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INTRODUCTION

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Introduction: Imagining and Reimagining Emotional Labour

In a 2018 interview in *The Atlantic*, Arlie Russell Hochschild noted, somewhat disapprovingly, a certain 'blurriness' and 'overextension' in more recent usages of the term 'emotional labour', a concept she first introduced in her 1983 study, *The Managed Heart* (Beck 2018). Hochschild was referring in the interview to the emerging centrality of the term in proliferating discussions about the continued invisibility of women's labour, particularly revolving around care and largely conducted within the home. Such popular interpretations represent a marked departure from Hochschild's original understanding of 'emotional labour' in terms of the active regulation of feelings in paid forms of employment and the varying expectations for emotion management across professional roles and contexts. The boundaries between intimate and professional domains have come under increased pressure, partly as a result of a global care crisis; in response, this special issue seeks to re-focus attention on the discourses surrounding the concept of 'emotional labour' by returning to Hochschild's definition, without losing sight of the term's resonance and currency in contemporary culture. The issue brings together a series of contributions that explore the sometimes-fraught, always-complex relationship between emotion and work, as it is conceived in modern

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and contemporary literature and the arts. While scholarly conversations, predominantly in the areas of sociology and psychology, have productively engaged with and critiqued Hochschild's concept – Grandey, Diefendorff, and Rupp note that there has been 'exponential growth' in research since the advent of the twenty-first century (2012: 4) – the concept's cultural representations and implications have been largely overlooked. Now, on the fortieth anniversary of *The Managed Heart*, the time is ripe for critical reevaluations which centre on the arts and humanities. Questions of work, care, and affect/emotion have each been subject to considerable analysis within literary and cultural criticism in recent years. This special issue aims to build on previous scholarship in these distinct areas, by prioritizing a term that re-frames and re-directs the conversation: 'emotional labour'.

With the benefit of hindsight, Hochschild's work can be situated at a critical juncture in intellectual and socioeconomic history. *The Managed Heart* was published a year after Carol Gilligan's radical elevation of an ethics of care as an alternative feminine paradigm for public and political life, while second-wave feminists were also, at this moment, arguing for the value of care work and other forms of domestic and intimate labour. But the book also closely followed Michel Foucault's lectures in the late 1970s at the Collège de France on biopower in which he interweaves questions of governance, economics and care (of the population, more specifically). If, for Gilligan and other feminist theorists, care had been detrimentally side-lined within Western societies, for Foucault, the subtle instrumentalization of care was a crucial sub-plot within the longer narrative of the formation of a rational system of Western governance, with roots in a Christian pastoral tradition. Such intellectual conversations were occurring alongside a drastic and global transmutation of social and economic landscapes. For example, in the UK, Margaret Thatcher's dismantling of the welfare state was in full swing while, on the other side of the Atlantic, Ronald Reagan was similarly implementing a suite of new policies; together these initiatives paved the way for a neoliberal zeitgeist. Hochschild's theorization of 'emotional labour' pinpoints one important aspect of this transition, involving the commodification of a language of welfare and its extension beyond the realm of intimacy. She turns attention to how, as care was being decimated in the public sphere, the private sector was incorporating a language and co-opting a practice of care into the late capitalist workplace.

Discourses of Emotional Labour pays tribute to the origins and pre-history of Hochschild's concept at the same time as it attends to its continued relevance and evolution in the twenty-first century. Writing at the century's turn, Michael Hardt foresaw that affective labour, though hardly a new phenomenon, was reaching 'the very pinnacle of the hierarchy of laboring

form' (1999: 90). The pieces collected here speak, in part, to the transformation of work culture through the establishment and preeminence of digital networks and online platforms, complicating previously defined boundaries between physical and immaterial forms of labour. These newly dominant networks and platforms have re-shaped the available tools, resources, and channels through which emotion is regulated and performed, amplifying, on the one hand, the demands for authentic expression and giving rise, on the other, to greater suspicion of inauthentic display. We posit that such a tension accentuates the interplay between the deep and surface forms of acting that Hochschild's analysis showed to be crucial to emotional labour (1983: 35). One of Hochschild's primary examples was the smiling flight attendant whose affability was trained and put in service to the customer on behalf of the company. However, within a growing gig economy that has fundamentally changed the composition of large swathes of the labour force, workers are simultaneously more vulnerable and subject to an increasing expectation to sell not only a product but also themselves. Even as the management of emotions has become central to contemporary work culture, these performed emotions remain difficult to measure and remunerate, a facet of the rise of what Alissa G. Karl, with reference to Jeffrey Nealon, has called 'affective capitalism' (2020: 274). Karl is particularly concerned with the new attention to empathy as part of socio-political and corporate discourses. As she elaborates:

> An emphasis on empathy trains labor and casts worker subjectivity in accordance with requirements for affective and immaterial labor in the contemporary workplace. Such a process also generates affects and subjectivities to be consumed, and makes life itself into work from which surplus value may be extracted. The empathetic imperative is likewise a feature of contemporary capitalism's production of affective life and subjectivity, […] those very affective productions are both a substitute and prophylactic for an apprehension of systemic precarity and exploitation. (274–5)

Indeed, contemporary capitalism both recognizes and exploits the commercial power of emotions but also systematically works to disassemble internal infrastructures of employee and customer care. Moreover, in this affective environment, it becomes difficult to distinguish between authenticity and inauthenticity, even as we are hyper-attuned to the two categories and their related values.

The paradoxical expectations around emotional authenticity in the late capitalist workplace can be illuminated through two recent examples:

Amazon's use of a smiling logo on its packaging and a prominent Twitter intervention exposing Vodafone's callous customer service. As we were working on this project, our conversations circled back to the Amazon logo – a cartoon smile – as symbolic of a corporation marketing itself as caring, even as it has been accused of exploiting its ground-level workers (consider, for example, the *New York Times'* 2021 investigation [Cramer 2021]). The example of Amazon is pertinent because, during the early lockdown stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, the corporation became an important means by which people could send care to others and look after themselves; ironically, Amazon has faced criticism for not extending such care to the frontline 'care' workers delivering those smiling packages (Sanches, Hoffman and Gelderblom 2021).

On an Amazon smiling package, the smile logo on what is usually otherwise a blank brown paper box or envelope appears, on the surface, as a metonym for care. The performance of emotion is thus materialized and disembodied, displaced from the workers who prepare and handle the goods onto the package itself. Where the customer is concerned, the smiling package corresponds to Sara Ahmed's concept of the 'happy object' (2010). The contours of the smile morph into an arrow which indicates what she describes as the 'end-oriented' quality of happiness in that it 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' (2010: 26). The complicity of Amazon in the instrumentalization of happiness as an ever-deferred 'good' (26), always immanent and never achieved, is encoded in the arrow-smile that might also be interpreted as, implicitly, a knowing smirk. This graphic icon, that essentially corresponds to two strokes of a pen, poses the question of the degree to which affective capitalism replaces structural action with surface symbolism. The ambiguously smiling/smirking package, poised between sincerity and insincerity, can be read as a Mona Lisa-like rendition of emotion in the contemporary marketplace.

Even as we may be suspicious of inauthentic performances of corporate care, we long, in certain situations, for an authentic emotional response, for our shared humanity to be recognized. The latter desire is articulated in a series of Tweets in July 2022 from the journalist and environmental activist George Monbiot in which he details his family's frustrated attempts, after his mother's death, to cancel her mobile phone account with Vodafone. Monbiot takes issue with not only the practical problem but also the emotional response, writing, 'At no time, even in the first phone call, was there any expression of commiseration or sympathy, just outright hostility and aggression'.[1] This exchange reveals not so much a lack of emotional response or connection but rather an emphasis on negative

1 https://twitter.com/GeorgeMonbiot/status/1546453244922269697. Monbiot further details his family's dealings with Vodafone in an article about what he terms the 'sadmin' incurred after his mother's death: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jul/28/sadmin-mother-death-vodafone.

emotions, the hostile phone call signifying the inverse of Amazon's smiling package. Monbiot later notes that his father began to receive 'threatening phone calls from the debt collection agency' (Monbiot 2022). Significantly, Hochschild posited the debt collector as the grimacing counterpoint to the smiling flight attendant. She saw these figures as representing 'a toe and a heel', two opposing though interrelated aspects of 'the corporate world' (1983: 137). She writes:

> When an organization seeks to create demand for a service, and then deliver it, it uses the smile and the soft questioning voice. Behind this delivery display, the organization's worker is asked to feel sympathy, trust, and good will. On the other hand, when the organization seeks to collect money for what it has sold, its worker may be asked to use a grimace and the raised voice of command. Behind this collection display the worker is asked to feel distrust and sometimes bad will. In each kind of display, the problem for the worker becomes how to create and sustain the appropriate feeling. (137–8)

While Hochschild focuses on the worker in the service of what Robert McMurray and Jenna Ward, building on her research, define as 'emotional dirty work' (2014), Monbiot spotlights the estranging experience of the customer who perceives such treatment to be an injustice. We proceed on the basis that the customer, a role that was somewhat sidelined in Hochschild's study, is an important participant in the emotional labour dynamic. Furthermore, McMurray and Ward have argued at length elsewhere, in documenting the 'dark side' of emotional labour, that 'antipathetic' forms remain 'underresearched and underdeveloped' (2016: 1) in contrast to the more empathetic manifestations of emotion in the context of work. The literary and cultural representations highlighted in this special issue powerfully evoke these neglected antipathetic dimensions of emotional labour, demonstrating, moreover, how negatively- and positively-encoded feelings interact and are variously instrumentalized in ways that produce a complex ethical landscape. The examples of the smiling Amazon package and the fractious Monbiot/Vodafone Twitter confrontation emerge from and reflect such a landscape, and foreground issues that will be variously taken up, developed, and further nuanced in the contributions included in this volume.

This special issue pays tribute to the continued relevance of Hochschild's term 'emotional labour', but is further concerned with the overlap between emotional labour and forms of care. Indeed vocabularies of care seem to be especially resonant today as both care practices and the value of care have become subject to intense debate: progressive thinkers and economists

continue to try to reclaim the term as the basis for a new kind of politics in the tradition of Gilligan; by the same token, care has 'been swamped by new languages – commercial, consumer or managerial – which threaten the essence of what is at stake' (Bunting 2020: 5). Nancy Fraser has, more broadly, critiqued a capitalist economy that 'free rides' on care (Fraser 2014). This conflict has been characterized by some thinkers as a care crisis. 'For a long time we had simply been failing to care for each other', write the authors of *The Care Manifesto* (Hakim et al. 2020: 2), attributing this crisis primarily to the predominance of a gig economy that has subsumed care work and the rise of 'individualised' notions of self-care that have replaced the welfare state. The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic and its related emergencies has been game changing, both revealing our dependence on care work, and exposing the inequities, fragilities, and failures of care systems against the backdrop of this perceived crisis. Published the same year as *The Care Manifesto* and likewise posited as an urgent intervention, Madeline Bunting's 2020 *Labours of Love*, was conceived of and written before the pandemic but the Preface nonetheless acknowledges how 'Covid-19 has starkly exposed the chronic underinvestment and undervaluing of care' (vii). Bunting and other such thinkers are equally committed to imagining alternative social formations for a care-centred future. For example, David Goodhart's *Head Hand Heart* attributes failures in care to a 'cognitive takeover' and argues that physical and emotional work must be newly valued (Goodhart 2021: 91–186). A February 2021 webinar held at the London School of Economics, part of a broader research project, focussed on how to build a 'caring economy'.[2]

Central to these debates surrounding how care is valued, devalued or revalued in our economy and society, is the question of who is carrying out the work itself. According to Sabine O'Hara, 'the burden of supplying … care services is not distributed evenly. It is disproportionately carried by nature, by women, by the young, the old, the poor and those without power' (2013: 39). Many theorists have looked at the intersection between care work and gender, both in terms of disenfranchisement and oppression but also in terms of ethical and political potentiality. The growth of affective capitalism, moreover, has been aligned with the feminization of work, what Johanna Oksala describes as a

> widely used but ambiguous notion [that] denotes not only the quantitative increase of women in the labor market globally—the growth of the service industries and the way women have been progressively transformed into a strategic pool of labor. It also denotes a qualitative change in the nature of labor: the characteristics historically present in female work—precariousness, flexibility, mobility, fragmentary nature, low

2 https://www.lse.ac.uk/Events/2021/02/202102041800/caringhttps://www.lse.ac.uk/International-Inequalities/Research/Global-Economies-of-Care (2022)

> status, and low pay—have increasingly come to characterize most of the work in global capitalism. (2016: 281)

In contrast with the above characterization of feminized labour as precarious, low status, and low value, Talia Schaffer details feminist economic theory that 'highlight[s] models of cooperative and sustainable economic behavior that includes maternal and domestic ties, rather than competitive resource mining or neoliberal consumerism' (2019: 525). Recent iterations of care ethics as an intersectional feminist theory might even, in her words, prompt us to 'rethink contemporary ideas of caretaking, citizenship, migration, and legislation' (2019: 523). A re-imagining of gendered discourses around emotional labour thus facilitates a better understanding of other longstanding inequities which include, but are not limited to, class, race, sexuality, age, education, and the non-human. What draws us to cultural and literary representations is, in part, the scope that they allow for such critical and creative explorations.

One aim of our special issue is to situate this ongoing, vital discussion of care and its gendered affordances in more direct relation to work spaces, sectors, roles and operations. Unlike previous work in the social sciences and management studies, this issue encompasses analysis of representational forms that include fiction, film, and craft, as well as larger practices of publishing, editing, activism, teaching and other kinds of industry that are not obviously aligned with care work. We are also invested in the question of how artistic production can itself be conceived as a mode of care work wherein the artist assumes or declines to accept affective or ethical responsibility towards their subjects/readers/audiences. The various contributions show a sustained preoccupation with the question of how care should be valued as a discrete form and an implicit element of work. We take the concept of 'emotional labour' as a common starting point because it captures the complicated intersections between care/carelessness, labour, and commodification. Hochschild alerts us to the implications of attaching emotions to a wage, and many of our contributors explore what happens when care is subsumed within a productive economy. Moreover, they are concerned with the tensions and ambiguous overlaps between ethical and commodified forms of care work.

The first half of this double issue contains essays – by Stella Bolaki, Sarah Brouillette, John Macintosh, Emily Ridge, and Alexandra Peat – that foreground organizations, institutions and workplace infrastructures. Bolaki, Brouillette, and Macintosh observe the outsourcing of niche functions of care to low-paid service workers, casting a critical eye on what Bolaki refers to, via Rakhil Akkali, as the new business models for an 'emotion economy' (276–277). Her essay examines Leigh Stein's satirical send up of

wellness culture, *Self Care* (2020), incorporating discussion of the contradictions of self-care, digital forms of emotional labour, the beauty industry, and the racial blindspots of neo-liberal feminism. Similarly interested in visibility/invisibility and diversity within the creative economy, Brouillette makes a compelling case for the value of sensitivity reading as well as its emotional and financial costs. Shedding light on a hidden strand of editorial labour within the publishing industry, she reveals sensitivity reading to be both a site of exploitation and a mode of quiet activism. Macintosh analyses Catherine Lacey's speculative novel *The Answers* (2017), which depicts a highly educated yet economically vulnerable young woman who is hired to perform as an 'emotional girlfriend' to a celebrity whose various emotional and sexual needs are met by a selection of contracted service workers. Macintosh demonstrates how work enters into the realm of subjectivity, through the pervasive encroachments of managerial surveillance and surveillance technology. In delineating how Hochschild's work has been taken up, expanded and/or repurposed in popular discourse, he looks ahead to the absurd and dystopian apotheosis of the gig economy.

The texts considered by Ridge and Peat precede Hochschild's work; nevertheless, they trace the beginnings of affective capitalism in pre- and postwar workplaces and the increasingly contradictory imperatives of the modern care labourer. Ridge documents the ways that emotive discourses are used to galvanize and to regulate work forces after the Second World War. By the same token, as she observes, modern workforces themselves are shown to acquire fluency in a specialized language of emotional expertise. The novels she discusses – Muriel Spark's *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960) and Christine Brooke-Rose's *The Middlemen* (1961) – situate their explorations of feeling management within professional industries that are outwardly committed to the synthetic and the material. These novels not only depict characters who struggle to differentiate between authentic and inauthentic forms of feeling but also disrupt the categories of the material and the immaterial. Peat similarly points to the double-edged meanings of pastoral forms of care, but, in this case, through an account of female scholarly community in Dorothy L. Sayers's *Gaudy Night* (1935) and Barbara Pym's *No Fond Return of Love* (1961), two novels published at moments of significant educational reform. She argues that as these works depict women who are trying, failing, and re-trying to craft different ways of caring (of 'taking an interest') outside of the realms of the romantic and/or domestic, they afford insight into the complex role that care labour has long played, and continues to play, in academic and intellectual work.

The second half of the special issue presents five contributions – by Jahnavi Misra, Liam Connell, Evelyn T. Y. Chan, Danielle Philipps-Cunningham, and Eve Dunbar and Linta Varghese – which depart from the

defined bounds of the traditional workplace in order to offer insight into the interplay between the private self, the family and/or community, and public/professional identities. Misra, Connell, and Chan are concerned with economic, emotional, and bodily transgressions of and within the nuclear family. Misra's essay extends considerations of the conflict between domestic and professional spheres to a discussion of the posthuman as it posits Klara, the automated Artificial Friend (AF), who narrates Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021), as an emotional labourer. Fascinatingly poised somewhere between a pet, a domestic service worker, a companion, and a thing/belonging/toy, the AF dramatizes, as Misra writes, the 'tragedy of a contractual relationship in which one side is expected to provide deep care and genuine love while the other side is allowed to see it as being nothing more than emotional labour' in exchange for money (388). Above all, Misra is interested in rethinking feminine/ist theories of care in relation to the posthuman or the machine. Similarly concerned with feminist recalibrations of working practice, Connell reads several films about commercial surrogacy with an eye to the tensions between altruistic and commodified, physical and affective forms of care labour. He places contemporary 'surrogacy thrillers', such as *The Surrogate* (2013) and *The Surrogacy Trap* (2013), in conversation with earlier films such as *The Baby Makers* (1970), with a focus on the surrogate mother as both a prop for and a threat to the traditional family unit. Chan's interpretation of Chan Ho-Kei's speculative thriller *Second Sister* (2020) delves into the often under-studied negative aspects of emotional labour, considering characters who partake in not only dark but also affectless performances of emotion. The novel depicts Au Nga-Yee, a young librarian assistant, who hires the mysterious N to first investigate and then avenge her sister's death. The Hong Kong setting of the novel is a nexus for the encounter between confucian family values and neoliberal myths of social mobility, and for an exploration of the extension of so-called family commitments beyond blood ties. The essay's central concern with questions of value and compensation, monetary and otherwise, comes to the fore in a discussion of sacrifice which seems to eschew the capitalist marketplace but, the essay suggests, can remain problematically embroiled in it.

We end this special issue with two contributions which envision more redemptive and revolutionary engagements with the discourses surrounding emotional labour. Phillips-Cunningham's essay gives an overview of the important life and work of the early-twentieth-century educator and civil rights activist Nannie Helen Burroughs, who made a visionary intervention in evolving debates around Black women's labour in the US, by marshalling what Philipps-Cunningham terms (via Fannie Barrier Williams) a kind of 'organized anxiety'. She sought to elevate Black

women's domestic service as a meaningful profession in and of itself but also as a potentially powerful political site of resistance. Burroughs provocatively sits at the intersection of many different threads that are important to this special issue: professionalism, rethinking affective discourses, and revaluing emotional and care labour. Finally, we include a fascinating dialogue between Eve Dunbar and Linta Varghese that returns us to a contemporary context, opening up innovative ways of thinking about emotional labour in relation to institutional diversity and deftly weaving together intimate experiences and intellectual ideas. Dunbar and Varghese recount their creation of and participation in a 'sewing circle (of two)' (455), a circle that grants a temporary relief from their daily working lives as what they call 'diversity hires' in the current university eco-system. They demonstrate that, within such carefully-cultivated counterspaces, emotional labour can be re-conceived as something positive and sustaining, a way of pushing back against the emotional demands placed upon women of colour within white-dominated institutional structures and communities. This is a dialogue about preserving authentic feeling and friendship and creating strategies for doing so.

While Philipps-Cunningham, Dunbar and Varghese explicitly set out to formulate modes that might foster hope, creativity, and regeneration, all of our contributors are invested, to some degree, in preserving a sense of possibility when it comes to the affordances of emotional labour. Though so often shown to serve the interests of affective capitalism, emotional labour, as these contributions collectively reveal, can be re-purposed or subverted. One strategy of resistance and subversion, identified across the special issue, is enacted at the level of language, as writers reclaim the ambiguity of feeling words. Throughout *Discourses of Emotional Labour*, seemingly neutral words and phrases materialize and accrue multiple, ambivalent meanings: for example, Brouillette's 'sensitivity', Ridge's 'happy family', Peat's 'interest', Misra's 'friend', Chan's 'sacrifice', and Phillips-Cunningham's 'anxiety'. In such cases, words become untethered from an original meaning, usage or context. Feelings are equally found to become untethered from words. 'If language can be made to serve, why does suffering remain so elusive?' (2017: 35) Deborah Nelson asks in her book, *Tough Enough*, on unsentimental women's writing in the second half of the twentieth century. Nelson is referring to a specific aspect of the work of Simone Weil here, but her emphasis on the unstable relationship between the instrumentalization of language and the slipperiness of feeling describes a dynamic disjuncture that the authors of this special issue repeatedly spotlight too. Nelson sets out, more broadly, in her book, to complicate the 'bifurcated story' that is often told about cultural production in the decades after the Second World War during which time

the oppositional styles of 'authenticity and irony' came to be seen as 'dominant or characteristic' (7). As our contributors demonstrate, the discourses that emerged around emotional labour in the very same period further undercut that established and polarized narrative; after all, the labouring smile/grimace uncertainly hovers between the authentic and the ironic. The special issue sets out to offer new insights into such complex characterizations of feeling within the wider public domain, focussing particularly on what happens when feeling itself is put to work.

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