

## THE AFFECTIVE STATE READING GROUP, SUMMER 2013

*“When the fluid part of the human body is determined by an external body to impinge often on another soft part, it changes the surface of the latter, and, as it were, leaves the impression thereupon of the external body which impels it [...] the ‘impinge[ment]’ of affect not only transmits energetic and informational sensations but is materially transfiguring, a process of mutual material incorporealization and remediation between bodies” (Spinoza, Ethics, ii.Post v.97)*

Join us this summer (August-September) for project three, the Affective State, of About a Bicycle’s reading and discussion series. We’ve traced the postmodern and the function of late-capitalism, but have yet to delve specifically into relational gestures and affectation. The intensity of affective categories trickled into the fibres of our discussion, as it is the central composite of how the social subject translates knowledge and information through images. Affect is often thought to be the synonym of emotion, the catalyst to feeling, the precursor to spending, and the tone that offsets movements. Nina Power mentions a “kind of war on affect” when critiquing Tiqqun’s recently translated text, Preliminary Materials for a Theory of a Young Girl, in which character and personality are prepackaged by consumer habits and behavioural conditioning, reduced to a state of constant fatigue and inescapable depression. “... [U]nhappiness appears to be all there is,” she continues. From the ecstasy of reaganomics (an ecstasy that is always already severe pain — see Hedy Lamarr on Ecstasy) to the agony of global neoliberalism, economically determined affect infects all subjects of dominant ideology. There is an overwhelming contempt for the way in which the rational subject (internalized as male) succumbs to affect, a contempt that is also intertwined with the overall feminization of the subject, in production (precarious labour) and in consumption, where it is characterized as weakness.

But still, what is affect? We see the rhetoric of communication amplified in states of crisis (i.e., the Calgary flood, the financial crisis) where downward turns in the economy ask us to spend on consumption in order to maintain the communities spawned by late-capitalism

and advance slow-moving recovery. We've read about psychic attacks on the body in the form of invisible reproductive labour, a concept arguably stretched too thin by the fanfare of Autonomous Marxists. Silvia Federici hits them where it hurts:

*But the concept of "affective labor" strips the feminist analysis of housework of all its demystifying power. In fact, it brings reproductive work back into the world of mystification, suggesting that reproducing people is just a matter of making producing "emotions," "feelings," It used to be called a "labor of love;" Negri and Hardt instead have discovered "affection."*

The sexual division of labour has always given heed to the slipperiness of states of being and embodied affect. There is no lack of demand on the body when a woman must care for her children, work full-time at a number of jobs, contend with her ideal self-image promulgated by mass media, and, at the end of the night, defend the choices she has made. Now, we extend our purview into those bodies (affect necessitates a body), attempting to reassemble a social mode that doesn't consider success to be the reproduction of already-sexist equalities.

Our query into affect will shift registers from the philosophical to the social, bearing in mind the external causes for intense states of being and the manner in which it is embodied as an individuated affect. We will read about negative and ambiguous affects (Sianne Ngai's Ugly Feelings), the "linguistic machine" that valorizes these prepackaged responses and narratives within capitalism (Dierdra Reber's Headless Capitalism: Affect as free-market episteme), the oppressive weight of morality, disillusionment, and being other (Freud's Civilization and its Discontents and Sara Ahmed's Multiculturalism and the Promise of Happiness), and the nervous importance placed on repurposed feelings, seemingly designated as "women's emotions."

## THE AFFECTIVE STATE SCHEDULE, SUMMER 2013

Week one: Friday, August 9

**Kierkegaard – The Concept of Anxiety**

**Brian Massumi – the Autonomy of Affect**

for reference to Massumi and NOT mandatory reading: **Spinoza – Ethics (pt. III)**

Week two: Thursday, August 15

**D&G – A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Ch. 10 Becoming Intense, Becoming Animal)**

Read up to p. 272, before Memories of a Molecule.

Week three: Thursday, August 22

**Sara Ahmed’s “Multiculturalism and the Promise of Happiness”**

**Dierdra Reber’s “Headless Capitalism: Affect as Free-Market Episteme”**

Week four: Thursday, August 29

**Sianne Ngai – Ugly Feelings** (Introduction)

**Herman Melville – “Bartleby, The Scivener: A Story of Wall-street”**

Break

Week five: Thursday, September 12

**Sianne Ngai – Ugly Feelings** (Ch. 7 Paranoia)

**Juliana Spahr’s “Thrashing Seems Crazy” from Response (pg. 535-537)**

Week six: Friday, September 20

**Freud – Civilization and its Discontents**

Week seven: Thursday, September 26

**Eve Sedgwick – Shame in the Cybernetic Fold**

**Nina Power “You’re Like an Advert for Yourself” and “Socialism Must Not Exclude Human Sensual**

**Pleasure From Its Program!” from One-Dimensional Woman**

Week eight: Friday, October 4

**Laura Kipnis: Marx: The Video**

**Wendy Brown – Regulating Aversion** (Ch.6 – Subjects of Tolerance)