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# Affective Labor, Resistance, and the Academic Librarian

LISA SŁONIOWSKI

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## ABSTRACT

The affective turn in the humanities and social sciences seeks to theorize the social through examining spheres of experience, particularly bodily experience and the emotions, not typically explored in dominant theoretical paradigms of the twentieth century. Affective or immaterial labor is work that is intended to produce or alter emotional experiences in people. Although it has a long history, affective labor has been of increasing importance to modern economies since the nineteenth century. This paper will explore the gendered dimensions of affective labor and offer a feminist reading of the production of academic subjectivities through affective labor by specifically examining the pink-collar immaterial labor of academic reference and liaison librarians. It will end by exploring how the work of the academic librarian may also productively subvert the neoliberal goals of the corporate university.

## INTRODUCTION

Feminist theorists have long been concerned with questions of labor. What constitutes “women’s work,” and how did labor come to be gendered? What are the social divisions of labor, and what are the economic and political implications of such divisions? This paper will focus on feminist theoretical reflections regarding the gendered dimensions of immaterial and affective labor in response to Marxism and Autonomist formulations of those terms, and also attempt to apply these reflections to the work of academic librarians in the twenty-first century. First, I will examine the Marxist conception of immaterial labor and then turn to socialist feminist objections to the ways in which domestic labor is cast as unproductive and almost invisible in this formulation of work. Finally, the workplace of the

university itself provides a case study for the gendered immaterialization of labor.

My interest in this topic emerged one day at my own library workplace, where, instead of spending the day clearing away my to-do list of concrete tasks, I spent most of it dealing with other people's emotions. First, in the morning, I worked for quite a long time with a student at the reference desk who was in tears over her assignment that was due the next day. Then, later in the afternoon, I had lengthy encounters with two different colleagues, one dealing with a workplace issue, and the other dealing with an unrelated personal problem. All three people needed support and encouragement in the midst of their respective small crises. When I arrived at home that evening I felt exhausted, and I also felt guilty because I hadn't "done anything" that day. By contrast, my colleague over in the digital services side of the library proudly announced he had batch ingested over 1,000 objects into our university library's new digital repository that very same day. What did I have to show for my time? Around that same time period, another colleague posed a seemingly unrelated question to one of our internal listservs, asking why academic librarians with active research agendas were (in her opinion) so embarrassed to just be librarians, why they felt research was more distinguished work—was it because librarianship was traditionally a women's profession and research more the domain of men and hence considered more prestigious? What was wrong with focusing on providing traditional library services like reference help, collection management, and teaching?

As a librarian with a reasonably active research agenda who is currently pursuing a PhD with a focus on theorizing feminist archives and collections, the latter question really struck me. Was I internalizing sexism in diverging from a more traditional librarianship role? What is the proper and historical labor of librarians anyway? What constitutes "doing something?" A quick review of library literature reveals that research agendas are not new to us—librarians have been writing and publishing for a long time in a variety of formats and publication venues. In fact, arguably, librarianship changed scope towards the practical when professionalized by Melvil Dewey in the late nineteenth century. As Dee Garrison (1972) discovered, Dewey argued that librarianship had to become firmly established as a woman's profession, for who else would work for such low pay and do such routinized work (p. 132)? Her important article on libraries as domestic spheres also emphasizes the turn to feminize librarianship as a sort of housewifely role in the late nineteenth century, where women librarians were hired to create welcoming spaces and offer patrons gentle guidance toward edifying and educative literature. It would seem that the so-called traditional librarian roles of teaching, research help, and collections management were in fact tied to a gendered circumscription of the

role as libraries emerged as publicly available entities in the late Victorian period in the Western world. The purpose of these libraries were largely about helping the working class attain social mobility, and, as Garrison (1972) describes it, “tender technicians” were required to help them in their journey (p. 131).<sup>1</sup>

Modern formulations of the academic library followed suit, with a significant gender distinction in wages and prestige created between faculty and librarians. Librarians were considered support staff, subservient to the scholarly and pedagogical output of the faculty, despite the fact that much of the work of faculty and students, particularly in social science and humanities fields, relied upon the collection building and research help of librarians (Coker et al., 2010). As we will see later in this paper, one can make a parallel here with the domestic labor debates between doctrinaire Marxists and socialist feminists over the value of different kinds of labor. It was a long struggle for librarians to become accepted as members of faculty associations, and in some places they still bargain independently of faculty.<sup>2</sup> Thus, an argument for a more robust understanding of the librarian’s role and potential research contributions in academe challenges the Dewey-imposed ceiling on our work rather than reinscribing sexist disdain for the service work of librarians. But still this question remains—is the traditional affective work of the librarian of the last one hundred years not important? Does it not serve a unique purpose on a university campus, and is that purpose still unrecognized and undervalued? Why? What about all those people in my office in tears? What about all the careful tending that goes into developing and maintaining research collections that scholars then use to generate more scholarship? How do such activities fit into an analysis of our labor? The final section of this paper offers an exploration of the waged affective labor of academic reference librarians in the university.

In placing the existential crises the profession faces in the context of wider feminist debates and theorizing about labor, I hope to underscore the value of librarianship to both the digital age and the university campus. In other words, this exploration serves a broader purpose than reassuring librarians that their work is important—although such reassurance is by no means frivolous. More importantly, however, in identifying the often unrecognized or unproblematized affective work of academic librarians in knowledge production and education, we can also analyze the overarching production culture of knowledge work from new angles. A feminist reading of academic labor that points to the production of academic subjectivities and human capital in neoliberal institutions of higher learning and that acknowledges dependence on the often invisible pink-collar labor of academic librarians in these production processes is a curious gap in the literature that this article will begin to address.

## MARXIST FEMINISM AND SOCIALIST FEMINISM

The first feminist interventions in the theoretical conversations about immaterial labor came in response to the work of Karl Marx. Feminists responded to Marxist distinctions between productive labor that creates surplus value and unproductive or immaterial labor—such as housework or childcare. Challenges arose over the implication that the labor needed to create market commodities and wealth is the only form of “productive” work in capitalism. The domestic labor debates of the 1970s and 1980s emerged from this tension. Marxist feminists and feminist socialists sought to correct Marxist views by pointing to the importance of unpaid reproductive and domestic labor in capitalist societies (Mann, 2012, p. 132). This body of feminist work asks us to rethink what constitutes labor and the notion of the role of the household in social reproduction (Mann, 2012, p. 135). A core question concerned whether domestic labor operated inside or outside capitalist production (Weeks, 2007, p. 235). Marxist and socialist feminisms saw the distinction between “production for use” versus “production for value” as key to forming the structural basis of inequality for women in society because production for use, for example, housework, “is unpaid labor and provides no basis for women’s independence” (Mann, 2012, p. 133). Such labor is also isolating, allows for no specialization of skills as housewives are expected to be equally good at a range of diverse tasks, and women are expected to be always available for work that has no beginning and no end (Mann, 2012, p. 133). Marxist feminists argued that women’s unpaid labor neatly served the profit-making desires of capitalism and that women were dominated and exploited by this economic system. Socialist feminists, on the other hand, argued that gender and class were interlocking systems of oppression and that women were doubly oppressed by both capitalism and patriarchy (Mann, 2012, p. 134). Both groups focused on women’s role in the social reproduction of labor power through childbearing and childrearing and housework, and usefully argued that women were producing and reproducing commodity labor power, which is “the most valuable commodity under capitalism because it produces surplus value” (Mann, 2012, p. 135).

If domestic labor is a critical form of production, then it becomes important to define the constituent elements of immaterial labor in the domestic realm, such as “education, communication, information, knowledge, organization, amusement/entertainment, and specifically, the supply of love, affection and sex” (Fortunati, 2007, p. 146). Rethinking the supply of love as a form of labor is in itself a particularly subversive political and theoretical move. It should also be noted, for those readers interested in the possibility of capitalist resistance, that affective labor was long understood in certain feminist traditions as fundamental both to contemporary models of exploitation and to the possibility of their subversion (Weeks, 2007, p. 233). Various critiques of the domestic labor debates and Marxist

and socialist feminist approaches to labor have been offered. Kathi Weeks (2007) suggests, for instance, in her article "Life within and against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics," that these formulations privilege housework over other forms of affective labor and are locked inside a logic of dual systems (private/public spheres) (p. 238). She also suggests that the differences in laboring practices between occupations, and the subjectivities that might be developed as a result of such practices, were grafted by later socialist feminist standpoint theorists onto a problematic logic of separate spheres that tries to locate an epistemology or ontology of women's work. This grafting ultimately replicated a binary two-gender system that serves to essentialize gender identity (Weeks, 2007, p. 237). Weeks (2007) also suggests that socialist feminist political economy analyses hit a theoretical wall because they didn't adequately register the transition from Fordist to post-Fordist modes of production, wherein immaterial labor becomes increasingly prevalent and arguably valorized in social and economic structures (p. 238). This last claim is problematic, as she seems to ignore more recent work from feminist thinkers posing important questions about the gendered division of labor in post-Fordist societies.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless she is correct that post-Fordist modes of production demand that we examine the gender divisions of material and immaterial labor more carefully and in new ways.

In relation to contemporary academic librarianship, particularly the work of reference and liaison librarians, we can see some parallels. While academic departments and the faculty within them are understood to be revenue generating by producing surplus value in the form of attracting students to the university, libraries are often understood as expensive cost centers. The work of librarians in supporting faculty research, teaching information literacy skills to students, and building and maintaining collections is undervalued, as evidenced by the low profile librarians have on most campuses and by the ways in which the operational budgets of libraries are continually under siege (Kniffel, 2009). The socialist feminist tendency to glorify women's work and essentialize gender is also occasionally prevalent inside librarianship as demonstrated by the anecdote of my colleague's defense of traditional library roles earlier in this paper as well as outside of the profession in the frustratingly enduring stereotypes of librarians.<sup>4</sup> The question of post-Fordist modes of production is interesting as well, as most growth in libraries has come in the areas of digital services—digitization units, digital collections management roles, digital assets management positions, digital repository managers, to name just a few. The immaterial labor of digital librarians is thus increasingly prevalent and arguably valorized as the future of librarianship in many library strategic planning documents, hiring practices, library conferences, and librarian networks. It would be interesting to examine in more detail the demographic make-up of digital librarians—but it would seem that this

is where the bulk of male librarians hang out (Tennant, 2006). Without replicating the binary system that limits our discussions to essentialist defenses of “women’s work”—we must nonetheless acknowledge that certain forms of affective and immaterial labor are privileged and prioritized more than others in libraries, and that gender certainly plays at least a partial role in this process. As we shall see, this trend is typical of the post-Fordist workplace.

### AUTONOMISM AND IMMATERIAL LABOR

The concept of immaterial and affective labor in post-Fordist economies is most often traced to the work of a group of thinkers called the Autonomists whose work focuses on the biopolitical power of global networks and alliances in the “multitude.” While a number of Autonomists have written on immaterial labor, for the purposes of this paper I will focus on Hardt and Negri, who argue in *Empire* (2000) that immaterial labor is increasing, dominant in post-Fordist modes of production, and based on the continual exchange of information and knowledges. Such exchange also includes an emphasis on the manipulation of affect and human proximity in order to produce powerful social networks. In Hardt’s essay “Affective Labor” (1999), he more specifically suggests it is “better understood by beginning from what feminist analyses of ‘women’s work’ have called ‘labor in the bodily mode.’ Caring labor is certainly entirely immersed in the corporeal, the somatic, but the affects it produces are nonetheless immaterial. What affective labor produces are social networks, forms of community, biopower” (p. 96).

Hardt (1999) further argues that the existence of immaterial labor is not new, but the extent to which it has been generalized throughout the whole economy and has achieved a dominant position in the contemporary, post-Fordist, informational society is unique (p. 97). Nonetheless, he recognizes gender and race divisions within forms of affective labor and the fact that lower value affective work is outsourced to developing countries (p. 97). He suggests that clarifying unequal and oppressive divisions of labor within immaterial labor is critical. He identifies three types of immaterial labor that drive the service sector at the top of the informational economy: the informationalization of industrial processes; analytical and symbolic tasks versus routine symbolic tasks; and, lastly, the production and manipulation of affects that requires virtual or actual human contact or proximity (pp. 97–98). He recognizes affective labor as critical to the production of collective subjectivities, sociality, and subjectivity itself and sees the product of affective labor as a Wittgensteinian “form of life” itself, hinting at affect’s reproductive capacities or, as he calls it, biopolitical production, or biopower from below (p. 98). In short, Hardt sees affective labor as the place where the boundary between productive and reproductive labor breaks down. He does caution, however, against celebrat-

ing maternal work in ways that reinforce the gendered division of labor and traditionally oppressive familial structures (p. 100). Notably, he does not draw on the important body of feminist literature on subjectivity and intersubjectivity, or collectivity, consensus, and coalition building in his writing, and while he acknowledges feminist lineages, many of the feminist thinkers we discuss later in this paper criticize him for not delving deeply enough into that work.

An Autonomist reading of contemporary librarianship will be offered later in this paper, but suffice it say that there is something deeply relevant here to the ways in which academic librarians work. Our immaterial labor of collecting, organizing, preserving, and digitizing scholarly and creative works that are then used to generate further scholarly and creative works is both productive and reproductive. We “batch ingest,” and we circulate too. In addition, the affective labor of our student support work, which is used largely to help students develop the academic subjectivities needed to earn their degrees and in some cases perhaps go on to become scholars themselves, are reproductive in their own right if not generally recognized or valued in university retention assessment schemes and mechanisms.

The next two sections of this paper will explore feminist responses to the Autonomists’ thoughts on immaterial labor that have been especially critical of the ways in which gender has been “added on” to the theory without adequate explorations of gendered forms of domination and oppression. Some have attacked what they see as a problematic dualism, how mind work is privileged over emotional work, as if care work had no intellectual components. Others have pointed to the materiality of care work and the ways in which embodiment is actually ignored in Hardt and Negri’s work, while other feminists are concerned that the Autonomists reduce “women’s” work *only* to the body. The implications of the outsourcing of domestic labor to migrant communities of women needs further exploration, as do the ways in which information technologies impact domestic labor—as several of the theorists examined below are sceptical of Hardt’s idealism in relation to these new social networks and forms of production. Many have pointed out the ways in which the feminist lineages of the concept have been ignored in current debates. We will examine these criticisms in more depth and separate existing feminist critiques into two broad theoretical categories, that of socialist feminist perspectives and poststructuralist feminist positionings. We will also examine some relevant formulations that emerge from the sociology of emotions.

### SOCIALIST FEMINIST CRITIQUES OF AUTONOMISM

First we will look at the work of Suzanne Schultz, who, in her essay, “Dissolved Boundaries and ‘Affective Labor’: On the Disappearance of Reproductive Labor and Feminist Critique in Empire” (2006), has offered a powerful feminist critique of Hardt and Negri. She takes exception to



what she sees as their gendered definition of emotional or affective labor that maintains the dualism of separate spheres; argues that, instead, affective labor involves strategizing and problem solving; and also points out that emotional work is also mental work (p. 79). Schultz also suggests that Hardt and Negri present affective labor as nonobjectified and noninstrumental and disputes their idealism, countering that one does not find an egalitarian paradise inside social networks, virtual or physical (p. 79). Such a claim overly idealizes women's work as spheres free from domination and exploitation in her view. She also disputes the way that Hardt, in particular, looks at the disappearing boundary between productive and reproductive labor, noting that women still do the bulk of care work in the home and take longer maternity and parental leaves. According to Schultz, "In this sense, the convergence model of production and reproduction reflects less the reality of labor relations than an increasingly hegemonic image of female subjectivity, where reproductive labor disappears into the holes and gaps of the patchwork that is the neoliberal working day" (p. 81). She also notes that while the delegation of reproductive labor to underprivileged women, particularly migrant women, is an example of the displacement of the boundaries between productive and reproductive labor, "the thesis of a shrinking divide between production and reproduction appears absurd when one thinks of the neoliberal cutbacks to public services such as kindergartens and health care, which (re)privatize reproductive labor and force unpaid women to pick up the slack in the system" (p. 81). She thus concludes that because *Empire* (Hart & Negri, 2000) offers no basis for a critique of the political economy of gender regimes, its subversive claims for the potential of biopolitical resistance fail.

Like Schultz, Leopoldina Fortunati (2007) also notes the way that the autonomists and other political economists valorize certain kinds of immaterial labor over others. In "Immaterial Labor and its Machinization," she argues that "the overall consequence of their discourse is that women again risk being reduced to the body" (p. 147). In her reflections on the concept of immaterial labor, she notes its overall growth and examines the increase in immaterial labor in the domestic sphere specifically as a consequence of the increase in old and new media (p. 153). Fortunati's view is that the domestic labor arguments have been put to rest as most recognize domestic work as productive labor able to create surplus value. Now, the larger issue for feminists and others is to examine how the immaterial labor of the domestic sphere has changed. She suggests the following:

The time saved through the diffusion and adoption of domestic appliances has been filled up by an increasing labor of housework organization and planning, micro-coordination of the various family members and their personal schedules and commitments, planning of children's transportation, the logistics of the flows of goods and people within

the house, knowledge and information activity aimed at the development of “informed” housewives/workers, and the adoption and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in order to remove the human body from education, communication, information, entertainment and other immaterial aspects of domestic labor. (p. 147)

Such new elements of domestic labor are integral to the post-Fordist desire for the production of human capital with skill sets suited to the manipulation of information and technology as well as being important mechanisms of social control that encourage the consumption of new commodities like cell phones, tablets, and handheld gaming devices in the domestic sphere. One can see parallels in librarianship with the increasing emphasis on uncritically oriented makerspaces as well as technology training approaches to information literacy.

Simultaneously, in the production of material goods, precarious labor and the intensification of the working day has increased along with immaterial labor. “Immaterial labor has become productive for capital in a way that signals a wider phenomenon which is the exporting of the logic and structure of the domestic sphere to the world of goods, which always ends up resembling and being assimilated to the reproductive world” (Fortunati, 2007, pp. 147–148). In pointing to the relationships between the public and domestic spheres, Fortunati also draws attention to the integrated and inseparable nature of the dual spheres and systems of analysis from a perspective more attentive to domination and oppression than that of the Autonomists. For librarians, then, the traditional reproductive affective work of teaching, research help, and collections management is increasingly eroded by the need for librarians to develop deeper skill in manipulating and preserving digital objects. However, effective manipulations also require a sense of the affective behaviors and needs of academic users when approaching online collections. While it might seem easy at first to distinguish between different librarian organizational silos, the reality is that our work deeply impacts and shapes one another—as is evidenced in our many committee and listserv battles over how best to approach our work. Our tenure structures also require us to evaluate one another. Nonetheless, certain forms of digital immaterial labor are valorized as mind work over the emotion work of liaison librarians, and such valorizations have their roots in gendered divisions of labor. Ironically, however, outside of librarianship in digital humanities and related fields, the contributions of digital librarians are often misconstrued and devalued as service work (Shirazi, 2014).

In their essay, “Gender at Work: Canadian Feminist Political Economy Since 1988” (1996), Meg Luxton and Heather Maroney also point to this complex integration of spheres and inform us that the best contemporary feminist work now recognizes

a complex interplay of capital accumulation, labor markets, state policies (especially regarding public-service funding and employment legislation), reproduction of labor power in daily and generational cycles, family household demographics, forms of organization and divisions of labor, and workplace, trade-union, and political organizing by workers. (p. 92)

They note that it is women who “mediate the contradictions between the two production processes and locations. Gendered relationships and subjectivities are produced in the labor force as well as through ‘socialization’ in families or educational institutions” (p. 92). Analyses that challenge the boundaries between the reproductive and productive spheres align with Hardt and Negri’s belief that the boundaries are dissolving, however, feminist analyses demonstrate that such dissolution does not necessarily offer emancipatory opportunities for women inside capitalist and patriarchal systems.

As this paper demonstrates, socialist feminist critiques of Autonomist conceptions of immaterial labor focus on the ways in which previous feminist work has been largely ignored, how emotional labor and care work is not valorized as highly as intellectual immaterial labor, and how the dissolving boundaries between the productive and reproductive sphere reinscribe all manner of exploitation and oppression of women. Although I did not focus specifically on this issue in this section of the paper, it is important to note that all three of the studies examined above also discuss the social implications of the ways in which affective labor and care work is increasingly delegated to racialized migrant communities, offering an important intersectional analysis of post-Fordist economies. These theoretical and political interventions in the conversation around immaterial labor are important to any conversation around twenty-first century labor. However, lessons gleaned from poststructuralist formulations suggest that perhaps the theoretical perspectives of socialist feminists could also be improved by an examination of the regulatory regimes of heteronormativity in their explorations of the domestic sphere, and should pay deeper attention to cultural, symbolic, and discursive forms as mechanisms of oppression that are as powerful as the political economic structures that work to devalorize work amongst certain social groups.

### POSTSTRUCTURALIST FEMINIST CRITIQUES AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF EMOTION

Poststructuralist feminist thinkers share certain concerns with socialist feminists, particularly in regards to their suspicions around the ways in which the Autonomists undertheorize the gendered dimensions of affective labor, assume social networks are egalitarian, and do not adequately consider the ways in which the affective labor of the private sphere has been outsourced to migrant racialized women. Their work deviates from

socialist feminism, however, in a deeper attention to embodiment, subjectivity and intersubjectivity, heteronormativity, issues of cultural representation, and queer political economies. For example, the poststructuralist scholars Drucilla Barker (2012) and Monique Lanoix (2013) respectively pay attention in their work to rethinking representations and discourses of child care and health care workers and the sacredness of the heteronormative family, the essentializing of women and gender identity, as well as to the materiality of the body and the relations such materiality produces. These additions are useful interventions in the conversation around affective labor. Their attempts to think of new forms of experience and relationality that do not trap people inside a limiting domestic sphere and offer potential spaces of resistance is also shared by the poststructuralist, post-Marxist scholar Kathi Weeks in her exploration of Arlie Hochschild's work in the sociology of emotion. Because this paper attempts to specifically focus upon feminist debates with the Autonomists, I have not directly engaged a large body of literature on the sociology of emotion that is relevant to affective labor as a concept. Feminist conversations in that arena could form the bulk of an entirely separate paper, and space does not allow for a full exploration. However, the early work of Arlie Hochschild is particularly germane to this paper, and so we will approach her text, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, via the useful critique of her work by Kathi Weeks in "Life Within and Against Work" (2007).

Weeks (2007), as mentioned earlier in this paper, offers an explanation of the feminist lineages of the concept of affective labor—which has long been understood in certain feminist traditions as fundamental both to contemporary models of exploitation and to the possibility of their subversion (p. 233). She critiques the Autonomists for largely ignoring these lineages. Additionally, she argues that socialist feminist analyses hit a conceptual wall because they didn't adequately register the transition from Fordist to post-Fordist economies (p. 238). She points instead to Arlie Hochschild's analyses of postindustrial labor as a more useful feminist text for an examination of waged affective labor and the social consequences of the rise of immaterial labor.

Hochschild's work suggests the postindustrial era requires a new and sometimes harmful commodification of laboring subject through the transmutation of private emotional work to public emotional labor. She argues that active emotional labor is both a skillful activity and a practice that helps form one's subjectivity. It is also the case for Hochschild (2003) that "in processing people the product is a state of mind," which indicates the ways in which affective labor is co-opted by capitalism as a manipulative force (p. 6). The affective labor needed to sustain social relations of cooperation and civility and to strategically manage emotions for social effect is also an everyday practice that, since it is traditionally privatized

and feminized, is not recognized or valued as labor (Hochschild, 2003, p. 167). Such labor becomes a kind of shadow labor in the post-Fordist economy.<sup>5</sup> There is also a human cost, as Hochschild suggests, we “risk losing the signal function of feeling or the signal function of display when emotional work is transmitted to labor . . . the commercial distortion of a managed heart has a human cost (p. 22). She notes that service jobs are largely performed by women and argues that gender is both produced and productive when personality is harnessed for the workplace. Hochschild acknowledges that all societies require the use and management of feeling, but she argues that the use of emotional labor in capitalist economies correlates to an estranging, sexist, colonization of life by work.

While Weeks (2007) sees Hochschild’s analyses as offering important new questions, she does challenge the ways in which Hochschild relies on “both a site of unalienated labor and a model of the self prior to its alienation” to animate her critiques (p. 243). She warns us that there is no way of identifying some “kind of spatial or ontological position of exteriority” (p. 245). In other words, there is no outside; there is no heart that was never managed. She notes that Hochschild herself questions whether there is such a thing as an unmanaged heart. Weeks indicates that such claims to exteriority undermine Hochschild’s argument by relying on nostalgia and an essentialist view of the self that ends up reproducing the logic of dual spheres. Nonetheless, Weeks argues that the critique of work as a mode of subjectification must be a feminist project, and suggests that looking at the genealogies of feminist theories on affective labor offers us clarity in our current situation. She notes that “once the model of separate spheres is rendered finally unsustainable the problem is how to develop a politics in the absence of an outside in which to stand” (p. 245). Hence she asks what if, instead of discussing home and work as separate spheres, we talked about life and work, to critique the post-Fordist organization of labor? If these two categories are indistinguishable, then life could offer an immanent critique of work. However, another political project remains, to register and challenge the gendered organization of labor. The gendered hierarchies and divisions of labor within both work and life must be contested and made visible (Weeks, 2007, p. 247). An emphasis on subjectivity, as it is produced and gendered in the workplace, with a focus on the potentially liberatory project of collectively inventing new subjects, allows for the expression of feminist political desire that does not reinscribe gender identity.

The preceding review of feminist responses to Marxist and Autonomist formulations of affective labor identifies a series of key themes and pre-occupations echoing through the literature. Core concerns include the ways in which the gendered and racialized divisions of immaterial and affective labor in both Marxist and Autonomist texts have been treated superficially, how emotional labor is productive of subjectivity and can

also damage and exhaust the laborer, and how heteronormativity is reinscribed in conceptions of care work and the family. Another issue is the problem of a hierarchy of labor—intellectual immaterial labor is valorized over emotional labor in Autonomist theory. This valorization replicates the gender binary and suggests that emotional labor requires no intellectual capacities or that “mind work” does not require the management of feeling. Finally, in some feminist analyses there is a concern about the ways in which the body, and work of the body, is dematerialized or dismissed in discussions of immaterial labor.

Also, the literature review demonstrates that, given the increase and dominance of immaterial labor in post-Fordist economies, the examination of the specificities of the social divisions of immaterial labor is a critical political project. Scholars should examine the ways in which affective labor is both subordinated and undervalued, while simultaneously offering possibilities of affective resistance. Our own university environments are an ideal place to engage such a project. In fact, it is important for academics to study the university for a number of reasons, for, as Melissa Gregg reminds us in her piece “Working with Affect in the Corporate University” (2010), our laboring practices are not exceptional (p. 183). We need to better understand how our workplace mirrors others, what shared concerns and points of recognition we have with the people we study, how our fortunes are tied to the socioeconomic conditions of all workers, and how in the academe we reproduce some of the same oppressions we study in other workplaces.

Treating the university as an exceptional workplace allows for any number of inequities to flourish, even in environments where the study of social inequity is of primary concern. Noting that there are wide ranges of employees engaged in any number of tasks and activities at large institutions like universities, in the final section of this paper I will largely focus on the work of professors and librarians. My focus emanates from logistical concerns given the space and time restrictions of this paper, but also as a response to Luxton and Maroney (1996), who noted, “Political economy has not paid much attention to women as members of the capitalist or business class and little to women professionals” (p. 92). I will attempt to address that omission by offering some thoughts on labor inside the academe.

### AFFECTIVE LABOUR AND THE EDU-FACTORY

To begin this analysis, we must first demonstrate that the labor of the university is largely immaterial in both the Marxist and post-Fordist definitions. The products of higher education, if it can be said to have any, are the production of new knowledge in the form of original research, and the formation of human capital for the market. Many have written on the neoliberal impact on the university and the ways in which education has become marketized.<sup>6</sup> The neoliberal influence has also increased social

divisions of labor with the academe. Feminist critics have noted that “the highly individualized capitalist-inspired entrepreneurialism that is at the heart of the new academy . . . has allowed old masculinities to remake themselves and maintain hegemonic male advantage” (Grummell et al., 2009, p. 192). These authors point to the glorification of concrete outputs in performance measurements over emotional labor as an example of the ways in which care work is devalored in relation to other tasks.

Like the forms of immaterial labor particularly prized by the Autonomists, the psychological space of the university is heavily influenced by Cartesian views of the development of the rational autonomous subject (Grummell et al., 2009, p. 191). The university is supposed to be an emotionally neutral space, a place for objective inquiry and the production of new knowledge. Of course the pressure to be emotionally neutral creates its own affect. Melissa Gregg (2010) challenges us to ask how the production cultures of knowledge work impact the work we do and the knowledge we create (p. 183). We should ask how the pressure to suppress both the emotions and the body impacts the research scholars produce and the learning experiences they provide, as well as the ways in which labor is institutionally and interpersonally divided as a result of these affective pressures. Hochschild (2003) has explained how corporations rely on the emotional lives of employees for company benefit. The university, which must shepherd students of varying ages and backgrounds through the educational process, also relies on the emotional lives of its workers to produce correctly calibrated human capital for the labor market, despite the invisibility of such work in yearly performance reviews and merit bonuses. Of course academic immaterial labor is stratified—while management is rewarded handsomely for managing relationships and developing partnerships, particularly with private industry, employees are only minimally rewarded for good teaching scores and high impact publications and grants. Some affective labor is more valuable than others, and it is not difficult to see a gendered and capitalist dimension to such valorizations.

Gregg has perhaps best characterized affective labor for faculty in the corporate university as including fear, anxiety, controlling oneself and one’s emotions, modulating subjectivity to fit workplace demands, the psychological preparation to be ready for work’s potential (i.e., through constantly checking email), and the anticipatory effects of staying constantly connected and on top of new information in one’s field. She also points to a pervasive sense of precariousness, feelings of instability and being overloaded, and a ready willingness to study and learn techniques of change management coupled with ongoing fears of being left behind. In academia one must be always psychically and somatically prepared for work that has no beginning and no end (2010, pp. 186–188). As others have noted, this environment mirrors many other post-Fordist workplaces and work practices, and as such the university offers a fertile case study of

immaterial labor.<sup>7</sup> It behooves us to examine the social divisions of labor inside it, and the consequences of those divisions.

### LABORING LIBRARIANS

One such social division of labor is the stratification between faculty and librarians. As mentioned previously, librarianship as a profession has been heavily female-dominated since the early nineteenth century. Working in libraries was considered fitting work for a woman because they were willing to work for low recompense, it was not physically taxing work, some of the work was mundane and detail-oriented, and it allowed them to expand their roles as guardians of “culture” and to leverage their skills learned in the home to make the library a gracious and welcoming home-like space for patrons. These skills and roles conversely began to impact the goals and status of libraries (Garrison, 1972, p. 132). Notwithstanding the many important contributions of individual librarians to their communities and to cultural memory, libraries can be understood as an extension of the domestic sphere, and librarianship a form of waged domestic labor.

The emotional and affective labors of librarians are well documented in the library and information science literature as well as the common phenomenon of burnout attached to such work.<sup>8</sup> However, outside of this literature, studies on the work of librarians and archivists are very scarce. Academic librarians specifically are a curious employee category inside the university, straddling both “academic” and “nonacademic” work in their job descriptions. Like faculty, librarians are engaged in helping educate students by offering research help as well as instruction in information literacy and research competencies. Although the term “information literacy” is not well-known outside of librarianship, and librarians’ work in this area is underrecognized, the skills required to find, organize, synthesize, and manipulate information are prized in the neoliberal knowledge economy as information is the preeminent commodity form of contemporary capitalism (Eisenhower & Smith, 2010, p. 308). Academic librarians also maintain collections and organize information. We participate in gift economies through facilitating the borrowing of books and other items as well as through our professional engagements with the open access and open data movements in scholarly publishing. We curate and maintain common spaces within which faculty and students may read and study, and, finally, along with our archivist colleagues, we engage in all matter of cultural stewardship and preservation activities in our collections, both physical and digital. In short, we operate as shadow labor whose role serves to reproduce the academy (Shirazi, 2014). The emphasis in our work, however, and how it is perceived by the public, is largely on the service side of our role, rather than on the intellectual work involved in negotiating, evaluating, and manipulating scholarly information and its affects (as discussed at length in Harris & Chan, 1988).



As in all service jobs, librarians are asked to make pretence of emotional neutrality around the information and people they engage with and to offer service with a smile (Shuler & Morgan, 2013, p. 118). Professional guidelines exist that describe how one should govern oneself in order to appear receptive, visible, cordial, and interested in our student's research questions (Reference and User Services Association, 2013, n.d.). A growing body of literature asks libraries to consider the issue of library user anxiety and how best to address those anxieties.<sup>9</sup> Even in our pedagogical efforts to foster information literacy, as guests in a professor's classroom, our work often involves negotiating for opportunities to engage in pedagogies that facilitate critical thinking and the evaluation of information, rather than just offering tours of library catalogues and research databases (Eisenhower & Smith, 2010, pp. 315–316). These negotiations often involve having to educate faculty members as to the intellectual contributions librarians can make to their course or curriculum, and to resist reacting emotionally to the dismissiveness with which our services are sometimes received. As in all service positions, librarians are required, therefore, to disguise fatigue and irritation with library patrons, and our primary affective contributions involve willingness to help, patience, active listening—supplements to the flow of pedagogical power (Eisenhower & Smith, 2010, p. 316). Hochschild (2003) defined this sort of emotional labor as that which “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state in others” (p. 7). This management of feeling is true for librarianship as well and comes with a personal cost to the worker.

In terms of social and material conditions, while academic librarians are generally remunerated on a level comparable, if slightly less than, faculty, we suffer from lack of prestige and recognition in the workplace (Harris & Chan, 1988). Cuts to library operating budgets mean most libraries operate without enough librarians, while increases to enrollment and increased demand to offer new digital services in both collections and teaching abound. It is not an exaggeration to say that academic librarians have considered themselves to be in significant existential and institutional crisis for most of the last two decades, along with most publicly funded services. Our low status and decreasing ranks also leads to a diminishment of opportunity, where librarians are not always considered viable candidates for upper-level university service positions or for principal investigator roles on grant applications. There is a ceiling for care workers in the university because we are viewed not as professionals, or scholars, but as support and administrative workers. This perception remains despite our faculty status in most universities. However the work we do is central to the production of knowledge. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida (1998) argued that there is no political power without control of the archive, and that the technologies of archivization (which are largely created by librarians

and archivists) produce as well as store the historical record (pp. 4, 17). Foucault suggests in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) that enunciability itself depends on the archive, what can and cannot be said is predicated on what we preserve and how we make it available (p. 129). And yet librarians struggle to find the time to write and theorize intensively about the social and political dimensions of libraries, archives, and the technologies of archivization. In not publishing and presenting on these issues to other scholars, issues we have intimate and practical engagement with, we contribute not only to our ongoing invisibilization but also to a diminishment of academic culture, and to debates around scholarly communication and knowledge production in general. We struggle to find time to research and write because our service work is considered more useful to the corporate goals of the university and university administrators are often unsupportive of our research goals when they take our limited time and bodies away from serving library patrons and their various anxieties. Simultaneously, the rise of digital humanities has opened doors for librarian makers and programmers to be more involved in academic projects, but nonetheless such projects are generally managed and funded within traditional academic labor hierarchies, with professors directing the work of librarians and other alt-academics whose intellectual contributions are devalued as merely service work or project management.

From a poststructuralist perspective, libraries may also be considered as an extension of the domestic sphere in the sense that they are procreative spaces. Liljestrom and Paasonen (2010) remind us that interpretation is a question of contagious affects and dynamic encounters between readers and texts (pp. 1–2). If so, then the labor of librarians needed to structure and mediate those encounters is generative and reproductive. Of course, the library as a physical building holding a body of knowledge on its shelves also requires librarians and library staff to care for its material needs. To think that the act of finding materials in the virtual or physical library is the result only of serendipity speaks again to the invisibilization of librarians' labor. Consequently, I would argue from both a poststructuralist and socialist feminist position that librarians and archivists provide a form of largely ignored reproductive and affective labor in the knowledge production of the academe and are an unrecognized production culture within the knowledge work of the university. Our invisibilization relates to the very meat of feminist critiques of gendered affective and immaterial labor and the ways in which reproductive and care labor is devalored in a post-Fordist economy. More attention needs to be paid to the care work of librarians in studies that examine knowledge production, as the absence of these laborers provides a curious and gendered gap in existing scholarship, a gap that will only increase as our libraries become increasingly virtual and immaterial and will have long term consequences for the historical record and the production of knowledge

inside the academe. Further studies also need to be done that examine the ways in which immaterial labor in librarianship is stratified along gender lines—as I have suggested earlier in relation to digital librarianship’s preferential status over reference and liaison librarianship. Nonetheless, we need simultaneously to be mindful that we do not reproduce a dual-spheres binary analysis that essentializes gender and limits librarians to a false and ahistorical notion of “traditional librarianship” in our attempts to recognize what is socially, academically, and politically useful about the more affective dimensions of our work.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has tried to trace feminist engagements with affective labor, variously defined as reproductive labor, care work, and part of immaterial labor, from the domestic labor debates of the 1970s to present day interventions in conversations in post-Fordist political economy. Primary challenges to dominant texts include the ways in which the gendered divisions of labor in both Marxist and Autonomist texts has been dismissed, how heteronormativity is reinscribed in current debates about the family and the public sphere, and how global migrant labor is ignored in the lower valued affective labor of care work. Immaterial labor that is considered problem-solving, strategic mind work is more highly valued than emotional labor, replicating a traditional gender binary and suggesting that emotional labor requires no intellectual capacities or that “mind work” does not carry its own freight in emotional labor. The materiality of care work is foregrounded in many feminist analyses, and disputes about the importance of the body and embodiment abound. The human cost of the instrumentalization of affect and the production of subjectivity has also been explored in much of this work.

In terms of the immaterial labor of universities, some material has been written about the affective labor of faculty in mainstream scholarly texts, but the care work of less privileged members of the university has been ignored outside the literature of library and information studies, essentially replicating the invisibilization of care workers outlined in feminist theory and offering us a good example of how even debates aware of the denigration of affective labor can replicate the very divisions it wishes to disrupt. Any such gap is also problematic because, as Hardt reminds us “the production of affects, subjectivities and forms of life present an enormous potential for autonomous circuits of valorization, and perhaps for liberation” (1999, p. 100). Feminist theorists ask us to consider new potentialities for the resistance of life to power.

Further work on the feminist concept of affective labor needs to be done that takes up the larger body of work on affect in feminist thought. Given the ongoing and increasing machinization of immaterial modes of production, an attention to the affective nature and labor of technology in life and work and the ways in which it also impacts human subjectivity

and gender seems a fruitful new line of inquiry for feminist thinkers concerned with labor issues. If we take up a call to arms to think about life and work and the subjects we wish to become, how might new technologies enhance, augment, or limit our feminist political desires for subjectivities free from domination? In the context of the academic library, how does the disruption of the digital library allow us to rethink and revalorize the subjectivity of the librarian? Indeed, the feminized figure of the academic librarian might be an ideal object of study for such work given the ways in which technology has completely transformed the workplace and culture of the library. Regardless, feminist theoretical reflections on immaterial and affective labor offer an important correction to the techno-determinism and optimism of the Autonomists and remind us that liberation must be equally available to all members of the multitude.

As for the potential biopolitical resistance or subversion afforded by affective labor as suggested by the Autonomists, I'd like to end with some final, cautious, thoughts on what academic librarians might do to disrupt oppressive divisions of labor. While I am aware that there are great limitations on what we can accomplish, particularly while working on our own and not as part of broader social coalitions with other related professions, I see our most effective forms of resistance as having two prongs. First, we must have our affective labor recognized, and we must recognize our affective labor. In other words—we need to write and talk our way into legibility through publishing more often outside our own journals, and we need to develop some sort of internal professional metrics that reward or at least acknowledge affective labor. We recognize movers, shakers, pushers, shovers, leaders, and change agents, but how do we acknowledge emotional labor and care work? We need to speak at more interdisciplinary tables, and we need to write precisely about our labor issues as well as about the politics of knowledge organization and how our work impacts the production culture of the academy. Our writing must place our work in a broader theoretical and sociopolitical context. We need to be visible, we need to speak the language of social and political theory, and we need to be heard. The recent interest in critical librarianship is very encouraging on this front, as evidenced by recent editorial shifts in some library journals, new conferences, and new presses—but we need to be less insular as a group. And we need to find a way to recognize the caring and affective dimensions of our work at precisely the same time as we become immaterialized in a digital world. We also need to recognize the other kinds of affective laborers on our campuses—library technicians, the secretarial staff, and the people who cook and serve food, the cleaners—and fully think through the ways in which those positions are underprivileged, underwaged, and disproportionately staffed by women of colour.

Relatedly, academic reference librarians must engage the concepts of critical information literacy and social justice in our teaching as key mechanisms for resisting market logic in education. We must continue

to build broad and subversive collections and resist censorship and fight for intellectual freedom and freedom of expression. I would contend that by fostering spaces for dissent, civic engagement, nonneutrality, and even nonefficiency in our libraries and classrooms, we offer disruptions in the affective flow of the corporate university. Similar contributions can be made in the areas of scholarly communication and digital scholarship, calling attention to the ways in which authority is constructed and valued, and exposing the gears of knowledge production. In offering a feminist interpretation of the human cost of the undervalued immaterial labor of librarianship and developing an awareness of the many hurdles in our path, I am nonetheless comforted by a new awareness of the ways in which our labor undergirds and is generative of academic subjectivity. We must consider such production more carefully and in more detail, and consider the kinds of new subjects we both wish to produce and become.

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### NOTES

1. There has been some critique of Garrison from those who see women in the early public library world as in fact pioneering professionally (Hildebrand, 1983; Passett, 1994). This was the case in terms of women being the first to carry out significant survey work (McDowell, 2009) and their engagement with early-twentieth-century child psychology (Van Slyck, 1998, pp. 160–200). These revisions are important corrections and clearly provide evidence that some women librarians were able to step outside gender restrictions in libraries and demonstrate deep expertise, professionalism, and even radicalism. However, such exemplary work was, and is, largely unrecognized in dominant narratives and stereotypes about librarians.
2. My own place of work, York University in Toronto, broke ground in Canada when our union won a historic employment equity concession from the employer in 1997. The employer acknowledged that librarians were eligible for an employment equity settlement, given that the majority of librarians were women and performed academic activities and were required to have graduate degrees to do their work, and yet were significantly less compensated than academic employees in male-dominated faculties with comparable degree qualifications and expectations. It is worth noting that male librarians benefited from this settlement as well, underscoring the point that feminist organizing can be good for everybody.
3. See, for instance, the work of Luxton and Maroney (1996), or McDowell and Dyson (2011).
4. Librarian stereotypes are well-documented in library literature. See, for instance, the work of Pagowsky & DeFraim, 2014.
5. Other scholars have similarly argued that the literature on the decline of civic engagement ignores the care work of women in and outside of the domestic by dismissing it as selfishly motivated rather than altruistic citizenship behaviour (Herd & Meyer, 2002, p. 665).
6. The bibliography given on the *Living in Interesting Times* website gives an excellent collection of work on the neoliberalization of higher education (“Corporatization,” 2007).

7. See, for instance, the important work by Karen Nicholson (2015) on the McDonaldization of academic libraries.
8. See work by Accardi (2015); Matteson and Miller (2013); Sheih (2012); Mills and Lodge (2006); Guy, Newman, and Mastracci (2008); Shuler and Morgan (2013); Julien and Genuis (2009); Eisenhower and Smith (2010); Sheeshly (2001); and Caputo (1991).
9. See, for instance, the work of Nicol (2009) and Mellon (1986).

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