



# Vacillations of Affect: How to Reclaim 'Affect' for a Feminist-Materialist Critique of Capitalist Social Relations?

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper, I elaborate on the value of the notion of affect and the related concept of affective labour for a feminist-materialist critique. The core argument is that an affective conception of the relationship between subject and structure would allow for a constructive intervention into the definition of 'materialism' that builds the ground for any critical social theory, but remains unfinished in the Marxist tradition. For that purpose, it will however be necessary to develop the concept of affect beyond the common, decidedly a-political interpretations that are part of the New Materialist Feminism, as well as beyond the overly emphatic connotations that the post-Workerist tradition has attached to it with regards to its immeasurable characteristic that might allow for the creation a non-capitalist future from within our present.

**KEYWORDS:** Affective labour, materialist feminism, subjectivity, measure, Post-Marxism

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*'We want money, but capitalism knows, what's better for us: Love!  
Therefore I think: Love must be colder than capital.'*<sup>1</sup>

René Pollesch, 2009

The relationship between gender and capital is complex – and yet, it lies at the heart of any attempt to contribute to a materialist, emancipatory social theory today, which is committed to understanding the ways in which social relations are



exploitative, oppressive and cause pain and suffering to some more than others, whilst not losing sight of the question of what it might mean to overturn them. Looking back at the 1970s, second-wave materialist feminism attempted to think this link primarily through a critique of classical Marxist concepts, exposing their inability to account for the problem of patriarchy and the persisting sexual division of labour. The *Wages for Housework* campaign, for example, tried to counter this deficiency by putting on display the unpaid, invisible work of women in the home and as part of a family, which despite not paying for it, capitalism fundamentally relied on for the reproduction of its core resource: labour power.<sup>2</sup> Without wanting to either reduce materialist feminism to this specific theoretical moment, nor question the influence and importance of it for feminist activism and critique, past and present, we are today in a situation where we have to revisit and update the theoretical tools and reference points for a powerful feminist-materialist critique. Such an endeavour is bound up with the most fundamental question this critique can possibly face, namely what we are to understand by 'materialism' today after its Marxist grounds have been systematically deconstructed or at least rendered equivocal since the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> Into this definitional vacuum entered a 'new materialist feminism' (see for example Alaimo and Hekman 2008) born out of a critique of second- and third-wave feminism and their continuation of the binary between biological essentialism and social constructionism. This strand started from a specific interest in the materiality of the body and was influenced by Deleuzian theory, actor-network theory, as well as quantum physics. For its proponents, materialism takes on a much more literal meaning than it ever had for Marxism, where it worked first and foremost as that which avoids and counters the pitfalls of idealism (Balibar 1994, 91). New materialist feminism becomes attached to the aim of accounting for 'matter' as itself endowed with agency, which the previous, human-centred approaches to feminism ignored. It thereby does not so much respond directly to any previous definition of materialism, but instead reworks the one-sidedly discursive turn in feminist theory. Focused on the materiality of the female body and its interrelatedness, it challenges biologically deterministic ideas and thereby opens up a perspective in which 'the female body is no longer a stable ground defined by clear-cut reproductive capacities' (Chanter 2000, 266).

This paper aims to contribute to this contestation of how to think 'materiality' and contends that it is only by cutting across the dividing lines of the two material-

isms that we might be able to meet the need to complexify our categories in which we think 'social relationality' in accordance with contemporary capitalist reality. While there are many possible angles on this problem, of which certainly no single one will be exhaustive, the notion of 'affect' imposes itself as a valuable entry point that is, however, in need of conceptual clarification. Its different theoretical mobilisations, as an ontological concept and as an adjective for labour (affective labour) allow us to analyse the politico-analytical claims that are tied to a certain definition of affective materiality and its relevance for re-materialising feminist critique.

## The Concept of Affect in the Spinozist-Deleuzian Tradition

The notion of affect, especially as employed in Deleuzian feminist theory (see Colebrook and Buchanan 2000) provides first and foremost a theoretical tool for thinking subject formation differently (see Hemmings 2005, 550) – without making the subject with a specific identity the starting or end point of any argument or line of thought. Instead it traces the formation of subjectivity in its movement beyond or beside itself through constant processes of subjectification and resistance (see Sedgwick and Frank 2003, 8).

There is no denying, or deferring, affects. They are what make up life, and art ... Affects are ... the stuff that goes on beneath, beyond, even parallel to signification. But what can one say about affects? Indeed, what needs to be said about them? ... You cannot read affects, you can only experience them. (O'Sullivan 2001, 126; cited in Hemmings 2005, 548–549)

Affect is therefore something that a subject experiences, in which she is beyond knowledge and signification. For Brian Massumi, one of the leading thinkers of affect in a Spinozist-Deleuzian legacy, affect is the experiencing of changing intensity.

AFFECT/AFFECTION. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari). L'affect (Spinoza's affectus) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one ex-

periential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. L'affection (Spinoza's affectio) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include 'mental' or ideal bodies). (Massumi 2004, xiv)

In contrast to Arlie Hochschild's notion of a woman's 'managed heart', in which emotions and feelings are enacted or suppressed, a concept I will turn to further below, affect for Massumi works essentially against the line between head and heart, as completely non-linear, un-assimilable and un-directible, following no logic or order that is discernible from the subject's standpoint (see Massumi 2002, 25–27). Affect is therefore different from the personal and socially embedded emotions and feelings, which are intensities that are 'owned and recognized' (Massumi 2002, 28). At the same time, affect is the very condition for interaction as it opens up the body's vitality, whereas emotions aim at closure and at capturing the free-floating affects. In the same sense, Eric Shouse claims: 'you cannot invest in affect, only in the hope of being moved' (Shouse 2005).

In her auto-ethnographic analysis of the affective labour done by a waitress, Emma Dowling (2012), whilst acknowledging the important insights of Hochschild's analysis, supports the possibility and productivity of such a differentiation between emotion and affect in relation to the ways the waitress produces the 'dining experience'. For Dowling, it is not the management of emotions, but rather 'affective reconnaissance – instantaneous production and response –' (Dowling 2012, 111) that defines the work as a waitress.

I'm not simply on display. I create in you not just a state of mind, I create a feeling in your body, invoking or suppressing my own feelings in order to do so. What I produce is affect and that is the value of my work. Crucially, I can't do this on my own. I need you to be part of this process. I use my capacity to affect and your capacity to be affected, and vice versa too. You're not just on the receiving end ... we're in this together: adrift in the negotiation of our desires only to be hauled back by the complex power relations unfolding as we play, we are locked in a relationship ... (Dowling 2012, 110)

Thus, being attentive to the affective component within affective labour relationships means, firstly, to grasp the way that ‘forces of subjectivity [are] laced through with structural causality’ creating a messy mix of ‘attachment, self-continuity and the reproduction of life’ within a specific *material* scene of the present (Berlant 2011, 15; see also Steyerl 2010) that cannot be adequately captured by any form of dualism (structure – agency or subject – object), even a dialectical one. The scene in which affect is put to work is at the same time singular and relational (see Read 2013), there is no guarantee for a successful completion of the job and yet, the only way to succeed is through a momentary alignment of desires: ‘we’re in this together’. In Dowling’s example of the waitress, the product of her labour can no longer be described by the four forms of alienation – namely alienation from yourself, your co-workers, the product of your labour and society as a whole – that Karl Marx had identified in the 1844 Manuscripts under the concept of the ‘objectification’ of labour leading to the loss of the object (see Marx 1975, pp.322). Producing the dining experience demands investing labour time not only into an object that is external and thus, alien, to the worker’s needs and desires. Instead, desires are projected, maybe attached to an alien scene, in a non-unilateral way in which moments of estrangement are intertwined with a more positive attachment or attunement. As the opposite of a rational genesis, the affective genesis ‘cannot be projected from the labourer onto the “product”, – in this case the dining experience – but it only works if all parties are equally affected by their shared object of desire.’ (Balibar 1998, 110) ‘Affects ... do not require a subject as their addressee’ (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010, 13), and yet they constantly subject everyone who finds herself in an affective relationship or encounter to their energies.

## The Cruelty of Affect

In her critique of the overemphatic usage of the concept of affect, Lisa Blackman argues that ‘the complex processes of subject-constitution [...] induce both *becoming* and *becoming-stuck*’ (Blackman 2008, 47) and therefore importantly points to the ‘other’ side of affect, which Massumi, amongst others, seems to strategically under-emphasise. In order to draw attention to this second dimension of any affective encounter, in which the ‘hope of being moved’ (Shouse 2005) might

just as well turn into an unavoidable vulnerability, we need to interrogate more closely the specific relationship of bodies within space. Here, I ground my inquiry on Teresa Brennan's argument on the transmission of affect, in which she argues against a subject's self-containment: a subject is always open to the other's energies that are socially invoked and can have physical and biological effects, e.g. when entering a room. Affects are contagious (Brennan 2004, 68) and at the same time, they have the enormous power of 'the unexpected that throws us off balance, that unsettles us into becoming someone other than who we currently are' (Hemmings 2005, 549). Such an effect becomes extremely precarious in combination with an argument made by Clare Hemmings, which she develops on the basis of Sara Ahmed's examination of how Frantz Fanon sees his body through the fearful eyes of the white boy. Fanon describes his body as trembling of fear, which the boy however misrecognizes as 'shivering with rage'. Following Ahmed, the boy develops his fear of the black man based on misrecognition, because past histories stick to the present in the form of racial stereotypes. In her analysis of the effects of affect on subjectivities, Hemmings develops the claim that there is a similar 'heteronormative regulation' (Hemmings 2005, 560) of affect within space that works 'along racially defined lines' (Ahmed 2000) and, as I want to add here, also along lines defined by class and gender. This implies that affect is not as random, unpredictable and autonomous as Massumi likes to think, but that there is an 'affective trajectory' (Hemmings 2005, 564) to be taken into account that is actually able to shape not only the meaning of the social for the individual and her ability to act in the world, but also the perception that the individual has of her self.

Going down a similar path, Lauren Berlant (2011) identifies within our affective attachments no potential to develop a transgressive force, but an extremely violent promise, norm or fantasy of the 'good life'. This promise becomes violent precisely in circumstances where the conditions of possibility of its realisation are compromised, or plainly non-existent within our present; rather than helping us to go beyond the confines of the unequal and exploitative relationships we find ourselves in, our affective attachments are maintained in light of the illusion of a better future to come. Berlant calls this form of affective relationship 'cruel optimism' (Berlant 2011, 24), emphasising not the Marxian idea of the past weighing 'like a nightmare on the brains of the living' (Marx 1975b), but instead the 'weight

of the present' (Ashbery cited in Berlant 2011, 29) that needs to be equally taken into account in order to understand our contemporary condition.

It can provide a way to assess the disciplines of normativity in relation to the disorganized and disorganizing processes of labour, longing, memory, fantasy, grief, acting out, and sheer psychic creativity through which people constantly (consciously, unconsciously, dynamically) renegotiate the terms of reciprocity that contour their historical situation. (Berlant 2011, 53)

Thus, Berlant provides us with an entry point into understanding affective relationships as a very material aspect of our existence helping us to grasp our political impasses from the vantage point of a messy and yet 'shared historical time' (Berlant 2011, 15). However, we have not yet clarified how we might be able to conceptualise this present and its specific structures and processes that decide over whether and for whom a good life can be attained or not. The question is therefore not only how affect works ontologically, but, as the preceding discussion has brought to light, how is it 'put to work' within our late capitalist society and its corresponding subjectivities? How is affect made productive and for whom?

## Post-Fordism, Biopolitics & Affective Labour

The notion of *affective labour* is a rather recent conceptual invention that gained attention and importance especially through its prominent place in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's delineation of 'Empire' and its sites of potential resistance for the working class or the multitude (Hardt and Negri 2004; 2000). The discussion around the concept that finds its main ground in the work of the Italian post-Workerist Marxist tradition around Negri and Hardt, as well as around Paolo Virno and Maurizio Lazzarato, is built on two combined lines of thought (Diefenbach 2011).

The first line of thought starts from the Marxist debate around capital and its utilisation of the human labour force (see Marx 1976, 283). Following Katja Diefenbach, there are two tendencies in the early and late Marx that are maintained and merged in post-Workerism, which is the ontological idea of 'labour as self-generation' or 'creative vitality' taken from the Paris Manuscripts, combined with the 'historical-critical theses [...] on the socialisation of production' (Diefenbach

2011). But whereas the late Marx began his critique of the capitalist accumulation of wealth or the 'creation of value for value' (Fortunati 1995, 7) from the command of capital, especially in its generalised form, money, (see Negri 1991), Italian Workerism and post-Workerism take labour and its antagonistic position to capital as their starting point.

The only *use value*, therefore, which can form the opposite pole to capital is *labour (to be exact, value-creating, productive labour)*. (Marx, Grundrisse, cited in Negri 1991, 63; emphasis in original)

This reconceptualisation implies – against an orthodox value-theoretical interpretation of an economic law that ahistorically prefigures the relationality of capital and labour from the point of view of capital – that capital's power depends on and is thus limited by its relationship with labour as living labour from which it needs to extract surplus value in order to valorise itself (see Negri 1991, 58).

The specificity of the *post-Workerist* perspective is furthermore determined by an understanding of late-capitalist society as a post-Fordist society, which differs from a Fordist society in the forms of valorisation of capital, and thus the nature of work and the position of the working class vis-à-vis capital. Theorists like Lazzarato, Negri and Hardt describe the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist society as a transition in the nature of productive labour towards 'intellectual, immaterial, and communicative labour' starting in the 1970s (Hardt and Negri 2000, 29). Immaterial labour is characterised by the intangibility of its products and, more specifically, through producing 'first and foremost a social relation' (Lazzarato 1996, 142) – something that can only be co-created between worker and client and that potentially lasts far beyond the moment of its consumption. This mode of production as 'enriched to the level of complexity of human interaction' (Hardt and Negri 2000, 293) and immanently dependent on cooperation is supposed to create social networks and communities. '[T]he "raw material[s]" of immaterial labor is subjectivity as well as the "ideological" environment in which this subjectivity lives and reproduces' (Lazzarato 1996, 142), including language, communication and knowledge. Immaterial labour can then also be understood as capitalism's striving 'to find an unmediated way of establishing command over subjectivity itself', which explains a link between immaterial labour and 'precariousness, hyperex-

ploitation, mobility, and hierarchy' (Lazzarato 1996, 134–135). This development is also often referred to as the 'feminisation of work' as working conditions that have traditionally been associated with women's work are generalised throughout the post-Fordist economy (see Endnotes 2013).

For Hardt, Negri, and others, this implies that the classical Marxist theory of value, which argues that capital relies on the objective measurability of the value of labour through the invested, socially-necessary labour time, needs to be revised. In these newly emerging 'spaces of self-valorization' (Negri 2008, 21), capital becomes 'incapable of understanding the creative energy of labour' (Negri 2008, 20) and therefore can no longer account for and extract all the surplus value that is produced in the economy. What they therefore find in the post-Fordist forms of immaterial labour is an *immanent communist element*.

Because there is no value without exploitation. Communism is thus the destruction at the same time of the law of value, of value itself, of its capitalist or socialist variants. Communism is the destruction of exploitation and the emancipation of living labour. *Of non-labour*. That and it is enough. Simply. (Negri 1999, 83)

This new theory of value needs to be understood as closely linked to the Foucauldian argument that a new form of power entered the realm of the social in the nineteenth century called biopower. Foucault describes biopower as the moment when life itself in its abstractness, as 'bios', becomes the object of state control, and contrasts it to the still persisting earlier forms of control such as disciplinary control, in which life remained 'outside the contract' between the sovereign and the people (Foucault et al. 2003, 241). In parallel, Negri sees the new forms of labour as biopoliticised. This means that there is no more inside or outside of labour power from capitalist command, no more possibility of distinguishing between use and exchange value, or work and leisure: every act of economic production is at the same time a production of the social, which means in reversal that everything becomes productive (see Negri 1999, 80); using Marx's terminology, Negri calls this movement 'real subsumption'<sup>4</sup>.

In this entanglement of life made for production and production producing life, the new labouring practices supposedly also lead to the emergence of com-

pletely new forms of becoming-human, of subjectivities. And at the same time that 'exploitation can no longer be localised and quantified' (Hardt and Negri 2000, 209), those new, and foremost *collective*, subjectivities build a power of resistance against capital, a new 'potentia' 'from below' (Negri 1999, 78): affect.

In this paradoxical way, *labour becomes affect, or better, labour finds its value in affect, if affect is defined as the 'power to act' (Spinoza)*. The paradox can thus be reformulated in these terms: The more the theory of value loses its reference to the subject (measure was this reference as a basis of mediation and command), the more the value of labour resides in affect, that is, in living labour that is made autonomous in the capital relation, and expresses – through all the pores of singular and collective bodies – its power of self-valorization. (Negri 1999, 79–80; Emphasis in original)

Here, we find ourselves entering into the second line of thought, by which the Italian post-Workerists, indebted to Spinoza and Deleuze, inquire into the specific meaning and force of affect within the new forms of post-Fordist labour. In general, *affective labour* in Hardt and Negri is defined as a sub-category of immaterial labour, in which they see 'a unique alignment between the ontological possibilities of our being [following Spinoza's ontological category] and the activities comprising our economic life ...' (Federici 2011, 64; my insertion). The specificity of affective labour is the 'creation and manipulation of affect' in order to create 'a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement or passion' (Hardt and Negri 2000, 293), which is mostly achieved through virtual or actual human contact, mainly associated with kin work, care work, health services, the entertainment industry, and other kinds of services.<sup>5</sup> Beyond this characterization, affective labour remains, I would say, problematically underdeveloped within their writings.

What is new about affective labour that justifies its prominent discussion is not its mere existence in the labour market, as there have always been jobs that involved the production and manipulation of affects and emotions, but its newly acquired dominance as, according to Hardt, it produces the highest value for the current economic system (Hardt 1999, 97).

Following a Spinozist-Deleuzian legacy, for Hardt and Negri this production of affect that becomes the value of labour appears as a potentiality, a 'power to act'

(Negri 1999, 79) or 'potentia' beyond measure (see Anderson 2010), which limits capital to no more than a parasite that is trying, but not actually fully achieving to appropriate the creative forces of affective labour. This potentiality arises from affect's essential immeasurability, as always excessive and an 'expansive power' (Negri 1999, 77) that, in its limitlessness and autonomy is able to expose the very limits of the power of capital.

Against the backdrop of these, as well as Dowling's and others reflections on the nature of affective labour, we can conclude that a fundamental contribution of this debate that was very much initiated by Hardt and Negri is the re-affirmation that labour and life are much more intimately entangled than previous conceptions might have suggested. But rather than embracing too quickly the primacy of the production of social relations as a potential escape route from exploitation, we should try and subject Hardt and Negri's suggestions to the rigorous interrogation that they deserve. This means that we need to utilise the lens of affective labour in order to excavate the complex and constantly differing entanglements between the workings of capital and power within and on the labour process, on the worker's subjectivity and her social relations, which in a post-Fordist economy function on the basis of aligning strivings and desires that in past labour regimes might have been experienced as much more clear-cut, structural antagonisms.

## The Immeasurability Hypothesis

As Hardt and Negri have suggested, power that has become biopower needs to be understood in its direct relation to capital's struggle towards finding new, adequate forms of valorisation, which has one of its sites of struggle (and only one) in the field of affective labour. It is in this context that we need to re-assess their hypothesis that, whilst affective labour produces value for capital, it also always produces a form of excess, a form of life that remains outside of capital's reach and instead offers possibilities of the workers' self-valorisation, or 'commoning'. As Massimo de Angelis and David Harvie have shown, since the late 1970s, cognitive capitalism has, far from capitulating before the various forms of immaterial and affective value, started to race towards new and intensified forms of standardisation, quantification and surveillance of labour through what the authors call a

‘war over measure’ (De Angelis and Harvie 2009, 4), which results in an increasing commodification of the life sphere, including the sphere of social reproduction.

Through an interpretation of the Marxian category of ‘socially-necessary labour time’<sup>6</sup> as not only a past quantum of expended time in a factory, but as both ‘the result of past measuring processes and the present benchmark’ that workers are confronted with by management and other organisational surveillance mechanisms (De Angelis and Harvie 2009, 7), they show how the valorisation of affective and other immaterial values that are part of the labour process, but not necessarily directly visible or accountable for in the end product (see Dowling 2007, 128), can still be measured, commanded and transformed into value for capital.

In her study of the waitress as an affective labourer, Dowling shows in great detail how the affective part of her work is precisely prescribed, commanded, trained and evaluated by behavioural manuals, training sessions, different forms of assessment and importantly the wage relation itself that creates stimuli and performance-increasing hierarchies between the staff of the restaurant – even though the affective labour the waitress engages in remains ‘non attributive’ within the overall product (Dowling 2007, 121). Thus, Dowling helps us to grasp the force of capital, specifically in the context of a growing precarisation and immiseration of the work force more generally, that lies behind the various forms of mediation between affective relationships, subjectivities and power as immanent to the work process. The forms of mediation she describes succeed in overcoming the problems of immeasurability and instead focus on the perpetuation or intensified separation, isolation and inequalities between workers along gendered and racialised lines for the sake of economic value creation.<sup>7</sup>

Going back to Read’s work on a Spinozist critique of political economy, we can understand these new levels of indirect measure in a context of an increased sense of insecurity and precarity among workers as part of the fundamental structure of a post-Fordist or neoliberal affective composition of labour relations, which Read describes as ‘a regime of fear (tinged with hope)’ (Read 2013). Whilst an inquiry into specific affective labour processes, such as waitressing, then allows us to discern the ways in which this regime of fear and its war over measure is executed, it necessarily deconstructs the possibility of any simplistic assumptions about a primacy of self-valorisation as opposed to capitalist valorisation within affective labour environments in the sense Hardt and Negri suggest.

## Affective Labour as 'Women's Work' – Between Structure and Subject

Another important angle for the argument of this paper is to take into view the neglected element in Hardt and Negri's analysis, namely the fact that the female members of the work force are significantly over-represented in the sphere of affective labour compared to other non-affective occupations (Hochschild 2003, 171; see also Weeks 2004). Hardt and Negri and other theorists from the Italian autonomist or post-Workerist Marxist tradition only refer very marginally to the specific role of the female worker in affective labour occupations (Hardt and Negri 2000, 293; McRobbie 2010, 62). The most we know is that, whereas one facet of immaterial labour is importantly tied to informational services related to communication technologies, computing and analytical services more broadly, its other facet is affective labour, which, following Hardt, is best understood by feminist inquiries into 'women's work' (Hardt 1999, 95–96). It is therefore important to investigate what kind of jobs it implies, who the workers are and how its affective component plays out in the labour relation – something Hardt and Negri only peripherally engage in.

In parallel, there is a feminist critique of labour that is leery of the very notion of 'affective labour' and designates it as unhelpful or even damaging to the political struggles that they have been fighting around the question of work and capital's gendered structures of exploitation. For Silvia Federici (2011), Hardt and Negri's endeavour appears deeply problematic in the way in which they generalise affective labour as a condition of late-capitalist forms of work. Instead of emphasising the gendered dimension of affective labour, they engage in an 'un-gendering' discourse by emphasising 'the feminization of all work' (Federici 2011, 70), leaving once again the bulks of waged and unwaged reproductive work done by a majority of women all over the globe unproblematised, as if the feminist reconceptualisation of labour had not taken place. To underline, moreover, the implausibility of such a homogenisation in the forms and conditions of work on a global scale that Hardt and Negri envision based on Marx's concept of 'real subsumption', Federici emphasises the historical discontinuities that have been essential for the successful reproduction of capitalism, i.e. the fact that housework has never been industrialised (Federici 2011, 63; see also Federici 2012, 106).

Besides, the focus on affective labour blurs the lines of demarcation that feminists had established in order to achieve recognition of women's work specifically where it is unpaid or concentrated in reproductive rather than productive labour.<sup>8</sup> It follows that to introduce affective labour as a potentiality *because* it contains an element of non-labour within it does not sit easily with those lines of feminist critique, as it once again limits the focus on the paid work that women do – thereby moving backwards in the history of feminist struggle (see Federici 2011, Federici 2012, 97). Further, Hardt and Negri's emphasis on capital losing measure as its basis of mediation and command within affective labour contexts sounds less ground-breaking from those feminist viewpoints, aware that there have always existed different forms of domination for the waged and unwaged sphere, which has been precisely identified as part of capital's method of producing and reproducing the gender distinction (see Endnotes 2013). Thus, it remains to be seen if it will be possible to find a merit to the concept of affective labour that is indeed able to contribute something to existing feminist discourses around work.

What we need to bring together in this section is an understanding of the structural inequalities that women face in the labour market up to now, including their naturalised exclusion from it, which is tied to their responsibility to do unwaged work in the sphere of the home, and the effects that working in occupations that over-proportionally demand affective labour or 'labour in the bodily mode' (Hardt and Negri 2000, 293) has. Such occupations include caring labour, kin work, nurturing and maternal activities – or, in other words, the work of the nannies, sex workers, maids and flight attendants of this world. All these occupations have a primary affective component and are widely argued to be closely related to the 'natural' responsibility of women, which, in turn obscures the fact that the labelling of this type of labour as 'the labour of love' is precisely an instrument to hide the gendering that is part of this structural form of oppression, making those activities into 'non-labour'. I will therefore, in a first step, look at Arlie Hochschild's 'The Managed Heart' (2003) and emotional and affective processes at work in the realm of an area of classical waged labour, namely the work of flight attendants. Then I will explore, following Hochschild & Barbara Ehrenreich (2002), Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2007) as well as Susanne Schultz (2006), the role of affective labour in the field of reproduction and house-

work on a global scale, whose waged dimension is a recent and ambiguous component (see Federici 2012, 102).

In this part of the analysis, I will allow for an intermingling of the usage of the terms feeling, emotion and affect even though it partly contradicts a clear distinction that can be made between emotion and affect, as I have shown earlier. However, I suggest that especially Hochschild's analysis that focuses on emotions rather than affect undoubtedly offers an important ground for understanding the workings on subjectivity that we find within fields of affective labour and shows how close the relation between an emotional and an affective dimension within these forms of work is without becoming interchangeable (see Dowling 2012, 115). Blurring those dividing lines is furthermore justified by the aim of this section to unpack what Angela Mitropoulos calls 'the indistinction between intimacy and economy' (Mitropoulos 2012, 106) means for the female labour force in terms of the interrelation of new forms of exploitation and the formation of subjectivities. That also means that my interest in understanding the effects of capital's valorisation processes needs a certain openness towards the subjective and a-subjective forms of intimacy that are put to work.

Hochschild's argument as to why affective labour is a form of work to which women are more strongly subjected than men, and which is therefore gendered, vehemently rejects any form of a naturalising discourse and is instead based on the fundamental fact that women have been made into 'a subordinate social stratum' of society (Hochschild 2003, 163). This reduction implies that women are driven into affective labour jobs through a lack of other resources than their feelings and specifically their ability to 'be nice' and 'manage their heart', which they have learned through a specific childhood training as well as through a weaker status shield caused by their general subordination. For Hochschild, emotion is 'a bodily orientation to an imaginary act' (Hochschild 2003, 28), a signal function that enables individuals to know about the world, similar to seeing and hearing. Based on her empirical research, Hochschild comes to understand feelings not as biological organismic reactions, but as the outcome of 'attending to inner sensation in a given way' (Hochschild 2003, 27), making the management of our feelings a substantial part of what is felt in the first place rather than a slight 'tainting'. Her investigation focuses on the question of what happens to a subject when she does not only use, and more specifically, *manage* her emotions in the private sphere,

but when these emotions become a resource for sale. Thus, her characterisation of what Hardt and Negri call 'labour in the bodily mode' focuses primarily on the right of the employer 'to exercise a degree of control over the emotional activities of employees' (Hochschild 2003, 147).

Hochschild elaborates on this point by means of the example of flight attendants and bill collectors, which she sees as two opposite poles within the general forms of emotional labour, 'the toe and the heel of capitalism' (Hochschild 2003, 16): the flight attendants whose smiles and care are supposed to enhance the customers' experience, and the bill collectors whose aim is to entice fear and anger in the customers so that they feel pressured to balance out their open accounts. Emotional labour for Hochschild means that a subject increasingly starts to sell feelings or emotions that she does not genuinely have, or that, even to the contrary, she has to enact through the suppression of completely different feelings. In order to manage their feelings, the workers use the instruments of 'surface acting' and 'deep acting' (Hochschild 2003, 33). Whereas surface acting refers merely to an act of pretending and appearing in a certain way to the outside world, deep acting demands from the worker not only to deceive the 'other', the client, but also to deceive herself about her emotions, and thus about 'her real self'. By means of creating inner feelings through objectifying them in the 'learning process', this process of deep acting literally creates a new self by supposing an 'as if' against the reality. According to Hochschild, everyone applies this technique to a certain extent within private lives and private social roles, but it becomes extremely precarious with regard to self-estrangement and identity confusion when it enters the economic sphere of the labour market, where it is sold under the command of the employer and therefore ultimately of capital (Hochschild 2003, 132).

Transposing our investigation onto the global level, we can further identify what Hochschild and Ehrenreich refer to as 'a global heart transplant'. In this development, 'love and care become the new gold' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, 22; 26), namely a resource that cannot only, as in the case of the flight attendants, be artificially created, but also 'displace[d] or redirect[ed]' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, 23). In the cases that Hochschild and Ehrenreich illustrate under the headline 'Global Woman', the globalised good is the 'women's traditional role' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, 13). Essentially, it is love that is redirected from

the global South to the global North, as for example, from a mother's own child towards a child that she cares for as a nannie in a Western household in which the need for reproductive work has problematically persisted despite the revolution in women's possibilities for waged employment. This redirection seems to be induced by what Federici describes as 'near-zero-reproduction' zones that capital has created in the global South, i.e. the separation of large populations from their means of subsistence whilst neither supplying wage-labour opportunities nor (state) support for social reproduction. Under the law of exchange value, the time a nannie spends with another woman's child is worth more than the time she spends with her own child, having no (exchange) value and preventing her from investing her demanded 'loving' abilities towards productive activity (see also Rose 1983, 83). It is in this context that Schultz develops her critique of Hardt and Negri's obvious neglect of the persisting gender, race and class inequalities in the contemporary reconfiguration of production and reproduction, in which she sees a continuation of the structure of unwaged work in the work of reproduction on an international level, which is not questioned by the blurred boundaries that differentiate productive from reproductive work in the first place (Schultz 2006). Following Hochschild, Federici goes as far as to argue that what we observe in this dynamic is a global and permanent reproduction crisis that lies at the heart of capitalism's functioning (Federici 2012, 104).<sup>9</sup>

Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez's research (2007) gives us a more phenomenologically oriented perspective on the specific vulnerability of female migrant workers in affective labour occupations. In her study of migrants doing care and domestic work in European households,<sup>10</sup> Rodríguez identifies the moment of spatial closeness in which feelings of isolation and alienation of the worker, who very often does not speak the same language as the employer and does not belong to the same class, are confronted with an extreme relational intimacy within the space of the household as the centre of family life. Rodríguez notes a dissolution of boundaries between bodies and their affective binding-together through the work relationship, which then becomes more than that, namely a 'contribution to the production of life' (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2007, 16). She makes explicit that the spaces of affective labour as sites where not only economic, but also social relationships are produced and reproduced, create an extreme tension between affect, power and subjectivities.

Most notable here is not the fact that such a blurring of boundaries might be unlikely to happen outside of these spaces of affective labour, but that this blurring inside the household is taking place between the two subjects of employer and employee induced by the nature of the work, rather than willingly or consciously initiated by one of the individuals (see Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2007, 19). This means that, although what counts in order for the work task to be accomplished are affects, emotions and feelings in the abstract and not the individual that has these affects, emotions and feelings, there is always an encounter between bodies involved in which employer and employee (or flight attendant and passenger in Hochschild's example) 'articulate and negotiate their desires, needs and moments of identification and dis-identification' on an affective level (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2007, 21).

For Rodríguez, the household as one specific space of affective labour can be best described with Foucault's notion of 'heterotopia': a space 'by which we are drawn outside of ourselves' (Foucault 2000, 177). It points towards the ambiguity of the space that affective labour creates in which the potentiality of unexpected encounters that enable the renegotiation of power and subject relations go hand in hand with the fact that the latter usually starts from extremely unequal relations, putting one subject more at risk than another.

## Conclusion

My contention is here that Rodríguez does not go far enough with her critique and specifically that she falls behind the potential of the concept of affective labour for a feminist-materialist critique that I have tried to delineate by showing how it simultaneously operates on two, intertwined levels. Rodríguez emphasises the phenomenological aspect focusing on the problem of estrangement and alienation through emotional and affective impacts on or 'besides' the labourer's subjectivity. Her and Hochschild, taken in conjuncture with the earlier elaborations of affect's impact on subjectivities, have helped us to understand that to affect and to be affected or, in Hochschild's case, to endow emotions with exchange value necessarily involves that the worker, who is more likely female than male, puts herself at risk. The potential of transformation through affective attachments and relations always involves the possibility of getting hurt and of having

to cope with what Brennan calls ‘negative affects’ (Brennan 2004, 22). Another implication is the gendering potential of any affective encounter that hides behind what Hemmings identified as the heteronormativity of affect, which would then work precisely against any going beyond or besides of a subject and against Hardt and Negri’s vision of the emergence of new subjectivities. Instead, we would have to come to terms with the increasing reinforcement of existing lines of inequality on an affective level within the context of work. In Katie Weeks’ more general terms:

Gender is also produced and productive when personality is put to work. As Hochschild points out, personalities are gendered and that is part of their value to employers. (Weeks 2007, 9)

It is not only ‘the affective intensity associated with exploitation’ (Gibson-Graham, Resnick, and Wolff 2000, 14–15), but also the subjectivities of the workers in their becoming and their performativity within and against power that are constantly negotiated and contested within affective labour processes. If the very notion of affective labour does not encourage us to closely investigate these risks inherent in specific work spaces and interpersonal relationships – whose power effects the ‘affective turn’ importantly emphasised –, then it bears the danger of losing its theoretical and political meaning.

However, there is a second level of critique, which this paper has tried to excavate and which is key to making the notion of affective labour into a concept that is of use to a feminist-materialist approach. Taking Hardt and Negri’s developments as a *starting*, rather than an end point, affective labour allows for a structural analysis of the changing relation between capital and labour. We have seen how the production of life, of sociality and intimacy, is not merely a question of uncomfortably blurred boundaries or the worsening of a work-life balance against which we can demand more life and less working hours (Mitropoulos 2012, 174). This inquiry has foregrounded the heavily gendered character of affective labour, which includes paid and unpaid labour. Moreover, it has shown that the imposition of the need to work and to earn a wage allows capital to continue to create hierarchies, divisions and attachments within the work force that reproduces and reinforces the gender division of labour (see also Schneider 2013, 398).

Talking about 'affective' labour in this structural context now neatly allows for the integration of the first and second level, which challenges a purely structural account of 'the logic of gender' as for example Endnotes (2013) developed. Where they argue in their conclusion that 'the present moment allows us to see both our class-belonging and our gender-belonging as external constraints' (Endnotes 2013) that can be abolished, an approach via affective labour would not be as quick to affirm such an 'externality' of the gender-constraint. It will undoubtedly agree that there is nothing 'natural' to the gender category, and yet that does not mean that the subjects that have been formed in relation to it understand or experience it as a merely external constraint. In as far as there is no un-alienated form of life of which we could become conscious, there is also no straight-forward way of liberating our ways of existence and our 'selves' from the forces of subjectivation that infinitely expand within it, by treating it in a compartmentalised manner. Instead, the category of affect enables us to understand our shared material, ontological and epistemological investment in the capitalist present and might therefore be able to help us devise adequate political strategies for its contestation in search for a different life.

## Postscript: Affective Labour as Site of Struggle

But I want to shoot cold from the hip. And not supply with my life as value these endless reproductions of life. My identity as woman is really only a permanent production of disciplinary actions. [...] My revolt does not always need to become a self-sacrifice! Of course as a woman, that disgraces herself, I am the event. And your bad treatment is also the event. (Pollesch 2009, 179; 186)

If we can neither shoot cold from the hip as a character in René Pollesch's theatre play *Love is colder than capital* laments, nor rely on an ontological, subversive potential of the workings of affect in our labour relations, then how can a feminist-materialist politics be thought that takes the affective component within the capital – labour antagonism, which I argue remains intact even in the context of cognitive capitalism, into account? Angela Mitropolous suggests that maybe 'the oikos is haunted not by communism' (as Hardt and Negri make us believe), 'but by disaffection, a detachment from the oikonomic that signals attachments other-

wise and, for this reason, barely deciphered by conventional political analyses, but nevertheless distinctly uncanny' (Mitropoulos 2012, 175). Can we cause our affective compartments and conscious emotions to become even colder than capital has already rendered them? Pollesch's title of his play, *Love is colder than capital* is an adaptation of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film from 1969 entitled *Love is colder than death*. In both cases the description of love as 'colder' than capital / death can be understood as programmatic: Fassbinder and Pollesch portray love relations that are damaged by their social conditions (economic and political), filled with clichés that cause misery for the lovers and the suffocation of the relationships. And we learn from both works of art that these damaged love relations do in turn not exist besides capital or the police state or the political party, but on the inside of them and thus, need to be treated as such. However, Pollesch attaches a double meaning to the adjective 'cold', when he introduces the idea of 'shooting cold from the hip'. Here, cold stands in opposition to the *warm* love melodrama that the capitalist bourgeois society imposes on its subjects. Cold as the refusal not so much of not participating at all but of withdrawing the loving, emotional and affective capacities (as citizen-subject, loving wife or husband or affective labourer). 'But I want it cold' (Pollesch 2009, 187) could then be read as: if I have to participate at all, at least as a cold, passive object in which nothing is left to be loved or to love.

However, as Federici has shown in relation to reproductive work, the refusal of affective labour is not only complicated by an increasing dependency on the wage in times of a global crisis, austerity regimes and generalised privatisation of public services. In addition, affective labour, similar if not as exclusively as reproductive labour, has a double character as it not only reproduces labour power, but also life itself, the living individual that exists for the labour market as much as for the revolt against capital (Federici 2012, 99).<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, an important part of the collective struggle against affective labour is a refusal of its modes and demands as Hochschild depicts in relation to the smile strike of the flight attendants (Hochschild 2003, 127). Especially with the fact that women make up the majority within affective labour jobs, they can make the world experience how the various services they deliver would feel without the mothering, caring and smiling worker who delivers them. And even though Federici is worried that the category of affective labour could veil this important contradiction and inhibit the formation of pos-

sible alliances over what can be refused between 'mothers and children, teachers and students, nurses and patients' (Federici 2012, 100), it seems to be precisely an exposition of the intersection between feminist, postcolonial and anti-capitalist struggles within specific affective labour contexts that could prevent this problem.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> René Pollesch is a German author and theatre director, whose play *Liebe ist kälter als das Kapital* [Love is colder than capital] was first performed in Stuttgart, Germany in 2007. All quotations from his play are my translations.
- <sup>2</sup> See the essays by Margaret Benson, Selma James, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Christine Delphy and others in (Hennessy and Ingraham 1997).
- <sup>3</sup> While one could refer to all kinds of attempts that turned against Marxism in the wake of the crisis of French Marxism in the aftermath of '68 and the end of the regime of so-called 'actually existing socialism', I am referring here specifically to the attempts of Althusser and some of his students, who took this crisis seriously as a crisis of Marx's and Marxism's concepts and thus, started to interrogate his work for its internal limits and contradictions. It is from this perspective that Étienne Balibar has elaborated the instability of the category of 'materialism' in Marx and its relapses into idealism through a specific definition of the proletariat as universal subject, the unity of praxis and the teleology of history at its inside. The central conclusion from these deconstructive efforts for this paper is that it will not be enough for a feminist-materialist critique to aim to include women's work, paid or unpaid, into the labour-capital antagonism that Marx described. The question of what kind of subjects the capitalist social formation produces, how and to which end it produces them and with what kind of effects for the political struggle are just as central to a materialist approach to social theory.
- <sup>4</sup> See for a problematisation of Negri's use of the concept of 'real subsumption' Andres Saenz de Sicilia's talk entitled *Time & Subsumption*: <http://reificationofpersonsandpersonificationofthings.wordpress.com/2013/07/31/time-and-subsumption/>

- <sup>5</sup> The particular jobs usually summarized under the category of 'affective labour' will be discussed in the next section as there is an apparent relation between them and what is classically defined as women's work.
- <sup>6</sup> As I noted in a different context, the concept of 'socially necessary labour-time' lies at the core of Marx's value theory of labour, defined in *Capital Vol.1* as follows: 'Socially necessary labour-time is the labour-time required to produce any use-value under the condition of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society.' (Marx 1976, 129) Whereas there have been recent attempts to newly emphasise the crucial place of this concept in an understanding of Marx's theory (see e.g. Massimiliano Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities* (Leiden: Brill, 2013)), there is also an implicit danger of confusing 'socially necessary labour-time' with the embodied substance of concrete labour, which De Angelis and Harvie are certainly in danger of, when they use the concept in order to short-circuit between new forms of governing concrete forms of labour within cognitive capitalism and what that means for the theory of value (see Michael Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft Vom Wert: Die Marxsche Kritik Der Politischen Ökonomie Zwischen Wissenschaftlicher Revolution Und Klassischer Tradition* (Westfälisches Dampfboot 2001, pp.199). An alternative way of understanding the 'war over measure' might be via Jacques Rancière's concept of 'police'. Then the role of measurement within the overall becoming-commodity of knowledge would be to control and steer a process of normalisation of commodity production for economic valorisation, without conflating those two moments into one, This is however a debate, which demands a more exclusive discussion beyond this paper.
- <sup>7</sup> Dowling points towards the importance not to disaggregate affective and immaterial labour from the often equally necessary material, physical labour for producing the final commodity such as a 'dining experience', which requires to then question hierarchies and inequalities between the different forms of labour going into the same product. (See Dowling 2007, 129)
- <sup>8</sup> For a feminist critique of the duality of value in Marx as neglecting or rather obscuring the exchange value of reproduction and housework as non-value through naturalization, see Fortunati 1995. For the contemporary debate and its relation to the earlier 70s Marxist-Feminist discourse, see also [http://www.commoner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/commoner\\_issue-15.pdf](http://www.commoner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/commoner_issue-15.pdf). It also needs to be borne in mind that the distinction between productive and reproductive labour is itself subjected to critique regarding its adequacy in the contemporary capitalist regime, where both forms become less and less distinguishable, not only from the post-Workerist perspective (Weeks 2011, 140), but also from a contemporary structuralist account as for example Endnotes develops it (Endnotes 2013).
- <sup>9</sup> See for a deepening of the debate around the global restructuring of reproductive labour as part of a specific phase within capital accumulation the writings and edited works by Mariarosa and Giovanna F. Dalla Costa (Costa and Costa 1995; Costa and Costa 1999).
- <sup>10</sup> Her fieldwork was conducted in households in Spain, Germany, Austria and the UK. (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010, 2)

- <sup>11</sup> See also a recent interview with Federici published on Mute: <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/permanent-reproductive-crisis-interview-silvia-federici>

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