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Arlie Hochschild

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Notes and Commentaries

Reply to Cas Wouters's Review Essay on *The Managed Heart*

Arlie Hochschild

It is strange to see one's book laid out like a 'patient etherized upon a table', the doctor critiquing the shape of the pituitary gland here, the symmetry of the kidneys there. What is jarring, of course, is that an author likes to think of her book as whole and alive, muscles moving, heart beating. A diagnosis of the particulars can be useful, even while a sense of the living whole is missing. In this way I find something both useful and odd in Cas Wouters's review article of my book, *The Managed Heart*. What is useful are his criticisms of some particulars; what is odd is that he nowhere states my central thesis.

Mr Wouters makes a few good points. I tended to use the terms 'public' and 'commercial' interchangeably, which I agree is a problem. I could have developed my conception of emotion more fully, and related it more systematically to my thesis about the management of feeling at work. This, too, is a good point. He notes that I write as though I believe we are 'freer' in private life than in public life; I do not believe this, but my writing on this point may have been unclear. On the other hand, Mr Wouters says I believe that control 'always' emanates from outside the individual, whereas my chapters on emotion management and feeling rules in private life (chapters 3 and 4) give many examples of feeling rules that are well 'inside' the individual.

Mr Wouters goes on to say that I focus too 'narrowly' on capitalism, and that I'm 'preoccupied' with the costs of emotional labour. Instead, he suggests that I describe the emotion management of tribal chiefs, kings, warriors, and priests. He goes on to tell us about how people learned to control fire by controlling the fear of fire, and

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moves from there to the Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions. In the event that we develop a twenty-volume encyclopaedia on the sociology of emotions, a section on the discovery of fire or the Agrarian Revolution might well fit. But in a book on the expanding service sector in the modern American economy and the emotional labour it requires — the central idea he avoids — I wonder if I really need a chapter on primitive man.

Let me state it here. In the nineteenth century, when Marx was writing, most workers produced goods by means of their physical labour, and some did so by mental labour. In the twentieth century, with increased automation and the growth of the service sector, fewer workers make things, and more workers deliver services. Fewer work on assembly lines, and more work as secretaries, waitresses, sales clerks, social workers or teachers. Such service workers usually have face to face or voice to voice contact with the public. They create and maintain a relationship, a mood, a feeling, and to do so they engage in what I call *emotional labour* — the work of trying to feel the appropriate feeling for the job. With this changing nature in work comes a change in that aspect of self we call on to do work. I juxtapose two emblematic examples, a nineteenth-century labourer in a wallpaper factory and a twentieth-century flight attendant. The factory worker uses his hands, and his mind–hand–body coordination to create so many rolls of wallpaper a day. He does not have to 'love' the wallpaper; he needn't sustain a relationship to it. He makes it with his hands. On the other hand, to do her job, the flight attendant must try to create 600 to 800 'happy' customers. How she feels about these customers and how she feels about herself when she is with them is *part* of her job. If she is scornful, irritable or indifferent, she's not doing her job well. In some sense, she has to 'love the wallpaper'. She is expected to do 'emotional labour'. By my estimate, roughly a third of American workers today have jobs which subject them to substantial demands for emotional labour, and of all *women*, roughly half have such jobs.

With this change in the nature of work, I further argue, we see a change in the potential cost of work to the worker. As Marx pointed out, the factory worker can feel that the wallpaper he made is not really 'his' and that even his body, insofar as it has become an instrument of labour, is not quite 'his', but an extension of the machinery around him. So in a different way the flight attendant can become estranged from the aspect of herself that 'does' the job. She may feel that her have-a-nice-day smile is not really *her* smile but

is an indirect extension of the company's smile. Even the warmth and liking for passengers she summons up, and that helps make her smile sincere, can sometimes feel like a reflection of the company's disposition. The company then advertises her 'sincerity'. (A Delta Airlines ad features the 'smile from within'.) Just as we may become alienated from our physical labour in a goods-producing society, so we may become alienated from our emotional labour in a service-producing society.

My purpose in *The Managed Heart*, then, was to introduce the concept of 'emotional labour', 'feeling rules' (the norms which govern emotional labour), and the 'emotional exchanges' on which these bear, and to show how these concepts shed light on the nature of service work, and the workers' potential estrangement from it. I describe on-the-job emotion management, feeling rules and emotional exchanges by pointing out their analogues in private life. In an appendix I spell out my concept of emotion, arguing, with Freud, that emotion has a signal function (it signals where *we* 'stand' vis-a-vis the reality we apprehend). When our emotional labour puts us out of touch with our feelings, it is such signals that we lose. The ultimate human point of my book was to bring a hidden form of work out into the open, and to expose some of the conflicts people feel in doing this work, conflicts which don't show because part of their work is to 'seem to love the work'. The point was to give credit where credit is due — to female and male workers on the human assembly line. I believe that emotional labour is necessary for a high standard of emotional living but that, like housework, it should be shared. But in Wouters's review essay, we get no glimpse of this, 'the whole patient'.

Threaded through Mr Wouters's commentary are a series of puzzling turns of phrase. Mr Wouters claims I 'pretend' to present a new social theory of emotions, that I 'conceal' contradictions, that I 'almost secretly' say that commercialization affects private life, and that I 'try to make believe that' emotion management has become more subject to hierarchical control. Now I welcome Mr Wouters's diagnosis of my ideas as good or bad, as developed or underdeveloped. But what am I to make of this image of a sneaky writer, snatching pen to secretly scribble notes behind the reader's back? I wouldn't say Mr Wouters 'pretends' to criticize my book; I assume that he means what he says he means. But when Mr Wouters says that I 'pretend' to something, perhaps he is confusing me with one of the objects of my analysis, display work. If so, his reasoning

might go like this: if I talk about it, I must be doing it. But isn't this a silly confusion? Just because Mr Wouters writes about 'informalization' we do not assume that he himself acts in an informal way.

In addition to Mr Wouters's puzzling charge about 'secrets' is his disapproval of my having written a downbeat book. I'm gloomy. I focus on what's wrong, on capitalism, on subordinates. I don't say enough about what's right, about public life apart from capitalism, about those whom no one bosses around. My book, he says, 'encourages rancour'.

Mr Wouters himself went out and interviewed five KLM flight attendants. His five flight attendants weren't alienated. They were happy. The only real problem was their potential cynicism about stable relationships. Something can be done about that, Wouters says: 'more and more flight attendants have bought a telephone answer machine as an aid in maintaining their intimate relationships at home'. His finding of the Happy Worker fits a certain consentualist view of the modern workplace as a place in which hierarchy and subservience are wondrously 'disappearing', and avoidance behaviour declining. What is left, he implies, is a diversity of pleasant, egalitarian, social worlds.

This formulation is part of Mr Wouters's theory of 'informalization'. Basically I suspect that Mr Wouters read my book looking for a diagnosis that would confirm his own thesis, but finding only a pituitary gland here and a kidney there, he disposed of the whole body.

According to Wouters's theory of 'informalization', over the last hundred years of Western history, we have seen a decline in external constraints on human feeling. Models of emotional exchange 'have become more varied, more escapable and . . . less rigid and coercive'. Mr Wouters imagines that I say the opposite, namely that external constraints on human feeling are increasing. Actually, my thesis does not concern the *amount* of overall external constraint. My thesis concerns the changing *quality* of that constraint. I argue that the object of social constraint is more internal than it was, that we are controlled to a greater extent through our feelings, and less through our externally observable behaviour. (This notion of a social control that penetrates deeper into the self, can be related to Ralph Turner's observation of a change in how we define ourselves — less and less by our external, institutional memberships, and more and more by our inner feelings.)

In the modern era, I believe there may indeed be, over the long term, a growing diversity of social personalities, sexualities, and ways to be human. Although standards can vary from decade to decade, our social codes may be, as he suggests, increasingly situational. Here Mr Wouters has an important insight. But all of these ways may now be guided by more latent rules that run deeper into the self. If nineteenth-century advice books detail the proper observable manners, modern advice books suggest to us the right kind of 'self' to cultivate, the appropriate experience to have.

Further, when advice (on training or in advice books) is addressed to our inner self, the boundary between who we 'naturally are' and who we 'must be' can become increasingly blurred. For example, a woman may apply for a job as a flight attendant because she is 'genuinely' friendly and outgoing. She may experience little gap between her 'natural' self and her on-the-job self. But should that gap emerge, she is required to be friendly and outgoing anyway because, in some important way, feelings are the job. This peculiar kind of blur occurred to me recently when I saw an ad on American television by Pacific Bell Telephone Company. A business man is shown hanging up the phone, saying 'I keep in touch with my clients about personal matters. Sometimes the best business calls are the personal ones.' Business emerges 'spontaneously' out of personal ties. At the same time, a personal bond is *mobilized* in the interest of selling something. There is a blur. And there is an elaborated convention as to how to experience the business friend.

Mr Wouters often uses the terms 'informalization and democratization' together, as if the two go hand in hand. If by democratization, Wouters means that those at the top of the race, class or gender hierarchies put on fewer airs, and those on the bottom grovel less, he is probably right. But at the same time, a change in cultural manners may glide smoothly over a distribution of wealth and status that hasn't changed a bit. In fact, a change in manners can *obscure* the absence of structural change. The day Ronald Reagan proposed dropping the corporate income tax, he was televised having a beer in a working-class bar in Boston. Mr Wouters has his eye on the manners but he seems to ignore the structure underneath. Whatever informalization has been going on in the last decade in the US has gone alongside an increase in the gap between the rich and the poor, a growing number of homeless, and an increase in the proportion of poor who are women.

We may manage our feelings more, Mr Wouters argues, but we

have more freedom in how to do it, and Mr Wouters finds in this a totally unmixed blessing; we are liberated. As he writes,

> informalization presupposes an emancipation of emotions, the liberation and exchange of these emotions in informal contacts may bring some pleasurable tension and relaxation. Today the search for such excitement — a quest for excitement — is no longer restricted to separate domains like sports and arts, but it has spread into all spheres of life to such an extent that one might say that life as a whole has become a sport or an art, the sport and the art of everyday life.

It's one thing to say that people who cultivate an awareness of their feelings and who manage them carefully can enter more social worlds with more freedom. It's another thing to say that 'life as a whole has become a sport'. For a recent book (called *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*) I interviewed fifty working couples and observed in some of their homes. The women I studied have more choices about 'how to be a woman' than their mothers or grandmothers had; and in this sense they fit Mr Wouters's model of growing diversity.

But I didn't come away from my seven years of research on these busy and sometimes troubled marriages with a sense that, on the whole, they thought of life as a 'sport'. There was not that sense of easy exit, of inconsequentiality called to mind by the term 'sport'. They could have fun, but juggling as they were the conflicting demands of work and home, they didn't conceive of life itself as an amusement. In Erving Goffman's terms, they maintained a 'serious frame' on life. They did not reflect the postmodernist 'detachment' from life that Wouters seems to see on the cultural horizon.

And to be honest, I don't believe life is a 'sport' either, or that it would make a better world if we saw it that way. I believe some people really get hurt, and can't walk off the field 'after the game'. I believe that sociologists like ourselves can use our minds in some modest way to help. But I see we are in the realm of the personal, and that, alas, I'm not an example of Mr Wouters's theory, either. And I see now that the patient has woken up from the anaesthesia, and perhaps I should escort her home.

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Arlie Russell Hochschild teaches Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley.