same old emotions over and over again, like having stuck in our head an old tune we no longer wish to hear. Reflective awareness can permit us to have our feelings fully without their tainting our perceptions and memory in unbidden ways. Mindfulness practices stumbled upon this, centuries ago. Harnessing curiosity and compassion as meta-emotions so we can tolerate our own feelings long enough to know what is going on within us can also get us out of ruminative mental ruts. The positive affects of curiosity, interest and surprise seem to function well as *re-setting emotions*, like hitting the reload button on our take on life. This is part of what I am calling reflective awareness. You can fully have your feelings without them inevitably tainting your views of present and past in irrational ways.

Staying in touch with what personally matters is a challenge with so many cultural messages around. While it may seem like a good thing to live palely, to minimise emotion in the name of becoming more rational, research shows that this is linked with a lack of intimacy, impoverished memory, diluted awareness and appreciation of novelty and thus may have unexpected consequences for science, innovation and change. With nuanced expression and reception by others (and ourselves), emotions can be sources of insights we sift for inspiration. Charles Blackman said art was the courage



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LEFT: Futoshi Miyagi *Strangers #7* 2006, digital c-print, 16 x 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist, Daniel Reich Gallery, New York and PICA. OPPOSITE TOP: Kelli Connell *Brickhaus* 2002 from the *Double Life* series, 76 2 x 101 6 cm, digital Lambda print. Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, New York and PICA. OPPOSITE BELOW: Futoshi Miyagi *Strangers #6* 2006, digital c-print, 16 x 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist, Daniel Reich Gallery, New York and PICA.

to draw a line around your dream. Some artists are open to inner signals. They breathe life into subtle inner hunches, follow Ariadne's delicate thread, mooching around until they find what feels right. Culture can enhance our awareness of certain emotions, as honour cultures privilege awareness of insult; can give us a vocabulary around them, as the Japanese have for the congenial form of dependence on others (with no shame) called *amae*. It can also close us down in unseen ways.

I see two broad challenges: I want to be open to intuitive hunches, unconscious processes that if attended might form new feelings, or new cocktails of feelings. They may be able to be captured in words or forms, and be useful. That challenge is one that art has taken up - to find ways to reflect upon emotions and express that experience in whatever medium possible, even if there is not yet cultural space for it. The second (dare I say rational?) challenge is to hold my positions in life courageously and lightly, to be open to others' views, to step into the strength of the argument of the other, let it affect me, and let my views and myself be transformed throughout life. Emotions are not the enemies of reason. Rather they are part of an intuition pump that gets our first thoughts about what matters through speedily and that communicates personal significance. Handling emotions is a challenge, one that is sometimes so difficult and unseen, that we walk away from experiencing the range and intensity of feelings. We risk becoming passionless people, living palely by muting feelings we do not know what to do with. There are costs to this for our body, for how open we are to what is possible now and how vividly we recollect our past. There are those who speak the language of emotion so well that they pave the way for us, introducing us to freshly felt nuances. Some of these complex meta-emotions, with one emotion nested inside another, can be so subtle that poets, painters or musicians more readily capture them. I lumber along happily after them. ☺

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Julie Traitsis *Kissing Project* (stills)
2009, single channel video loop.
Courtesy the artist and PICA