

Emotional Labour, a symposium organized by the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies at Lancaster University on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April brought together Renata Salecl (Law, University of Ljubljana), Divya Tolia-Kelly (Geography, Durham University) and Gail Lewis (Social Sciences, Open University) for a day that turned out to be deeply engaging, both intellectually and affectively. In Anne-Marie Fortier's opening comments, she carefully articulated the way that affect has become both hegemonic as a mode of self and state governance, whilst simultaneously producing a de-politicizing effect as we turn away from the affect of protest, particularly protest against racism, state violence, lack of recognition and continuing and widening inequalities for those produced as 'other' to mainstream concerns. As a counter-balance to this de-politicizing turn, the day aimed to deliberately question the politics of the affective turn, to ask what effects are produced when emotion is mobilized in debate, and to probe whether, through attending to the affect of protest, understood in its broadest terms, emotion can help re-animate activism and social change.

This issue of what we turn away from, as well as towards, when affect prompts a 'turn' wove its way through the three presentations, perhaps most prominently in both Divya Tolia-Kelly and Gail Lewis' work around our difficulties with owning our own racism, as well as our own raced and embodied subjectivities, and at the same time working to undo them. What Gail Lewis so helpfully offers us is a reading of these difficulties through Bion's idea that we come to think in the first place through emotion – that thinking itself occurs through a condensation of affect in particular situations, conjoined with memory, somatic states and unconscious thoughts. If thinking comes into being in order to contain and make sense of these affectively charged 'thoughts', then when we perform good social science, we are effectively containing this affective charge. Gail's work demonstrates the kind of radical reflexivity that is required when affectivity is cathected to racialized difference. In Divya Tolia-Kelly's presentation, which focused on affective senses of belonging and citizenship, participatory art provided an alternative route into such affective thinking, allowing experiences of racial violences and estrangement from family, narratives and landscapes that contribute in complex ways to diverse forms of British identity, to be accessed, felt and inscribed.

Radical reflexivity took a different form in Renata Salecl's analysis of the affective states of anxiety and guilt, and their relation to new subjectivities emerging under neo-liberalism and the current economic crisis. The imperative to 'Become yourself, Only a Better One' places the responsibility for self-improvement, she argues, firmly with each individual, creating a pervasive ideology of self-creation that relies on anxiety and guilt to do its work. Self-help books, for example, function through giving your 'self' over to someone else to advise you what to do, yet spectacularly (and profitably) fail to help, breeding

instead a sense of insecurity in those that read them. This prompts a turn to new 'masters' – coaches, teachers, therapists, parents, friends – anyone other than ourselves. A glimmer of optimism emerged in this picture, in the form of our capacities to at least create our own symptoms, despite the pervasive impact of capitalist ideology. Here again, small windows could be created for affectivity to perform its labour as a form of dissent.

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