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ARTICLE

Even Womb Surrogates Think: Rethinking Labour and Maternal Work

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Feminists are generally agreed that mothering is a form of work, is certainly felt as such and clearly makes economic and social contributions to society, but feminist theory remains unsettled on whether mothering can be theorised through a Marxian understanding of production, reproduction and labour. Stella Sandford revisited the dilemma in this journal, concluding as have others, that the notion of 'maternal labour' was fundamentally dichotomous and that a focus on what is specific to mothering depleted it of its potential character as labour. I argue that the difficulties that have persisted in theorizing mothering as work have arisen from a too-narrow understanding of work and consequently of 'labour'. This paper builds on insights into working, work, maternal work, and capitalism developed by Christophe Dejours, Sarah Ruddick and Nancy Fraser. It argues that with an enriched understanding of work and working being an activity that engages the whole of the subject and which is formative of identity, it is then possible to understand mothering as labour that is both affective, intersubjective and 'reproductive'.

'We see that mothering can be imbued with such passionate feelings that onlookers, accustomed to distinguishing thought from feeling and work from love, can barely recognize amid the passion either the thinking or the work.' (Ruddick 1990, p. 67)

'Onlookers', feminists, policy writers, and mothers themselves remain ambivalent about how or whether the intensities of bodily, intellectual and emotional maternal experience can be categorised as work. Feminist theory is agreed that mothering is a form of work, is certainly felt as such and clearly makes economic and social contribution to society, but feminist theory remains unsettled on whether mothering can be theorised through a Marxian understanding of production, reproduction and labour. How can we approach what seem to be dichotomies between paid and unpaid labour, between care-giving, domestic work and paid labour, between emotion 'freely' given and emotion work, women and class, identity and difference? Stella Sandford revisited the dilemma in this journal, concluding as have others, that the notion of maternal labour was fundamentally dichotomous and that a focus on what is specific to mothering depleted it of its character as labour (Sandford 2011, pp. 11, 9).

Attempting to reconcile the binaries of the maternal with Marx's thesis on labour, Sandford turned to Sarah Ruddick's work on mothering as thought, then focused on the 'mothering as a politics of peace' component of Ruddick's theoretic that Ruddick had indeed wanted a response to, but which has ultimately not achieved the epistemological and ethical shifts she hoped for. Sandford concluded that Ruddick does not illuminate maternal work as a component of the 'social-political whole', and offers 'no more than a hopeful vision'. (Sandford p. 9) A maternal politics of peace was Ruddick's explicit aim (comprising the final Part 3 of *Maternal Thinking*), but her central theoretic about mothering being a thoughtful practice is what is most effective to considering how mothering is 'labour' and indeed, to understanding what work is. I propose that a reinvigorated understanding of labour can demonstrate fundamental commonalities with mothering, including those specific experiences and perspectives of mothering-work that have previously seemed to keep mothering outside of a theoretic of labour.

This paper is to some extent a response to Stanford's question, or more exactly, to one of the key questions which she investigates in that paper. I suggest that there is an indissoluble relationship between mothering and labour and that it has existed as a 'background condition' to labour in general and, is a crucial component of the social character of capitalism (Fraser 2014, p. 61). Concomitantly, an understanding of work-in-general and its relation to the formation and maintenance of the self and society has not been fully possible. The difficulties that have persisted in theorizing mothering as work arise from a too-narrow understanding of work and 'labour'.

Firstly, I look to Christophe Dejours, the French academic and clinician well known amongst both French academics and the French public for his theorisation of work and working. Work, as defined by Dejours, is a co-ordinated activity in which the individual engages their body and intelligence, and which might, but does not need to involve a wage relation. (Dejours 2006, p. 47; Deranty, Clot and Dejours 2009, p. 70). More critical than the wage relation to the question of what is work (or in post-Marx Anglophone discourse, 'labour'), is the fundamental connection between work and *subjectivity*: work forms a focal point for the individual's relation to the world, to the self and to society. Dejours' insight is that work impacts upon the self, and in order to accomplish the work required, the individual must draw upon themselves to fulfil the task. This insight is the enabling point from which to understand mothering as work, in all its intellectual, bodily, social and economic complexities. What has been understood (post-Marx) as the social 'reproductive dimension', is in fact, a universal work category which has existed across time and societies, but which nevertheless continues to perplex us as to its relation to the self, to 'labour', and to society.

Legal and political reforms in the areas of family welfare rights and responsibilities, evolving reproductive technologies, along with changing care work patterns that are the result of women's increased labour participation and ageing populations in the West, are contributing to a significant public discourse by mothers about mothering. This discourse is engaged with by media, politicians, and social science and economic researchers. Yet, even with the public visibility of issues around

reproduction, mothering and care-giving, mothering continues with its ontological invisibility as 'working'.

Dejours et al (2018, p. 5–6) draw upon Alfred Marshall's definition of labour as 'an exertion of mind or body undergone partly or wholly with a view to some good other than the pleasure derived directly from work.' Work, by this definition includes both paid employment and work done outside a wage relation. It involves physical, intellectual or emotional effort, in varying degrees: the work might be highly physical such as labouring, or intellectually demanding, such as with the production of theory. It is directed toward something other than oneself, and so is not leisure or play, although work can indeed be pleasurable (and one person's hobby could be another person's work). A child care worker might say that they 'love working with children', but even still their care work is directed at the children and undertaken within the organisational and legal constraints of the role. The good which is its outcome can include an economic good for the employer (income, profit), or the provision of a service to customers or a community. From the worker's perspective, the receipt of a living wage might be the primary good amongst a range of goods produced by their labour.

Secondly, I draw upon Sarah Ruddick's notion that mothering is a practice (1990, pp. 13–14) distinguished by the 'cognitive capacities, metaphysical attitudes and ethical conceptions' that arise from the work of mothering children (pp. 17, 24). Thinking arises from and is challenged by practices, which are 'collective human activities distinguished by the aims that identify them' (p. 13). In her discussion of practices, it is evident that all kinds of work are compatible with this notion of a practice, because both practices and work require thought and are directed to something outside of the self. Ruddick identifies two key aspects of mothering work: analysis and interpretation; and the engagement of the individual's whole subjectivity to fulfil the task. Mothering is physical, from the exertions of birth and lactation, to teaching skills and engaging in play, and containing one's physical gestures (or not managing to) when angry; it is emotional, drawing upon a potentially limitless range of feelings and dispositions from very 'positive' emotions to negative ones of indifference or resentment; and it is intellectual, requiring analysis, planning, interpretation and learning.

As did Dejours in his applied workplace investigations and clinical consultations, Ruddick arrived at this insight through a 'practicalist', applied approach investigating the tacit knowledges that mothers engage with and develop.

What is work: Dejours

Dejours' theorization of work speaks to the actual, lived experience of working, proposing that working draws upon and impacts on individuals physically and psychically. That is, he is saying what is self-evident and tacitly understood by working people (including mothers), but barely acknowledged in the social sciences (Deranty 2015, p. 105; Dejours et al 2018, p. 1–2) – that work forms subjectivity. Our sense of self is not formed and maintained independent of working; working shapes us physically, intellectually and emotionally. Working impacts on our feelings of achievement or self-worth through the effort of meeting the demands of the task however simple, or complex and as changing as they might be. These impacts on self are embodied, emotional and intellectual – psychic and physical. The breast-feeding mother 'in love' with her new baby develops carpal tunnel syndrome in her wrist tendons from weakened lymphatic drainage; the caring nurse, against protocol, is left alone in the triage room, then punched by a drunk patient; the team manager subjected to a corporate restructure and possible retrenchment experiences heart palpitations and dizziness along with feelings of anger and anxiety. Work places constraints upon subjects which are internalised, thus shaping subjectivity: the mother's daily hand pain complicates the care of the child, and she doubts her capacity to return to her computer-based employment with the injury; the nurse experiences anxiety after the assault but when given personal leave finds himself more depressed at home; the manager's health deteriorates and he loses the sense of commitment to the organisation's purpose, which had previously buoyed and motivated him. At the same time, the work continues to provide some elements of what is expected of work: material well-being, of social belonging, the opportunity to engage one's intellectual and physical capacities, positive social standing, and 'existential security' (that one's survival is secure). (Dejours et al. 2018, p. 69).

Work might reward us with a sense of excitement and accomplishment, the testing of our intellect or the enjoyment of the sociability of the work. It will however,

invariably have negative physical and emotional impacts, because in order to engage with the 'technical' demands of the job, the worker's subjectivity must be activated to fulfil those demands of the work, which are never so simple that they can be done without thought and attention.

From this enriched understanding of working being something that one does to oneself and in society with or for others, the question about the relationship of the maternal to labour can be answered. With this indissoluble relation in place, between work and subjectivity, it is then possible to understand mothering as work.

Dejours' argument is that work-in-general, and the activity of working, involves offering more than what is overtly asked for in a description of duties or instructions. To get a task done or to understand the whole complexity of a work challenge, the subject needs to use their intellectual, tacit and emotional resources to fill the gap between what is needed and known and what is to be done. (Dejours 2012, p. 221) Work in this sense is both what is invisible as well as what is demonstrable: it is the *additional abilities and affinities given by the worker* to the task beyond what is possible to describe and delineate. The worker gives of themselves so as to bridge the gap between what is proscribed and the fulfilment of the task:

[...] work is what is implied, in human terms, by the fact of working: gestures, know-how, the involvement of the body and the intelligence, the ability to analyze, interpret, and react to situations. It is the power to feel, to think, and to invent [...] What emerges as the main feature of 'working' [...] is that, even when the work is well conceived, even when the organization of work is rigorous, even when the instructions and procedures are clear, it is impossible to achieve quality if the orders are scrupulously respected [...] Working thus means bridging the gap between prescriptive and concrete reality' (2006, pp. 46–47).

Work across societies and epochs, that is, in pre-capitalist, capitalist and non-Western societies, is central to the formation and maintenance of subjectivity, and individual identity. It is central to subjectivity, in terms of the subject's physical and emotional health, the structure of gender relationships in so far as work often reinforces gen-

der, and the community through its familial, collective and organisational character: 'We speak of the psychological, gender-related, social-political and epistemic centrality of work'. (Dejours and Deranty, 2010, p. 169).

Most people participate in and are exposed to work throughout their life. Long before one is legally or ergonomically old enough to work, children (in so-called 'developed' nations) spend a majority of their time closely associated with the work of teachers and others associated with educational institutions. At home, if the parent/s are working, the child's day is shaped not only by their schooling but by the adult working day, the emotions and dispositions arising from work brought back to the home by the parent. At the other end of the life-cycle, elderly people receive care from personnel in aged-care facilities or from care-workers or family members at home. The years in between, if one is fortunate, are involved in meaningful work. Financial remuneration is not necessarily the key 'good' (Marshall) derived from work, though an income to sustain one's life is undeniably vital. At a more granular level, the working life is likely to involve changes in kinds of work and possible retraining, and breaks taken for parenting or other family care-work, or arising from unplanned illness or unemployment. Unemployment, or the absence of work in a subject's life, causes psychic and somatic harms that arise from unstructured, 'unfettered' time, social isolation, the absence of shared goals with others, an absence of recognition, and the absence of 'reality-oriented' activities (Marie Jahoda's 'categories of experience' (1982) cited in Dejours et al. 2018, 30–32). Unemployment's harms are work's shadow, revealing a rich array of effects that working contributes to the construction and maintenance of subjectivity.

The subjective and pragmatic challenges that working manifests take place in social sites (Dejours 2006; Deranty 2015) such as work groups or teams, the physical place of work, the profession or trade which recognises one's vocational expertise. Work is tremendously varied and specific in its techniques, purposes, and outcomes. What all work shares is the pragmatic challenges which the subject needs to overcome, and requires physical and mental effort and attention, and this effort mobilises one's subjective capacities for a 'good' (Marshall) outside of oneself. We are always subjects-in-making, with more or less agency, in relationship to the discourses

around us, undergoing transformation. The subjectivity of individuals at work is one of process and becoming. Dejours inverts the familiar question, 'What does the subject give to work?' to ask, 'What does working give to subjectivity?' (2006, p. 45).

Also crucial to Dejours' work and identity theoretic is the essential and indissoluble connection between (on the one hand) the social relationships of sex and those of work, and the social relationships of work and relationships of domination, with (on the other hand) relationships of production and reproduction. (Dejours 2015) These non-binary connections between sex, work, domination, and production and reproduction make Dejours' theoretic valuable to a maternal theory of mothering as work. That there is an invisibility to working, that there are components to labour that cannot be readily described, monitored and measured, also offers a tantalising link to Nancy Fraser's argument that the so-called reproductive sphere has been a background condition to capitalism and its narratives (addressed later in this paper). The axis shifts, from the binarisms of public/private work and productive/reproductive spheres, to relations with multiple axes between the spheres and relations, for a fuller account of maternal work.

What is maternal work: Ruddick

The conception of mothering and maternal work set out by Sarah Ruddick (and further developed and critiqued by Patricia Hill Collins (1991, 1994) and others (Bailey 1994, Keller 2010)) intersects fruitfully with Dejours' notion that the activity of working makes demands on the worker to fill the gap between what is prescribed and the doing of the task, and that working contributes to the formation, maintenance and evolving subjectivity of the individual. Ruddick was influenced by Adrienne Rich's view of motherhood as formed of both experience and institution (O'Reilly and Ruddick, 2009) but moved beyond Rich's over-simplifications of the relations between subjectivity, experience and social contexts. (DiQuinzio 1999, 212) She contested Simone de Beauvoir's devaluation of the maternal as prosaic and immanent,¹

¹ 'As we have seen, the two essential traits that characterize woman, biologically speaking, are the following: her grasp upon the world is less extended than man's, and she is more closely enslaved to the species.' Simone De Beauvoir (1949).

rebutting the argument that women are 'enslaved' by their corporality. Ruddick's practicalist argument is that intellectual engagement and reflection are intrinsic to mothering work:

I speak about a mother's thought – the intellectual capacities she develops, the judgments she makes, the metaphysical attitudes she assumes, the values she affirms [...] I use a vocabulary developed in formulating theories about the general nature of thought ...[that] arises out of social practice. In their practices, people respond to a reality that appears to them as given, as presenting certain demands [...] Thinking is governed by the interests of the practice out of which it arises. (1990, p. 24)

This notion of maternal thinking fundamentally challenges the essentialism that argues that only women should or can mother; that caregiving is the work of an un-free individual, and the individualism characteristic of contemporary Western thought. Ruddick demonstrated that mothering mobilises cognitive capacities, metaphysical attitudes and ethical conceptions. In Ruddick's view, mothering is not innately gendered, but a learned, social practice (pp. 13–14) which aims to protect, nurture and train (p. 23). A 'mother' is any person who takes upon her/himself the responsibility for a child's life, making care of the child a regular and substantial part of their life (p. 40). Maternal practices necessarily take place in specific social, technological, and ecological settings. Each of these settings present the subject doing the mothering with particular demands and challenges. The values and disciplines involved in mothering develop from the social world.

Our first experience of mothering is from being mothered ourselves. This is where subjects first acquire their tacit knowledges. (Children who have not been mothered, such as Indigenous children of the Stolen Generations in Australia, sometimes attest to not knowing how to mother as adults, with sometimes dire impacts on their well-being and that of their children.²) Mothering practices are further developed through

² See Garimara (2015) and Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia (1995).

the trial and error of actual mothering, and the observation, internalisation or critique of others' mothering practices; the apprenticeship to other mothers (as siblings, cousins, babysitters, etc), and the sharing of knowledge, beliefs and practices with elders, friends, mothers' groups. Mothering practices are informed for better or worse, by specialists such as paediatricians, psychologists, social workers, and the mother's informal or formal education (school parenting workshops, blogs and social media, university study of the histories of childrearing, early childhood education, etc).

From this complex social world of culturally ascribed practices, Ruddick argued that all maternal practice engages three 'universal' demands of the child: to preserve their life; to foster their growth; and to install processes that allow the child to become acceptable within their community. In sum: preservation, nurturance and socialization.³ Thought, reflection, preparation and improvisation are all needed to meet the child's demands for these three categories.

In Dejourian terms, i.e. as with work-in-general, in order to meet these demands, the mother engages her subjectivity to address the multitude of unprescribed challenges that mothering involves. Known or unexpected demands may not be met: poor mothering practices are invariably present. Maternal work presents an infinite array of situations for which there are gaps between what is socially, legally or culturally prescribed and the unexpected gestures, speech, orientations and actions which the care demands. Communities and societies establish sometimes controversial, oppressive or supportive rules, truths, expectations and regularizing practices around what good, bad or good-enough mothering is or should be. Contemporary struggles and debates around mothering practices include, for instance, the ethics of commercial surrogacy, intercountry adoption and anonymous sperm donors; the harm versus the good to children of popularised parenting 'methods' such as 'helicopter'

³ Ruddick's three universal demands have been criticized for being ethnocentric. For discussion on this see Patrice DiQuinzio (1993); Alison Bailey (1995); Jean Keller (2010). Bailey offers a variant to Ruddick's tripartite demands, drawing upon Collins' 1994 essay, 'Shifting the center: Race, class, and feminist theorizing about motherhood.' The three goals of maternal practice enacted by American women of colour mothers, identified by Collins are: motherwork and physical survival; identity; and empowerment. These core goals emphasise the mother and child's necessity to resist and survive oppression and discrimination within the broader white society.

or 'tiger mom' parenting; and arguments about cultural tradition versus the human rights of the child when mothers condone or organise their daughter's FGM (female genital mutilation). These controversial discourses are enacted by mothers who will sometimes or even frequently feel ambivalent or experience failure when they find that an action taken or decision made was wrong or ineffectual. From the minutia of daily interactions such as asking a question of a child who refuses to respond, to determining how best to demand assistance for their child's special needs from the school principal while managing emotions of grief or frustration, or defending your child incarcerated because they are black, or trans or in some way other to the normative ideal – there is the reality of defeat, mistakes and lack of success. In all work, the 'real world resists' the efforts of the worker to accomplish what they have set out to do, and 'confronts the subject with failure'. (Dejours 2006, 3) Working is never straight-forward, it invariably requires the worker in intellectual, physical or emotional adjudications: 'the closing of the gap between prescription and realization is the work of subjectivity.' (Dejours et al. 2018, p. 75).

In mothering work, resistance is located in the immediate child, and beyond in the social institutions such as the child's family, school or broader community demands. To mother, the subject must use intuition, technique, trial and error that combine to form a practice (Ruddick), and the application of practiced and technical 'solutions and responses' (Dejours 2006, p. 48). These practices and techniques culminate in an intelligence and power to work upon the subject's immediate world (with all the attendant achievements, failures, and uncertainties necessarily involved), in this way transforming the self. The mother's subjectivity is transformed and revealed to itself through the practice of working.

Objections to maternal work as a 'species' of work-in-general

An objection to this argument could be that whatever is specific about mothering is now lost. If maternal work is like work-in-general, does that not also suggest that it is like kinds of work that are so evidently different, such as teaching high school maths, or working in a call centre. Is there a specificity to maternal work, or can it be subsumed within some other category such as care work? How is it different to being

a domestic worker/nanny employed to make beds, do the washing, prepare dinner and pick the kids up from school. To respond to this challenge, we return to Ruddick and Dejours' shared central thesis that work is a practice which involves particular techniques and bodily and intellectual knowledges applied to real challenges within specific situations, and that work is defined by its aims, by what is expected to be produced or resolved through the subject's working.

The high school math teacher's aim is for the students to attain competencies relating to a specific math curriculum and defined learning outcomes. While all teaching shares the goal of student learning and care of the student within the bounds set by schools (generating trust, supporting each student's individuality, mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and so on), the maths teaching practice focuses on specific goals. These specific goals define it as 'maths teaching'. Even still, the teacher does not need to be wholehearted about their commitment to the work aim, but by 'dint of their activity' and their acceptance of the conditions of that work, they are involved in the practice. The maths teacher might not like teaching calculus, or comes to a class underprepared. The teacher's aim for student success might not be achieved. However, these failures do not negate or undermine the defining practice and goal. Ruddick explains that:

'The aims or goals that define a practice are so central or 'constitutive' that in the absence of the goal you would not have that practice... to engage in a practice means to be committed to meeting its demands.' (Ruddick 1990, p. 14)

It is mothering's distinctive goals of preservation, nurturance and socialization of the child that distinguish it from care work and work-in-general, and which simultaneously characterize mothering as work. These three goals, and the child's demand that they be met (the 'real') together constitute maternal work. (Ruddick 1990, p. 17) Certainly maternal work and care work share in practices and techniques, and maternal work can, for some subjects and some of the time, involve the psychic harms of unemployment identified by Jahore (including lack of intimate and social recognition,

unfettered time, social isolation). But these shared features do not deplete maternal work of its specificity. All work shares these fundamental features along with its own specificities. The Dejourian point that all work involves working upon the self remains. The warmth and love that mothering frequently involves does not negate the argument that mothering is work; work can indeed induce psychic and physical pleasure in the subject, can feel like play, even if the same 'work' is sometimes also a source of worry, boredom or anger, or withers one's self-esteem.

Emotion Work

Arlie Russell Hochschild's articulation of emotion work in *The Commercialization of Intimate Life* (2003) is useful to understanding how this working upon the self is a fundamental component of maternal work, and work-in-general. Hochschild identified that acting upon oneself is required in both the public work realm, and the private sphere of family and friendship relationships, and is not determined by the presence or absence of an economic factor. Individuals undertake emotion work to bridge the gaps between what is actually felt and what we individually know we ought to feel. We are guided by what we know of the 'feeling rules' about what is owing to or expected by others around us:

To 'work on' an emotion or feeling is, for our purpose, the same as 'to manage' an emotion or to do 'deep acting'. Note that 'emotion work' refers to the effort – the act of trying – and not to the outcome, which may or may not be successful'. (pp. 94–95)

Hochschild's radical observation was that emotion work and emotional labour is work done upon the self, and not only directed outwardly to a recipient. In its invisibility, it is a component of the giving of oneself that Dejours' theorises, and which Ruddick leans towards in her rejection of the immanence of the maternal and insistence on it being a thoughtful practice: 'thought-provoking ambivalence is a hallmark of mothering [...] feeling, thinking, and action are conceptually linked; feelings demand reflection, which is in turn tested by action, which is in turn tested by the feelings it roves.' (pp. 68–69) To feel caring or cheerful and not simply to appear

so, the ward nurse, bus driver, the 'mum' or public servant, works upon themselves to create the emotions required of the job:

The managing act [...] can be a fine-minute stopgap measure, or it can be a decade-long effort [...] Work to make feeling and frame consistent with situation is work in which individuals continually and privately engage. But they do so in obeisance to rules not completely of their own making.' (Hochschild pp. 96–97)

Emotion work as a component of work-in-general also involves failure. When failure arises, when the prescribed feelings are not felt, the maternal work is a cause of sometimes extreme suffering. (A socially and individually fraught instance of perceived maternal failure is when the mother does not 'bond' with her newborn or infant.)

Hochschild's insights into the hidden work of shaping and managing one's emotions are a key element to understanding the component of maternal work which confronts the resistance not only of the child and the social or economic spheres, but one's subjectivity. Mothering involves sustained and highly complex emotion work. Emotion work contributes to understanding how mothering is a necessarily thoughtful practice that demands that the mother thinks, manages her emotions upon herself and the child, and gives of herself to undertake this emotion work in order to fulfil the care.

Maternal work: a background condition for capitalism

Maternal work's outsider relation to labour is not only a political and social effect and cause of women's subordination in society; it is also amplified in the inadequate theorisations of production and labour. (See the illuminating discussions offered by Deranty 2015, Gürtler 2005, Sandford 2011.) Constrained by the theoretical paradigms of production and labour, the vigorous feminist project begun in the 1970s of reappraising Marx through the 'addition' of the concept of the 'necessary life activity' of reproduction was bound to falter. Production could not account for the 'sociability and historicity' (Nicholson 1987, p. 25) of reproductive activities, because in Marx's schema these were a-priori, natural and pre-determined. While

Marxism's pervasive androcentrism has been thoroughly exposed by decades of feminist analysis, production has not been displaced as the dominant paradigm. This commitment to the 'production paradigm' continues (Gürtler 2005, p. 124; Fraser 2016).

What has followed is a turning-away from the argument and investigation. Nancy Fraser has sounded a warning about this lack of critical engagement, arguing that the wane in interest has enabled neoliberal and globalised capitalisms to proliferate without a critical discourse able to address issues of environmental harm and continuing inequalities in redistribution and recognition:

Thanks to decades of social amnesia, whole generations of younger activists and scholars have become sophisticated practitioners of discourse analysis while remaining utterly innocent of the traditions of *Kapitalkritik* [...] The upshot is that we are living through a capitalist crisis of great severity without a critical theory that could adequately clarify it. (2014, p. 55)

Marx gave attention to the physical reproduction of the species, of birth and child raising, but did not account for the social and affective relations within the family not strictly related to that care work, nor other kinship and familial activities and dispositions that can be described as political, particularly for minority mothers. (Advocacy in schools for instance, and other public institutions is political to the extent that it includes socialising of the young, developing and maintaining communities, and creating and sustaining shared meanings, values and perspectives that underpin or challenge social and political cooperation.) In removing from theoretical focus all the activities basic to social reproduction and human survival which fell outside of capitalist economy (and which were highly social), and with no history of mothering to hand nor an idea that there could even be such a history, no explanation was then demanded of reproduction for an understanding of economic society.

This conceptual corralling of the production of objects and productive activities away from 'reproduction' was a consequence of Marx's too-narrow notion of production alongside his privileging of the economic (Nicholson 1994, pp. 18–19,

23–24; Fraser 2014, 2016). Women were conceptualised somewhere between the natural and the social, and efforts to account for female subordination were unstably predicated on a 'natural' sexual division of labour and unquestioned 'natural' heterosexuality. (Marx figured woman's oppression not in terms of a specific sexual politics between men and women, but in terms of a class relation (Haraway 1991, p. 131)). Marx's model of production suggested the figure of a male-gendered subject acting upon things; 'an active agent transforming, making and shaping an object given to it' (Benhabib and Cornell 1987, p. 2). Activities and orientations essential to human survival and the reproduction of society which fell outside of a direct relationship to the 'public' capitalist economy were effectively eliminated from this model.

Marx's description of the category of labour focused on alienation and abstraction in a philosophical move that could only take place by excluding *non-alienating* maternal work, work that patently formed and was formative of subjectivity. With its focus on the economic, the model necessarily sought to emphasise only women's indirect creation of wealth through the reproduction and socialization of children. In *Grundrisse*, Marx characterised this alienation in terms of a non-investment of the self, rendering the relationship in terms opposite to how Dejours and Ruddick characterise the working self:

'Indifference towards specific labours corresponds to a form of society in which individuals can with ease transfer from one labour to another, and where the specific kind is a matter of chance for them [...] and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form.' (1857, p. 45)

The notion that either workers in general, or mothers, are indifferent to their working self is inconceivable, even when we readily acknowledge that some workers are indeed indifferent to a particular job or that some mothers will be indifferent to their own child or to children in general, and that different groups in society value children differently or that different societies conceive of 'childhood' differently. In Sanford's view Marx demonstrates here that, rather than the contradiction between 'labour' and 'maternal' arising from an inadequate theorisation of work, that the

contradiction is, in fact, a 'lived' one and is indeed present in 'all care labour, paid and unpaid.' (Sandford 2011, pp. 9–10) This conclusion is, however, dependent on our continuing to have an inadequate understanding of work-in-general and our agreement that Marx's theories of labour and production continue to offer the greatest 'explanatory or critical force' (ibid, p. 1). Working with a conjoined analysis from Dejours and Ruddick, it is possible instead to see how much is shared of the 'affective, invested and intersubjective' (ibid, p. 6) in labour and maternal work. Sandford identifies these only with maternal work; but in fact all labour, all working, requires the worker to invest their subjectivity to undertake the tasks at hand, and in Dejourian terms, to experience impacts upon their subjectivity.

Nancy Fraser's argument about the background conditions which support capitalism is key: maternal labour exists as a 'background condition' to labour in general, and it is a crucial component of the social character of capitalism. Capitalism should not be understood as only an economic system: it is both that and an 'institutionalized social order'. (See also Nicholson, 1987.) Key to this revision is Fraser's discussion of capitalism's three non-commodified 'crucial background conditions', concerned respectively with social reproduction, ecology and political power. These non-commodified zones lie outside of production, invisibly supporting the production of goods. These background conditions embody 'distinctive normative and ontological grammars of their own. These grammars include the social practices oriented to reproduction that tend to 'engender ideals of care, mutual responsibility and solidarity, however hierarchical and parochial these may be.' (2014, pp. 66–67; Fraser 2016)

Fraser's inclusion of maternal work (within the social-reproductive) as a background condition for capitalism is compelling. Amongst other global, transnational industries undergoing rapid change, that of mothering – an industry as well as a sphere of activity – is evidencing significant technological, economic, demographic and cultural change. These changes are evidenced in the massive displacement of refugees; the millions of female labour migrants working as care workers in the 'invisible sectors'⁴ in Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East and north America

⁴ Approximately 80 million women are migrants, just under 50 percent of the total number of migrants. (United Nations 2015; ILO 2008).

('transnationalism from below', Smith and Guarnizo 1998, p. 4); and the burgeoning industries around reproductive technologies, including birth surrogacy, in developing and first world nations.

Amrita Pande characterises Indian womb surrogates as 'mother-workers' on the basis that their pregnancy and birthing work is subjectively experienced as and literally performed through labour:

At each stage of the disciplinary process, the mother-worker duality is manipulated in ways that most benefit the mode of production, from the recruitment of guilt-ridden mothers to the disciplining of poor, rural, uneducated Indian women into the perfect mother-workers for national and international clients. The production of this mother-worker subject, however, does not go unchallenged. What we see instead is a continuum of resistance that includes both narratives as well as individual and collective actions. (2010, p. 970)

The industry is thoroughly neoliberal in character: flexible, alienated, globalized, and determined to be profitable. In this, it is signally different to earlier commodifications of intimate maternal work (wet-nursing, fostering) wherein the production and care of infants was work undertaken by and negotiated directly between the mothers and other individuals, or within families. Pande details the ways that the women resist the abstraction of their labour from their own experience of it. By engaging in the surrogate pregnancy they have a care relation to the child in utero, and their own children, whom they've temporarily left to earn money through surrogacy. Living together in city-based clinics, often far from their home-town or village and family, the mother-workers share resources, information and strategies for improving their futures and those of their own children, whom they aim to return to with funds for education, health care and housing, earned by carrying and birthing babies.

Care-giving, gestation and birth are increasingly valorised as commodities to be traded and marketed. The political, legal, economic and social aspects of mothering and care work all come into prominence when an industry lens is applied. Kroløkke &

Pant write of surrogacy, that 'Transnational surrogacy produces not only new babies and new citizens but also new parents and new bioethical and biopolitical concerns [...] (2012, p. 243).

The socialization of children and young adults in regard to their education and health rights; citizenship and legal recognition; and the accessing of other institutional resources for children are a responsibility (though not a sole responsibility) of maternal practice. These are pre-eminent capacities and rights to develop and acquire, especially so for migrant, refugee and other minority mothers (ethnic, LGBT, indigenous). These capacities and rights are very often mediated by women, by mothers and others providing maternal care. Work and mothering are not separate spheres, and are today increasingly de-bordered and undergoing re-valuation by local and global neoliberal markets.

Nancy Fraser's call for feminist re-engagement with Marxism's political, social and economic discourse (Fraser 2012) is entirely valid in an era saturated with identity politics, and market-hungry capital's 'remapping' of 'institutional boundaries' (2014, p. 62; 2013, pp. 4–5), which traditionally separated the productive and private spheres. Neoliberal, globalized capitalism has found a new market, that of mothering, and new consumers for this mothering: working mothers and childless or child-wanting men and women. Neoliberal values are present everywhere in public discourse and have coerced some feminist discourses around the gendered issues of care, nurture and dependency.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to reconsider maternal labour through a reading of Christophe Dejours' enriched, thick understanding of work-in-general and Sarah Ruddick illumination of the practice of maternal work. Nancy Fraser's focus on neoliberal capitalist practices and structures is an important reminder, if we needed one, as to the importance of the concept of maternal labour. Maternal labour and a rich understanding of work in general shouldn't remain in the 'background' of feminist thinking. An enriched social, psychological and economic notion of work, that gives back to work what we-who-work tacitly know to be true — that we give of ourselves

to the work, that we engage our subjective self to attain the task, and that work is formative (or destructive) of our identity – will enable an understanding of mothering as work, with all its emotion and affect retained and valued.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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