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**“More person, and, therefore, more satisfied and happy”: The affective economy of reading promotion in Chile**

Reading is often regarded as a public good and an essential part of developing almost every aspect of human potential. In this article, we survey the “affective economies” (Ahmed, 2004) of literary reading through a textual and visual analysis of documents issued by Chile’s Ministry of Education. Through a critical and diffractive reading of these documents with Ahmed’s and Braidotti’s (2018) conceptualizations of the affective, we claim that when reading is presented as beneficial, pleasurable, and promising, an assemblage of exclusion is set into motion. We describe how the affective repertoires in these documents reinforce oppressive and exclusionary neoliberal values under the guise of the promise of future happiness. The pleasure and happiness that can be achieved through literary reading, however, is only accessible to those who are willing to orientate themselves in the “right ways.” In this orientation, the cognitive is privileged over the emotional, and readers are supposed to learn to postpone any current demands for the promise of future happiness.

Key terms: Literacy and reading promotion, visual analysis, literary education, Chile, happy objects

During certain periods of history, like the late XVI century in Europe, or even the Victorian period, reading was considered risky, and authorities feared the effects of literature on children, youth, and women (Porter, 1998). Today discourses about literary reading have radically changed. Even though reading, particularly amongst children, is a monitored and even policed practice, reading “for pleasure,” as it is often referred to, is encouraged globally through state-funded campaigns (Veliz & García-González, 2020). Latin American governments established these campaigns within literacy and educational programs and embedded into these campaign desires for inclusive citizenry (García Canclini, 2015). Yet, which kind of inclusion

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 and ideal citizenry is encouraged in these types of programs and state-driven campaigns of “pleasurable reading” remain underexplored (e.g., Desai, 2016; Petrie & Darragh, 2018).

In this article, we analyze Chilean policy documents that promote literary reading and explore the affective economy in which they are entangled. We follow Ahmed’s (2004) conceptualization of affective economies as the flow and circulation of affects that produce and reproduce excluded bodies. We trace here normative affective orientations towards reading and examine how they stifle literature’s potential to generate dissensus. While literature could signify opening lines of flight or fractures within oppressive regimes of truth through dissensus (Rancière, 2009), the reading promotion documents analyzed are part of an affective economy that neutralizes or at least minimizes this potential. Here we conduct critical analysis on the discursive manifestations of this affective economy and unravel its exclusionary processes.

Through text and visual analysis of three reading promotion documents issued by the Chilean Ministry of Education, we sketch how happiness and self-confidence are promised to those that orient themselves “correctly” towards the intellectual pleasure that literary reading would give. We first present a brief description of the Chilean context. Second, we examine the promises associated with pleasurable reading in academic discourses and how critical theories about the affective and the emotional may provide new understandings about what is at stake when pleasurable reading is celebrated. Third, we present the materials we analyze and explain our methodological approach of diffractive reading or “plugging in” with theory as proposed by Jackson and Mazzei (2012). The fourth, fifth, and sixth sections are the core of this article. In them, we deploy Ahmed’s (2010) conceptualization of “happy objects” to trace how the documents are entangled in an affective economy that produces the purpose of reading as intellectual pleasure. We follow this with an inquiry into how the visual elements of reading

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promotion documents—photographs and illustrations—connect with socioeconomic references and superficial notions of diversity in the documents. In the next section, we explore possible cracks to the discourses of pleasurable reading. We conclude with some questions on how the affective economy of reading promotion produces an assemblage of exclusion in which particular repertoires for being and feeling are not possible.

We argue here that analyzing these types of documents reveals oppressive regimes of truth, a context of neoliberal crisis, and deep-rooted inequality. Our analysis shows how the circulation of discourses about the affective (re)produce particularly unequal social orders in Chile. By bringing these affective relations into our analysis, we demonstrate how these documents reproduce exclusions and work to neutralize the potential non-normative force of the aesthetic reading experience. It is necessary to critically analyze the repetitive affective associations of reading and pleasure to challenge their normative power. In the current Chilean context, in which the neoliberal model is in crisis, we respond as educational researchers politically concerned with social justice. This type of analysis is crucial to trace and critique the reproduction of inequities through the Chilean educational system and its curricular knowledges.

### **Chilean Educational Context**

Chilean educational context and the current state of unrest in Chilean society are rooted in the neoliberal political reforms undertaken by Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship between 1973 and 1989. During this period, the dictatorship privatized social services and public enterprises to promote economic competitiveness in sectors where it previously did not exist. Through these reforms the state was turned from a socialist one into a subsidiary liberal state by force (Klein, 2014; Torche, 2005). The democratic governments that succeeded Pinochet's dictatorship since 1990 have focussed on reforming rather than dismantling the neoliberal system (Salazar, 2006;

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Schild, 2013; Van Der Ree, 2011). The dictatorship's 1980 constitution "transformed traditional collective understandings of citizenship into individualist market-oriented societal roles" (Van Der Ree, 2011, p. 29). This individualistic and market-oriented citizenship model has persisted even after the return to democracy.

These political changes had and still have grave impacts in terms of social justice and equity and in the long run turned Chile into one of the most economically unequal countries in the world (Molina, 2019). Almost 21% of Chile's population is considered to be experiencing multidimensional poverty (Toro Aguirre, 2019). This poverty rate is higher for particular communities such as indigenous peoples in Chile, rising to almost 31%. State social spending is scarce in general and critically low within Indigenous communities; the Chilean state spends three times less money in total in Indigenous rural communities than it does within communities of mestiza and European descent population (Toro Aguirre, 2019).

The neoliberalization of the state has impacted the education system as well as the Chilean economy. Even though Chile has a high literacy rate—96.4% (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017)—the public school system suffered a harsh blow which has only recently started to be addressed. The dictatorship transferred the administration of public schools from the Ministry of Education to municipalities and encouraged these public municipal schools to compete with private schools and the newly founded charter schools, which also receive public funding (Mayorga, 2017). Funding in both charter and municipal schools in Chile is allocated in accordance to enrollment rates. Consequently, poor school districts or municipalities had poor schools that had to compete for resources with charter schools. In 1980, 80% of Chilean students enrolled in public schools, while today only 33% do so (Ministerios de Educación de Chile, 2020; Paredes & Pinto, 2009).

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Competing for students has not turned schools into more efficient machines, it has only revealed that less social spending and abandonment by the state results in increased educational inequality. In 2011, a minister of education attempted to create an “education-quality traffic light” map to show where the good quality and failing schools were located. These classifications were based on the results of national reading, math, and social studies tests. The experiment quickly turned into scandal when the public saw the distribution of green, yellow, and red lights; poor municipalities and communities only had access to “red light” schools (Álvarez & Peña, 2011).

Also under Pinochet’s dictatorship school curriculum was intervened to represent education in general and schools in particular as politically neutral spaces. Instead of a recognition of particular agendas, education was reproduced through the curriculum as neutral process. This impacts the curriculum until today. As Mayorga (2017) argued:

The curricular changes came hand in hand with a new discourse that stated that politics had no place in schools (...). The depoliticization came from a new notion of “individual,” directly linked to neoliberal discourse and understood as a free, rational, and dissociated being of its collective. (p. 359)

The political neutrality of schools, and the discourses of effort and success associated with this neutrality, have had consequences on education and Chilean society including profound inequity, injustice, and attempts at the erasure of more communitarian political approaches. For example, the state attempted to erase the curricular knowledges (or Kimün) of the Mapuche, the largest Indigenous group in Chile. Kimün is centered on oral traditions and “highly interconnected and extended kinship-based networks, that transmit Mapuche historical memory and Indigenous knowledge and language” (Ortiz, 2009, p. 106). Mapuche curricular knowledges have only been

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superficially included into national curricular knowledges and are in direct opposition to discourses of political neutrality and individualistic resilience in education. National curricular knowledges have traditionally been based on assimilation and epistemic violence through their erasure of other types of knowledges, particularly Indigenous ones (Sepulveda et al., 2015).

Beginning in the last years of the dictatorship, society in general, but particularly Mapuche communities (Richards, 2005), students (Bellei et al., 2018), and feminists (Follegati Montenegro, 2016), have protested the inequalities caused by the neoliberal state reforms, such as the consequences of ideologies that promote the discourse and ideals of individualistic resilience. Mapuches have fought for their lands and a more communitarian relationship with nature based on reciprocity (Richards, 2005). Students organize to end inequities in education, and feminists work to stop violence against women and gender non-conforming people and to promote gender equality (Bellei et al., 2018; Follegati Montenegro, 2016). More recently, in November 2019, social unrest reached a peak and catalyzed the process of writing a new political constitution that is still underway. The revolt started because of a rise in public transportation costs, but morphed into a protest against the deep inequalities in the country. Specifically, the movement is focussed on the extreme consequences of neoliberalism in all aspects of social life, including the isolating individualistic approach to success and progress.

### **The Promise of Reading**

Reading is often regarded as a public good and an essential asset involved in the development of almost every aspect of human potential. Scholars have provided evidence to support this understanding of reading; reading has been found to be a feasible predictor of academic performance (Whitten et al., 2019), beneficial for a healthy mind (Kidd & Castaño, 2013; Lysaker & Tonge, 2013), helpful to resignify traumatic experiences (Cerlalc & Unesco,

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2018; De Vries et al., 2017), and even capable of boosting financial success (Mol et al., 2008).

Yet we also find critical approaches to the celebration of reading and literacy pedagogies in recent literacy research, especially from scholars who use affect theory (Kuby et al., 2019; Leander & Ehret 2019; Lenters & Dermontt 2019). For example, Perry (2020) critiqued the Western paradigm that considers human language to be the pinnacle of all sign systems and its learning crucial for development. Perry (2020) argued that this Western paradigm needs to be revised to incorporate broader and less anthropocentric understandings of human experience.

There are other researchers which have explored affective economies in different literacy and curricular contexts. We have used some of these research projects as guides. For example, following Desai's (2016) research on the "girl rising" curriculum, we approach public policy documents by focussing on the "affective dimensions of the assemblage of images, texts, and audio producing these profoundly hopeful feelings" (p. 253). Like Desai (2016), we have examined how "affect plays a critical role in constructing economic, cultural and political regimes of truth" (p. 254) and found that particular elements in the curricular materials we analyzed are reproduced as "happy objects" that function as powerful tools to enforce these regimes of truth (p. 258). Dernikos and Thiel (2020) used Berlant's (2011) concept "cruel optimism" to show that transmedial storytelling with traditional fairytales produce affective attachments towards Eurocentric and white discourses, reinforcing the racialized, gendered, and classed myth of meritocracy. Furthermore, Truman (2019) explored inhuman literacies and affective refusals in literary education. She explained how language as a school subject—in her case English—has been coopted by neoliberal ideals in the UK through the emphasis on "key skills" or "skills based" teaching and learning (p. 116). Truman (2019) argued that this approach works to promote learning tools that respond to labour and economic demands. In Chile, reading



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and literary education are also approached from a “toolbox” set of skills perspective—as we show later in this article—which is directly linked to economic success and self-reliance in adult life. We agree with Truman’s assessment of how language literacy skills are related to what we call neoliberal skills. In this article, we analyze reading promotion documents as part of the mechanisms that produce “correct” orientations towards literacy and literary reading as part of a broader project of educating neoliberal subjects.

Our critical exploration of these documents also aligns with Petrie and Darragh’s (2018) research project on the affective impacts of desires related to learning English in the Nicaragua context; our project, however, follows the affective intensities and desires attached to literary reading in Chile. The authors explained that

desire includes a recognition of a lack, an object that will fill that lack (a “happy object”), as well as the energy to pursue that object. Rather than viewing desire as a state, this is a view of desire as a catalyst to action. (p. 457)

For her part, Truman (2019) argued that “school-based practices...continue to alienate (in)human others” (p. 116). In our research, we speculate about the possibilities foreclosed and reproduced as regimes of truth by the affective forces engaged within the reading promotion policy documents.

### **Affects and the Promise of Happiness**

We employ a diffractive reading approach to these documents to identify and critically review their affective orientations and intensities. Our understanding of affective orientations and intensities follows Braidotti’s (2018) conceptualization of affects:

affects are not to be taken as emotional states in a psychological frame that assumes the liberal individual as point of reference....affects are rather to be understood as transversal,

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non-human forces that need to be assessed in terms of their impact on subjects and on the world. (p. 221)

For Braidotti, affects are transversal forces, rather than human ones; that is, they do not reside within a person's psyche, but they pass through it, affecting them. Ahmed (2010) explained that feelings, emotions, or affections (she uses the concepts interchangeably) do not merely reside within subjects or objects, but instead move and circulate creating impressions in shared spaces of existence (p. 14).

Ahmed focussed her research on what the repetition of specific emotional associations do in society. In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), she asks, “what is it that ‘happiness’ does” (p. 2). Our article is part of this project of monitoring “affective economies.” We ask which are the emotional repertoires that get repeated in the documents and what do these repetitions do to the affective economies of literary reading. Through our analysis, we found that happiness in association with reading was a salient theme. This is why we have used Ahmed’s (2010) conceptualization of “happy objects.” She defined happy objects as an integral and constitutive part of “affective economies”:

Objects would refer not only to physical or material things but also to anything that we imagine might lead us to happiness, including objects in the sense of values, practice, styles, as well as aspirations. (p. 29)

Ahmed (2010) explained that some objects become “happy” because of their association with the promise of achieving happiness (p. 29). The promise of happiness sticks to these objects, circulating, moving from one place to another, accumulating positive affects, and becoming social goods (p. 21). These sticky associations also carry a certain normativity; the promise of “happiness” is available to those who are affected in the “right ways” towards “happy objects”

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(p. 45). In this article, we explore how Chilean ministerial documents produce reading and reading bodies as “happy objects” that accumulate positive value. We believe that this orientation could lead to oppressive “unhappiness” for some.

### **Plugging in Happy Objects and Literacy State Documents**

This article is part of a larger research project titled “Emotional and Literary Repertoires for Childhood,” in which we analyze different affective repertoires in literary education. In this particular article, we inquire into the affective economy of Chilean educational public policy documents related to reading promotion. We understand “affective economies” as flows and emotional relationships towards particular objects—in this case reading—and the repetition and stability of those relationships (Ahmed, 2004).

To develop an understanding of the affective economy of these documents, we selected policy documents developed by the Chilean state—the Ministry of Education and the National Council for the Cultures and Arts—and distributed in schools to promote reading. These documents are considered extra tools or recommendations meant to work with the prescribed state curriculum. We avoided specific documents such as those designed for particular school grades. We selected three documents: the first, *La comunidad que lee* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a), provides guidelines for school libraries; the second, *Apoya a tu hijo o hija en el camino a leer* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-b), is focused on the promotion of reading as a domestic and familial activity and offers recommendations for how parents, librarians, and teachers can encourage literary reading at all stages (and in all spaces) of children’s lives; the third, *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015), is directed to the general public and highlights the hopes the government has and the plans it will carry out to promote reading in the country and the role educational institutions should play. All these

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documents are publicly available as pedagogic resources on the Ministry of Education's curricular website. The document *La comunidad que lee* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a) was also given to all public and charter school libraries as set recommendations for language teachers and librarians. While there are other mandatory reading curricular documents (such as learning objectives and textbooks), we chose to focus on these three in this particular article because these are the policy documents that actually produce discourse and images about reading, and particularly, literary reading.

Using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis program, we elaborated a list of the 3000 most frequently occurring concepts used in the selected documents. From this list of concepts, we selected the terms we considered to be related to emotions, such as “conflict,” “happiness,” “satisfaction,” and “empathy.” We worked with a total of 50 of these concepts (see Appendix. For each one of these selected concepts we went back to the documents and analyzed how they were used in context. For each one we considered how these particular sections of the documents referenced the emotional and the affective and assessed what kinds of affective economies could be sketched through these uses. We also reviewed all 58 photographs and illustrations present in the documents and analyzed how these images produced and became entangled with affective intensities, that is, “transversal, non-human forces” (Braidotti, 2018, p. 221). This means that we analyzed the images by considering what each image did in relation to affects and emotions.

To analyze this large set of data, we conducted diffractive reading following two proposed methodological approaches. First, we read both the textual and visual references in relation to the theoretical concept of “affective economies.” We followed Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) definition of diffractive reading as a process in which data “plugs in” to theory. “Plugging in” to theory is a mode of analysis sketched by Jackson and Mazzei to trouble traditional

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understandings of data analysis. They explain plugging in as a “continuous process of making and unmaking” and a “process of arranging, organizing, fitting together” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 1). To undertake this kind of analysis, the authors propose three steps to follow:

1. Putting philosophical concepts to work via disrupting the theory/practice binary by decentering each and instead showing how they constitute or make one another;
2. being deliberate and transparent in what analytical questions are made possible by a specific theoretical concept...and how the questions that are used to think with emerged in the middle of plugging in;
3. and working the same data chunks repeatedly to “deform [them], to make [them] groan and protest” with an overabundance of meaning, which in turn not only creates new knowledge but also shows the suppleness of each when plugged in. (p. 5)

Plugging in is a mode of analysis in which the researcher reads the data through a particular theory. To plug in to theory you have to select an analytical theory. In this case we have selected affect theory and focus in particular on Ahmed’s (2004, 2010) development of affect theory. We decided to put certain theoretical concepts to work in our reading of the data. These concepts are “affective economies” (Ahmed, 2004) and “happy objects” (Ahmed, 2010). Using particular theoretical concepts to plug in to theory entails using questions to read the data through the theory. In our article we read the texts as affectively agentic and inquired into “the ways in which [they] name or perform different emotions” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 13). This means that we read the data through these theoretical concepts multiple times and asked what particular “emotional” concepts *do* in relation to reading promotion in each curricular text. As mentioned before, we wrote a memo for each one of the “emotional” concepts. For example, in the document *Apoya a tu hijo o hija en el camino a leer*, the section on reading to your baby explains that “Boys and

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girls become ‘readers’ before they learn to read. Enjoying books together now will help you enjoy books later”. (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-b, p. 3). When we encountered this kind of data we asked ourselves: What does “enjoyment” do in relation to reading promotion? What does this text accomplish? What kinds of affective repertoires are being foreshadowed? We recorded our answers for each one of the selected affective concepts.

For the critical visual analysis, we analyzed the internal affective narratives present in the images in this way (Banks, 2007; Drew & Guillemin, 2014). We used some questions developed by Drew and Guillemin (2014) that interrogate the visual and its relation with the researcher and other objects of research. For each image, we asked ourselves: Where does my eye go and why? What does the image mean? What does it *do* in relation to reading and affects? What social signifiers or symbols are available in it? What cultural values make me see this image in a certain way? How does it impact them? What does the image try to tell us? How is meaning conveyed? We wrote “memos” for each of these images answering these questions. For example, for the first image one of us answered the question “Where does my eye go and why?” with “to the child's face because it is extremely cute and pretty.” In responding to the question “What does it do in relation to reading and affects?” we answered that “Seeing this child showing his book with his happy face produces a lot of tenderness in me and fills me with happiness.”

After this analysis, we understood that Chilean reading-promotion educational documents are strongly related to affective economies of “happiness.” We analyzed how happiness does three things in these documents. First, happiness promotes normative orientations in relation to reading; that is, it produces how subjects should be affected by happiness and what kind of pleasures may be attached to reading. Second, happiness produces reading and reading bodies as “happy objects.” Third, centering happiness as the desired outcome of reading forecloses

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reading's other potentialities. In the following section, we analyze how happiness did these three things.

This is the scope of this article. We have not addressed particularly oppressed groups in the sections of this article, but rather what sort of affective economies are developed in general in these curricular documents. Even though we touch upon issues related to “diversity” and the representation of Chileans, we will not delve deep into these exclusions due to the general scope of the article.

### **The Promise of Future Happiness and Normative Affective Orientations Towards Reading**

The reading promotion documents produced by the Chilean state construct a relationship between happiness and cognitive abilities associated with reading. Take, for example, this description of the “good reader” in the document *La comunidad que lee*, which explained

In brief [a good reader] can receive, comprehend, interpret and evaluate the information contained in texts to use it according to their needs and accomplish their objectives; which leads them to participate in society. An adequate level of proficiency in reading allows the individual to be freer, more person and therefore, probably more satisfied and happy. (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a, p. 27)

What does it mean to say that a proficient reader is “more satisfied and happy”? In this phrasing, happiness appears linked to the notion of achievement and progress. As Ahmed (2010) indicated, being happy “becomes, then, a way of maximizing your potential of getting what you want, as well as being what you want to get” (p. 10). Reading, achieving adequate reading proficiency, and interpreting texts are associated with the development of agency and individual choice. Happiness is related to the satisfaction of being able to accomplish goals, that is, of becoming

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more human (“more person” in the fragment above). We note that other affects are erased when happiness is related to satisfaction in this way. Being a proficient reader is not, therefore, related to other ways of being affected by texts such as dissatisfaction, unhappiness, sadness, and feeling the pain of others and our own helplessness in responding to global injustices.

We considered how to think about this idea that reading makes us “more person.” We can connect this to the production of the liberal human subject that reads, a production of literacy as key in the making of the human (Kuby et al., 2019). Ahmed (2010) explained that if someone desires happiness, or to be considered a valid subject or person, they will follow the norms that will grant them access to these promises (p. 30). The happiness of being “more person” is, therefore, not free. Reading creates “lines and pathways in its trail as if we might find happiness by following these paths” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 160). We can trace correct affective orientations towards reading and those that appear to deviate from these paths. The promise of happiness works as a machine for the “regulation of desire” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 37).

The documents produce reading as a pleasurable activity and construct the context as though there is consensus about this among Chileans. Teachers and other readers are asked to “share their enthusiasm and compromise with those who surround them and contribute to visibilize the benefits of reading so others can reproduce them” (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a, p. 39). Schools and families are produced as “indispensable in the promotion of reading for pleasure which supports the human development of students” (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-b, p. 1). The promise of happiness positions happiness “as what you get in return for desiring well” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 37). In these documents “desiring well” involves orienting oneself towards reading as a pleasurable activity. The pleasure of reading is, nevertheless, a sophisticated form of pleasure. In *La comunidad que lee* this is stated as such:



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The pleasure of reading does not mean just finding a fun story or following the adventures of an easy mess. In addition to the sensory pleasures we share with other species, there is a purely human pleasure: to think, decipher, argue, reason, dissent, unite, and confront diverse ideas. Literature is one of the best ways to move to that territory of refined pleasures. (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a, p. 29)

It follows that the pleasure of reading should not be a sensory pleasure of the body, but rather one of the mind. This coincides with Ahmed's (2010) analysis of "strong and weak conceptions of happiness" as moral distinctions, particularly in classical models where "the forms of happiness that are higher are linked to the mind, and those that are lower are linked to the body" (p. 12). This mind/body asymmetry replicates that of reason/emotion and, in turn, also of refined/simple.

Having the right affective orientation towards reading is entangled in an assemblage of happy promises as sketched here:

Today we know that frequent reading can improve the lives of people in different ways. [Reading] improves the chances of being successful in school, getting access to good training and jobs, and to participate and influence your community. It also improves self-esteem, social and family bonds, and the capacity to imagine and build. (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a, p. 6)

The future seems brighter for those who are frequent readers. Through reading, students and teachers can imagine an intangible time when they will be individually capable and successful, have good jobs, be well trained, and be influential members of their community. Reading is also linked to national economic growth, individual economic success, and access to higher education (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015, p. 11). However, this production of the

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frequent reader is only possible if reading is done for (intellectual) pleasure:

Different investigations have demonstrated the importance of reading for pleasure in the formation of autonomous readers. The PISA test showed that “enjoying reading is more important for school success than the socio-economic status of the family”. If students read for pleasure, it is easier for them to acquire vocabulary and recognize complex linguistic structures. On the other hand, reading for pleasure contributes to the development of soft skills, such as empathy, self-control, discipline, and perseverance, thus enriching self-esteem and social relationships. (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a, p. 29)

Economic status becomes, therefore, something that individuals on their own can change through reading for intellectual pleasure. Enjoying books seems to be the source of (future) happiness, making correctly affected subjects resourceful, prepared for future difficulties, and able to break through structural socio-economic barriers. Reading is turned into what Ahmed (2010) called a “happy object” taking the form of “an individual responsibility, a redescription of a life project, but it also becomes an instrument, as a means to an end, as well as an end” (p. 10). Rejecting this “happy object” in the context of these “affective practices” seems to indicate that an individual or a community does not wish to improve their situation, that they voluntarily choose not to exit poverty through the escape route that becomes reading for intellectual pleasure. The promises inherent in reading for intellectual pleasure also translate into assigning individuals the responsibility of “pulling themselves by their bootstraps” without concerns for community, social justice, or redistribution.

### **Reading Bodies, Children, and Diversity: The Visual Production of a “Happy Object”**

The analyzed documents connect reading, happiness, and success in different ways. As Ahmed (2010) explained, “the more happy objects circulate, the more they accumulate affective

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 value, as signs of the good life” (p. 39). The curricular documents do not just discursively articulate what reading for intellectual pleasure brings, but also produce this promise with the material-semiotic force of images. In this section, we analyze how reading bodies sustain this promise of happiness with “feel-good” intensities (Ahmed, 2010, p. 3).

One of the last pages of the document, the *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015) shows a picture of a toddler holding an open book to the camera (see Figure 1). The boy has dark brown hair and eyes. The book is a cardboard book with pictures of cats, and the boy has a slight smile. The photograph, even though clearly staged, struck us as stereotypically adorable and endearing. The photo appears to produce a warm fuzzy feeling of happiness at how cute the very young boy looks while engaging with books and presumably the practice of reading.



**Figure 1:** Plan Nacional de la Lectura (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015, p. 92), photographs from the Ministry of Education, National Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums, National Council of Culture and Arts, Ministry of Social Development, National Board of Kindergartens and Integra Foundation.

The images in these documents are frequently meant to evoke these sorts of emotional intensities. The front cover of *La comunidad que lee* (Figure 2) shows hundreds of young

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children reading on the school patio. We also find several photographs of children concentrated on, or perhaps immersed in their books (Figure 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9).



**Figure 2:** *La Comunidad que Lee* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a), front and back cover, Photographs from Mineduc and National Board of Kindergartens Archives



**Figure 3:** *La Comunidad que Lee* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a, pp. 14-15), Photographs from Mineduc and National Board of Kindergartens Archives



**Figure 4:** *La Comunidad que Lee* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a, pp. 112-113), Photographs from Mineduc and National Board of Kindergartens Archives



**Figure 5:** *La Comunidad que Lee* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a, p. 139), Photographs from Mineduc and National Board of Kindergartens Archives



**Figure 6:** *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015, p. 25), photographs from the Ministry of Education, National Directorate of Libraries,



**Figure 7:** *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015, p. 41), photographs from the Ministry of Education, National Directorate of Libraries,

Archives and Museums, National Council of Culture and Arts, Ministry of Social Development, National Board of Kindergartens and Integra Foundation.



**Figure 8:** *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015, p. 44), photographs from the Ministry of Education, National Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums, National Council of Culture and Arts, Ministry of Social Development, National Board of Kindergartens and Integra Foundation.

Archives and Museums, National Council of Culture and Arts, Ministry of Social Development, National Board of Kindergartens and Integra Foundation.



**Figure 9:** *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015, p. 45), photographs from the Ministry of Education, National Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums, National Council of Culture and Arts, Ministry of Social Development, National Board of Kindergartens and Integra Foundation.

In these photos, children are usually not accompanied by adults but depicted, even from a young age, as eager readers and book lovers. The use of young children's bodies—we find many more young children than adolescents in these pictures—produce an “affective economy” of early childhood tenderness. Ahmed (2010) explained how the circulation of particular “happy objects” can become strong by the mere promise they signify:

Indeed, the very promise of happiness may acquire its force by not being given by the objects that are attributed as happiness-causes [in this case reading]. The happy object circulates even in the absence of happiness by filling a certain gap; we anticipate that the happy object will cause happiness, such that it becomes a prop that sustains the fantasy that happiness is what would follow if only we could have “it.” The happy object, in other words, is a gap-filler. The promise of the object is always in this specific sense ahead of us. (p. 32)

The bodies of children who are reading appear to be happy objects, gap-fillers in the present accompanied by hope for a happy future. Children's bodies are potential; they signify that future



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in which individuals will become college students and economically successful subjects. Ahmed (2010) explained that the happy object “accumulates positive value even in situations of unhappiness” (p. 33). The observers of these photographs can live in discomfort, unhappiness, or pain, but a better future is promised to those who engage in reading.

Another recursive use of images and photographs in the curricular documents presents the happy association of female bodies, books, and reading children. In the *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015) we find several digitally designed scenes. In one, an older woman reads watching several children dancing in a circle holding hands (see Figure 10). Another shows a woman holding a book from which blue lines and suns emerge and get to four children who watch her (see Figure 11). A third picture shows a pregnant woman caressing her belly and sitting in nature while reading a book (see Figure 12). There are also photographs of women holding babies with books (see Figure 13) and caring for infants in street libraries while they check books out (see Figure 14).



**Figure 10:** *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015, p. 5), illustrations by Milena Hachim Díaz, Centro Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes



**Figure 11:** *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015, p. 10), illustrations by Milena Hachim Díaz, Centro Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes



**Figure 12:** *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015, p. 80), illustrations by Milena Hachim Díaz, Centro Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes



**Figure 13:** *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015, p. 55), photographs from the Ministry of Education, National Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums, National Council of Culture and Arts, Ministry of Social Development, National Board of Kindergartens and Integra Foundation.



**Figure 14:** *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015, p. 85), photographs from the Ministry of Education, National Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums, National Council of Culture and Arts, Ministry of Social Development, National Board of Kindergartens and Integra Foundation.

Apart from the obvious gender-normative associations (there is almost no male figures caring for children in the documents), these images also contribute to the production of reading as a practice of happy futures, particularly normative happy futures. Children are presented as a promise of what is to come from reading for intellectual pleasure, while women signal caring figures who watch over their development. These drawings and photographs reek of wholesomeness. Signs like nature, caressing, babies crawling, and children dancing in circles all stand-in as or could be understood as “gap fillers” for the happy future that will come. This

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“wholesomeness” is a particularly traditional, patriarchal, and upper-class normative promise in which women seem to have the time to hang around and care for children while reading and are content to do so.

The “happy object” of reading for intellectual pleasure produced in these photographs and images is assembled with other promises related to diversity and socio-economic inequalities. In *La comunidad que lee* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a), we find a photograph of two young women, presumably teachers, showing a book to six very young children (see Figure 15). The children and teachers seem to be concentrating on the reading. We cannot see their faces, but we may look at what is on the page: it is a drawing of a monkey who sells Chilean sweets in a street stall; a small poem explains how the monkey started working selling these sweets in the street and how he chases people down and makes funny faces at people who are not willing to buy them (see figure 15).



The monkey earns a living in the informal economy, a very common yet precarious form of work



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 in Chile (with no social security, low pay, and at times police persecution). Right next to this photograph the document explains,

School prepares students to develop their “reading skills”, defined by the OECD as “the ability of an individual to understand, use, reflect on the texts and commit to them, in order to achieve personal goals, develop knowledge and personal potential and participate in society.” (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a, p. 30)

Even though neither the image nor the document link the precarity of the job performed by the monkey with this development of reading skills as training for the achievement of personal goals, the image stands as a reminder that structural inequalities result in certain bodies attaining less.

The document *Apoya a tu hijo o hija en el camino a leer* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-b) includes plenty of illustrations of women and (heteronormative) families showing care for children through reading (see figure 16 to 20). Interestingly, men wear ties and very stereotypical office outfits while women appear wearing dresses and pearl necklaces (see figure 16). Moreover, the spaces where they read are filled with comfortable looking armchairs and fineries (see figure 19 & 20). These images combine the “happy object” of pleasurable reading with the intensities of socio-economic comfort and upper-class aspirations. The promise of future happiness appears to be one of upper class belonging and status. We can also see that all these characters are white and one of the mothers is a redhead, which is extremely rare among the Chilean population. These kinds of images seem to be pandering to long-standing racist obsessions in Chile, including beliefs and the desire to be perceived as white. Recently, a study found that most Chileans consider themselves “cleaner and whiter than other people from Latin American countries” (Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 2017). This might give us some

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clues as to how these illustrations could be reflecting these dreams and desires for whiteness.

Afro-Chileans, immigrants, dark-skinned people, Indigenous people, and families are erased from this imaginary.



**Figure 16:** *Apoya a tu hijo o hija en el camino a Leer* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-b), front cover, illustrations by Paloma Valdivia.



**Figure 17:** *Apoya a tu hijo o hija en el camino a Leer* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-b, p. 2), illustrations by Paloma Valdivia.



**Figure 18:** *Apoya a tu hijo o hija en el camino a Leer* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-b, p. 4), illustrations by Paloma Valdivia.



**Figure 19:** *Apoya a tu hijo o hija en el camino a Leer* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-b, p. 12), illustrations by Paloma Valdivia.



**Figure 20:** *Apoya a tu hijo o hija en el camino a Leer* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-b, pp. 14-15), illustrations by Paloma Valdivia.

These dreams for the future are combined with desires related to a “boutique” diversity (Fish, 1997). The digital drawings in *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015) portray a wide range of bodies that read in a variety of spaces. We find, for example, an illustration of a woman reading to children in a natural background of araucaria trees and snowy mountains (Figure 21). The woman and children are wearing the traditional clothing of the Mapuche, an Indigenous group in Chile. On another page, we find a man wearing the traditional clothing of the Aymara, another Indigenous group in Chile, who reads surrounded by an Altiplano landscape (Figure 22). Finally, there is a drawing of a man wearing black glasses reading a braille document with a thought bubble that represents what he is presumably reading about: a cat (Figure 23).



**Figure 21:** *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015, p. 14), illustrations by Milena Hachim Díaz, Centro Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes



**Figure 22:** *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015, p. 26), illustrations by Milena Hachim Díaz, Centro Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes



**Figure 23:** *Plan Nacional de la Lectura* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, 2015, p. 32), illustrations by Milena Hachim Díaz, Centro Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes

These illustrations connect the “happy object” of pleasurable reading with celebratory notions of diversity. The “diverse” bodies represented in these illustrations read with smiles on their faces. We find visually recognizable signs of diversity such as traditional outfits to refer to cultural diversities, a blind man to signify disabilities, and “natural” landscapes surrounding Indigenous people. In these visual presentations diversity is not threatening, but rather something to celebrate. This recalls the distinction made by Fish (1997) between a superficial, “boutique” multiculturalism in which differences are celebrated and a strong multiculturalism in which such differences are honored more deeply. It is worth noting that the drawings of Indigenous individuals do not reflect traditional communitarian oral histories, which are fundamental in

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Indigenous communities in Chile. Instead, the Indigenous individuals in these images read from books almost in isolation. These findings reflect problems that arise from the superficial and nominally “inclusive” practices in curricular knowledges and the tensions with communitarian based and politically charged Indigenous knowledges. The fact that all “diverse” bodies have white faces (and are smiling) could signify that the documents are using this diversity as a national unifier, as an affective practice that assimilates all into a common activity despite differences. The “happy object” of reading circulates to promise a future of national development and (Westernized) culture. As Ahmed (2010) explained:

If objects provide a means for making us happy, then in directing ourselves toward this or that object, we are aiming somewhere else: toward a happiness that is presumed to follow. The temporality of this following does matter. Happiness is what would come after. Given this, happiness is directed toward certain objects, which point toward that which is not yet present. When we follow things, we aim for happiness, as if happiness is what you get if you reach certain points. (p. 26)

The promise of happiness is for those who affectively orient themselves in the “right” ways. Reading for intellectual pleasure is linked to other signs such as caring, nature, recognition of “diversity,” and socio-economic progress. These promises are for those who comply with the “right” orientations towards reading and happiness: caring femininities, desires of upper-class comfort, and tolerance of “diversity.”

### **(Un)happy Bodies, Ugly Feelings, and Affective Managements through Hope**

Even though the analyzed documents produce a stable affective economy concerning reading, the assemblage of bodies, promised futures, happiness, and affective intensities allows us to discover and analyze some “escape routes” or moments that threaten that stability.

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Some of the images produced to cause particular affective intensities may bring about unexpected affective responses. For example, the posed cover photograph in *La comunidad que lee* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a) with hundreds of children standing and reading in the school's patio contains several baffled faces (see Figure 24). These children might not have understood the instructions and looked directly at the camera instead of focusing on their books. These faces are confusing and break the smooth surface of the promise of happiness for those who read. They seem more disconcerted than content, more earnest than happy.



**Figure 24:** *La Comunidad que Lee* (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a), front cover [detail], Photographs from Mineduc and National Board of Kindergartens Archives

The affective practice contained in the “happy object” of reading for intellectual pleasure also loses some of its stability in other ways. It may be that the act of reading is, in itself, a wildcard that may produce happiness and hope but also unhappiness and other feelings such as sadness, despair, and rage. As Rancière (2010) argued, an aesthetic approach to literature could lead to dissensus. For example, a frequent literary reader may use literature as a means to refuse participation in society as a skilled worker. Reading can turn you into a violent and angry subject. It seems the official documents analyzed here try to counter these possible “negative feelings” by normalizing this pleasurable and happy orientation towards reading. This happens, as previously discussed, mostly through the work done by the illustrations. The documents,

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however, also include text outlining strategies to avoid eliciting negative feelings in readers. For example, *La comunidad que lee* instructed teachers to: “Avoid promoting books that *propose violence* [emphasis added] as a system of life or as a response in the search for solutions; books that *seek to indoctrinate, or that leave no way out or hope* [emphasis added]” (Ministerio de Educación, n.d.-a, p. 80). This official document recommends that teachers purge readings that propose violence as a response or a way to find solutions. Is pleasurable reading only possible when peace and peaceful resolutions, and the hope they entail, are prioritized to the point of erasing conflict, force, and violence? Does this repertoire of pleasurable reading, as an affective practice, resist any conceptualization of injustices that call for direct action? How could the literary works be asked to always provide a hopeful resolution?

Reading for intellectual pleasure is normalized such that works that provide “a way out” of conflict are understood as pleasurable or happy; hope is mandatory in order for these texts to be understood in this way. As Ahmed (2010) explained, “happy and hopeful subjects are well adjusted” (p. 189) and, therefore, productive members of society. Hope, in the case of the recommendation to eliminate certain readings, is the hope that erasing books containing depictions of conflict or violence would erase negativity from the world. The literary scholar Edelman (2004) has examined this mandatory hope explaining that “the various positivities produced in its wake by the logic of political hope depend on the mathematical illusion that negated negations might somehow escape, and not redouble, such negativity” (p. 5). The documents try to escape negativity—and all it entails—through erasure without considering that these purges might “redouble such negativity.”

The gaze of the children who did not follow the instructions for the group photo appear as if they are breaking the promise of happiness. Ahmed (2010) explained,

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The good encounter could be read as being how bodies stay in place, or acquire a place in which they can stay, by agreeing with what they receive. The bad encounter can be read as how bodies refuse to be placed by disagreeing with what they receive.

(p. 213)

The “escape routes” we have described in these documents can be understood as bodies refusing to stay in place or as disagreeing bodies – e.g. bodies not posing as they are supposed to pose. Even the recommendation to purge violent or unhopeful books relates to the fractures in the assemblage of the “happy object” of reading for intellectual pleasure. The documents attempted to curate what could already be glimpsed as a flight route from these promises for the future: books, the many and variable unhopeful and violent books.

### **Exclusion in the Promise of Happiness through Reading**

We have analyzed how reading promotion documents produce an ideal of pleasurable reading as a “happy object,” that is, as a promise of a happy future. We have traced how pleasurable reading is a mode of engagement only available for those who orient themselves in the correct ways. The documents argued that literary reading makes you “more person” and help you become successful in the future. They suggest that pleasurable literary reading produces individuals who are able to make (good) choices, get better jobs, and exert influence in their contexts. In other words, the documents promote the idea that engaging in pleasurable literary reading allows people to fulfill the expectations of achievement and success in a neoliberal order. The visual aid of the documents—the inclusion of pictures and illustrations—reinforce these meanings and work on an affective level to connect pleasurable reading with desires and promises of socio-economic comfort, gendered caring of children, and superficial diversity. The images and illustrations work to erase other possible worlds and orientations; in this way, they



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reinforce the affective practices of neoliberal achievement while including signs of diversity that are superficially celebrated. The promise of future happiness for those who read is related to this superficial and even exclusive “diversity”: not all bodies are part of these particular dreams of the future, and not all relationships and activities can be part of that future. The images and illustrations reinforce racist, ableist, colonial, heteronormative, and patriarchal promises of a future we might do not desire.

We note how reading as a “happy object” excludes possibilities of being emotionally challenged by texts. Literary works are not expected to cause dissatisfaction, unhappiness, rage, sadness, or helplessness. Understanding reading as a “happy object” also excludes other pleasures and forms of amusement that are not related to rationality, like sensory pleasures. The “happy object” of reading for intellectual pleasure produces a liberal human subject who believes in individualism and, therefore, dismisses the material force of structural inequalities. It portrays individuals as being responsible for “pulling themselves up by their bootstraps” through the right orientation towards book culture. This individual responsibility is attached to the affect of tolerance for diversity. Diversity, when attached to tolerance, is only accommodating towards superficial differences that do not threaten any social order; tolerance is based on the right to dislike what is marked as other, while giving power to those who tolerate, that is, to people who dislike people who are different than them yet allow the people they dislike to exist. Tolerance, therefore, sustains the dominance of the powerful, and in this particular case, places the responsibility to bring about well-being and happiness on the individual subjects who are tolerated.

Reading for intellectual pleasure appears, therefore, as a promise for a better life that is assured to those who defer their present gratification. We argue that these affective economies

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are normative and exclude (the pain of) others. Which lives, which ethical forms of engagement, and which sufferings are rendered invisible in these policy documents and their orientations towards pleasurable reading? The analyzed documents and their promotion of these exclusionary affective economies illustrated how neoliberal power structures in Chile condition the circulation of affects and the (re)production of regimes of truth in relation to literary education. We have attempted to produce an “adequate cartography of the conditions of bondage” (Braidotti, 2018, p. 223), meaning that we have attempted to address how oppressive norms and regimes of truth work in the documents concerning affects and literature. We did so not just to show how the texts are reproducing injustice, but also to inquire into broader affective economies in neoliberal Chilean society and analyze how they are related to a belief in success. We want to produce this picture to help mobilize desires about reading “in disruptive directions capable of resisting codes and powers” (Braidotti, 2018, p. 223).

We finished writing this article in a time of profound social unrest in Chile. Since October 2019, Chile has been in upheaval with massive popular protests and anger spilling on the streets of cities throughout the country. We have been participating in these protests acknowledging how they produce new emotional repertoires in their refusal of the domesticated “happy objects” of the powerful. Just a few days before the popular movement broke out, President Sebastián Piñera described Chile as an “oasis in Latin America,” a peaceful and pleasant country safely oriented towards (economic) progress (Cooperativa, October 9th, 2019). During the dictatorship, Chile had been the testing ground for implementing neoliberalism (Klein, 2014). Chilean economists defended their neoliberal model by assuring the Chilean people that it would eventually lead to happiness, success, and well-being. Happiness would follow national economic growth and suspend the need to struggle for anything else.

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In this article, we question the notion of happiness produced in these educational documents. We believe that by questioning this idea of happiness, “we may ask other questions about life, about what we want from life, or what we want life to become” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 218). We desire approaches to reading that allow for multiple “affective economies” to open. which “might embrace what happens, but...also works toward a world in which things can happen in alternative ways” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 223). How can we help mobilize desires about reading in “disruptive directions capable of resisting codes and powers”? (Braidotti, 2018, p. 223). We might attempt to do this by affectively engaging with the possibilities excluded from the official documents, such as the repertoires of conflict, rage, and feeling others’ pain. We believe we need affective economies to resist the pervasive neoliberal orientation towards socioeconomic success. Like Edelman (2004), we believe in the need to read, feel, and think unhopeful futures with urgency.

### **Declaration of interest statements**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## Appendix

### Analytic Concepts Related to Emotions from State Documents

Death and derivatives	Kiss	Dignity
Emotions, feelings and derivatives	Sensitivity	Experience & Feel
Bullying	Enthusiasm	Inclusive
Empathy and derivatives	Anguish	Satisfaction
Rage, anger.	Self esteem	Sexuality
Bullying	Pride	Hard
Tears	Privacy	Wellness
Pleasure	Pain	Risk
Violence	Surprise	Joy
Humor	Loneliness	Identity
Abuse	Restlessness, worry	Conflict
Enjoy	hope	Sorrow, sadness
Interpersonal	Punches	Love
Wants	State of mind	