Introducing Mood Work

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Abstract *In this introduction we suggest a number of ways that mood has been and can be a productive way to approach various forms of labour including: the emotional expenditure of those that care either professionally or as 'voluntary' labourers; the pedagogic labour of teaching; and the mood work of the state and the media. The introduction also introduces the main themes of the essays in this special issue.*

Keywords emotional labour, Heidegger, mood, seminar

The most obvious questions are still worth asking: why mood, why mood *work*, and why *mood work* now? The mood-filled nature of the recent global economic meltdown is an obvious incentive: during those months in late 2007 and throughout 2008, months when the business news took centre stage, we were regularly told that 'the market' was suffering from depression, and afflicted with all the symptoms that came with that - anxiety, lack of confidence, panic. A mood of doubt rendered years of financial boosterism as little more than a mirage. But such vivid pictures of our economic structures (if so solid a sounding word as 'structures' can be applied to the world of stocks and shares, of futures and derivatives) don't articulate something new, rather they point us to the much longer history of the way that mood has been invoked as a central category for describing the states of the social and economic. As Jani Scandura reminds us: 'after the 1929 stock market crash, "depression" came to refer simultaneously (and without antecedent) to psychological ill health and financial collapse in American clinical and popular discourse'.[1]

Alongside the moods of the market our title 'Mood Work' is also directed to the world of work, to various forms of labour. One feature of recent studies in the political sociology of labour, particularly as it has been changing throughout many Western countries, is the increased focus on work where the product of labour is connected in some way to mood. What social scientists and others call immaterial labour and affective labour is very often also mood work. In the pioneering work of the sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild 'mood work' is called emotional management and emotional labour. Based on ethnographic work conducted in 1980, Hochschild's book *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* takes us into the moodful world of flight attendants. Hochschild's book is both about the physical and psychological cost of such labour and about how unevenly emotional labour is distributed (for instance within patriarchal family structures where women often perform the vast majority of care). She also points to the growing ubiquity of emotional labour:

1. Jani Scandura, *Down in the Dumps: Place, Modernity, American Depression*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2008, p4. http://doi.org/vzk

> But most of us have jobs that require some handling of other people's feelings and our own, and in this sense we are all partly flight attendants. The secretary who creates a cheerful office that announces her company as 'friendly and dependable' and her boss as 'up-and-coming', the waitress or waiter who creates an 'atmosphere of pleasant dining', the tour guide or hotel receptionist who makes us feel welcome, the social worker whose look of solicitous concern makes the client feel cared for, the salesman who creates the sense of a 'hot commodity', the bill collector who inspires fear, the funeral parlor director who makes the bereaved feel understood, the minister who creates a sense of protective outreach but even-handed warmth - all of them must confront in some way or another the requirements of *emotional labor*.[2]

2. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983, p11.

If Hochschild terms this work emotional labour, then why replace these terms with the vaguer phrase 'mood work'? We don't set out to challenge Hochschild's important work by swapping mood for emotion; rather we think that a mood perspective might provide new insights about our social worlds that might be harder to grasp if the focus is entirely concentrated on emotion.

If we stick with Hochschild's example of the experience of flight attendants, airline companies and flying, then we might initially suggest that mood incorporates the entire situation as well as the 'players' within it. While Hochschild brilliantly describes the work of airlines where 'spontaneous warmth' is sold as a commodity, and supplied by a steward who can't show that such spontaneous warmth is studied or laboured or drains the spirit and the body, she is less interested in all the other work that takes place to fashion the mood of the contemporary transatlantic flight. Of course she was doing her ethnography as someone committed to studying the hidden injuries of jobs undertaken mainly by women. And, of course, she was writing before 9/11 made security the dominant issue for commercial airlines and airports. Today if we started to enumerate the kinds of material forms and forces that shape the mood of a flight we might include alongside the 'spontaneous warmth' of the flight attendants at least the following: the queues through security and hand-luggage scanning; the sense of the journey (for fun, for work, for keeping contacts amongst diasporic families, for necessity); the status of your passport (will you be welcomed with suspicion at the other end? Pulled into interrogation and body searched?); the classing of seating (first, business, economy, and that dispiriting walk past the business booths before you find your place squashed into an economy seat in what is also known as 'cargo class'); the colour of the security code (is it orange or red?); the in-flight entertainment; the noise of the flight; the weather conditions; and so on. We could say initially that mood is made up of individual and collective feelings, organic and inorganic elements, as well as contingent, historical and slow changing conditions. A sudden jolt of turbulence can produces general muted gasps amongst all but the seasoned traveller and crew; hours of flying

in noisy cramped conditions can produce a sense of being not fully present, a not-quite-aware mood.

We could then suggest that mood is an orchestration of many factors. For instance the emotional labour that the flight attendants perform is often aimed at decreasing the emotional and affective intensities of passengers. A 'normal' flight, then, might have as a base mood a low-level anxiety coupled with that familiar sense of flatness that immobile waiting provides. We could say that the flight (and all the agents that this points to) attempts to instil a 'good-enough' mood of low intensity and it does this through the training of the flight crew and through the various rituals of flying: the safety announcement telling you how to disembark if you land at sea; the regular gifts of drink and food; the intermittent announcements; the restful voices of cabin crew; the endless cacophony of jet engines; the stream of in-flight entertainment.

Take another example of a mood-scene that will be familiar to many readers of this journal, and certainly to all of those who wrote this issue: the seminar. The seminar, for many of those working in the arts and humanities, is the central platform for pedagogic labour - it is where curricula are delivered, challenged and discussed. If a lecture offers a playing-through of ideas, then seminars are where ideas become inhabited. Orchestrating the mood of the seminar becomes a skill that any university teacher interested in trying to promote an ethos of openness and experimentation needs to develop. Skills are developed over time, through trial and error, through witnessing the practice of others. You recognise productive moods when they appear: the right levels of energy - not too hyper, not too placid; the right rhythms of time - people listening to each other, not talking over each other, but still eager to contribute; the right permissiveness - people willing to try out ideas but also to take responsibility for their positions. Such moods might include nothing much that could be called emotion, or affect: the mood is about attentiveness, about conviviality, about a willingness to share the time with each other. It is a mood that you hope takes a collective form of mutual support, where you hope that the shy and under-confident will feel able to contribute and where you hope that the easily-confident will take a lead but not dominate.

But anyone who has taught for even a miniscule amount of time will know that however gifted they are at teaching and orchestrating seminars, and however much they try and practice the same 'best practice' for each seminar group, in the end the collectivity of the seminar often means that the gift of mood is not always the teacher's to give. Two seminar groups discussing the same texts in the same room, taught by the same tutor at the same time on consecutive days can have quite distinct moods. One seminar is great - lively, discursive, funny, joyous - the other seminar isn't particularly problematic, it's just a bit flat, it hasn't taken shape, and it is hard work. And when you try and work out why this is so it is almost impossible to point to anything or

anyone as the causal agent - there isn't a snarling bundle of disdain casting a pall of negativity over the proceedings in the corner. Contingencies, it would seem, are important in mood work: perhaps one seminar collectively 'simply' got out of the 'wrong side of the bed'. It is no wonder then that one of the metaphors shared by many of those interested in moods is weather. Moods are like weather, they have their own pressure systems, there is never a possibility of having 'no weather', and they exist as an atmosphere. Perhaps the non-metaphoric weather was responsible for the initial condition of flatness that the one seminar group could never quite shrug off.

But there are other determinants involved in the shaping of mood and the most important of these are social and historical. To recast a well-worn sentence we could say that 'people make their own moods but they don't make them just as they please; they do not make them under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past'.[3] We live the mood-worlds we've inherited. But our mood worlds are also determined by the force fields currently at work in society. To go back to the seminar for a moment, we could ask what has changed over the last 20 or 30 years that could affect the seminar? Seminar groups have got bigger, rooms have become more and more anonymous, the length of time for the seminar has become shorter, seminar groups are now bombarded with online demands for their assessment of courses, very few students now get grants and most will have to pay £27,000 for their three years of undergraduate learning. It would be odd if this didn't have a determining effect on the mood of the seminar.

But how has this determined the mood of the seminar? One seasoned veteran of the seminar said to us that thirty years ago when a student complained about something 'not being relevant' they meant it wasn't relevant to understanding and changing the contemporary world, today when they said something wasn't relevant it meant they weren't going to be assessed on it. We can overcook these stories of creeping instrumentalism, and downplay the actuality of the situation students find themselves in and the ways in which they respond. We could say however that the anxieties of the seminar, which have probably always been there, have taken on new hues and tones and part of this is the worry of 'wasting money' by not getting the requisite marks to show your worth. We could also say that in a performance culture it is likely that we as teachers have altered too, knowing that how our students rate the seminar will be available for scrutiny by line managers and human resources. Are seminars slightly more brittle now, but also more focused? Do ears prick up more quickly when marking criteria is being discussed? Is discussion less-wandering, less-open to random surprise? Mood shows us how the determinants of history can be felt 'in the air' so to say.

When we were devising this special issue on Mood Work the journal *New Literary History* published their special issue on mood titled *In the Mood*.[4] Like them we don't want to draw hard and fast distinctions between mood,

3. Adjusted from Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852. Marx is talking about the conditions under which history is made. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1967, p96.

4. Rita Felski and Susan Fraiman (eds), *In the Mood*, special issue of *New Literary History*, 43, (2012). Some of our contributors have also usefully drawn on this excellent journal issue. We hope that 'Mood Work' can add to the discussions articulated in *NLH*.

emotion, affect and feeling. Like them we are keen to mobilise the insights of Martin Heidegger without following the political direction of his philosophical project. For Heidegger mood (*Stimmung*) is a fundamental category. As one of Heidegger's most acute commentators has it:

> Our moods modulate and shape the totality of our Being-in-the-world, and they determine how things can count for us in our everyday concerns. Heidegger's point is that only when we have been 'tuned in' to the world in a certain way can we be 'turned on' to the things and people around us. Moods enable us to focus our attention and orient ourselves. Without this orientation, a human would be a bundle of raw capacities so diffuse and undifferentiated that it could never discover anything. What we *do* encounter in our attuned situatedness is not just worldhood, but rather a highly determinate cultural world.[5]

5. Charles Guignon, 'Moods in Heidegger's *Being and Time*', in *What is an Emotion? Classic Reading in Philosophical Psychology*, Cheshire Calhoun and Robert C. Solomon (eds), New York, Oxford University Press, 1984, p237.

We could then say that mood is the form that attention takes. It is the way the world presents itself to us as 'matters of concern' and matters to ignore. Mood has the distinct advantage for us because it allows us to attend to the world of affect, to the world of sensation and the senses, and to the world of perception, simultaneously. We recognise that such a vague and inclusive purview might also be a danger for analysis. We are prepared to take our chances. But it is perhaps the last words of Guignon that excites us most: mood work gives us access to our situatedness within 'a highly determinate cultural world'. Mood, then, is how the social and cultural world is lived as qualities and forms, as sense and feeling. It is how the world enlivens us and flattens us. As the Public Feelings group and Feel Tank Chicago have it: 'Depressed? It might be political'.[6]

6. Ann Cvetkovich, 'Public Feelings', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 106, 3 (2007): 460. This article, freely available on the web, is an excellent snapshot of a milieu of mood workers in the US.

The essays that were commissioned for this special issue start off with Sara Ahmed's project of a political phenomenology informed by feminism, critical race studies and queer theory. Her essay reminds us that in the phenomenological tradition 'mood' or *Stimmung* also means attunement. And just as there is attunement so too is there mis-attunement - a failure to fit the mood. We might notice this, for instance, when we walk into a room and somehow the atmosphere that had previously been established is broken. When that shift in mood is caused by the colour of our skin altering the atmosphere of a collective that 'just happens to be' entirely white then mood and attunement are clearly political. Ahmed goes on to investigate the way that this is played out in a national culture when a prime minister (David Cameron) invites a population to practice 'muscular liberalism' and when a state asks us to celebrate a royal wedding. Here the mood work is powerful and palpable, it draws a spotlight on the mis-attuned: those who are seen to be failing to inhabit British liberalism in all its parochial contradictions, and those whose unions don't match a royally-stamped and 'nationally' celebrated heterosexuality. If this is national mood then we, like Ahmed, might want to

embrace our failure to get in the 'right' mood.

Michael Gardiner, with the help of some Italian radical thinkers, shifts the scene to the world of information and knowledge work and particularly to high-tech workers who are often sutured into the social through a belief in the freedom and creativity of their labour. Here mood is the material form of ideology: the boosterism of the digital market is absorbed by the information worker who is endlessly connected to the delirium of the network. Rather than the repetitions of assembly line factory work robbing the industrial worker of creative fulfilment, here it is the delirium of the network and the ceaseless demands of work which robs the worker of those slower processes that would allow the world to come into focus as a meaningful entity. In this situation, where the mood of a delirious information economy is always threatening to unravel the fragile worker (kept going through various forms of self-medication and through a desperate consumerism), boredom becomes something like a counter-mood, sitting on the edge of depression, but with the potential to reveal the poverty of our current culture of speedy convenience, and information-saturated life.

In Carolyn Pedwell's essay the focus is on textual moods and the sorts of mood work that can take place through hermeneutical cultural theory. Looking at the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the essay points to a shift in the moods of critical theory and the sorts of interpretation that goes with it. This shift, she argues, is in many ways a shift in mood rather than in, say, epistemology: it is a shift from a paranoid and suspicious relationship to objects of study, to a relationship characterised by love and reparation. What Pedwell goes on to argue is that such a shift can become a repetition of what it is trying to escape from unless the fundamental ambivalence of these moods and the relationships of moods are recognised. We can keep such ambivalence in sight by paying close heed to the lessons of Sedgwick and Spivak and by recognising that moods aren't simply ours to possess. The world of mood is not one we can simply control and if we want to use cultural theory to do mood work then that might mean having to succumb to textual moods that might be uncomfortable, unfamiliar and unnerving.

The next three essays each explore the creation and experience of mood at very precise historical moments. In doing so, they develop and amplify Raymond Williams's concept of 'structure of feeling' first proposed in *The Long Revolution* in 1960, and which anticipates elements of contemporary mood work by recognising how shared emotions shape collective consciousness. While Williams tended to deploy 'structure of feeling' to historically inscribe lived experience in fairly general terms, the emphasis here is on the more intangible and subtle aspects of mood, as attunement - as a convergence of collective emotions situated in precise movements and institutions. Scott McCracken's discussion of the mood of defeat takes as its starting point Reinhart Koselleck's assertion that defeat can be far more productive of long-term political vision than the complacency of victory, provided the defeated

gain sufficient distance from their debilitating experience. But as McCracken notes, this sidesteps the crucial question of whether it is possible to ever shake off the exhausting and lingering emotional legacy of defeat itself - whether the 'analysis of defeat … is still shaped by the original mood'. To investigate this conundrum he turns firstly to Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery*, a psychomythographic account of how mythologies of defeat shape national narratives. McCracken develops his critique of Schivelbusch's approach, in which defeat is seen as a form of collective psychopathology, by contrasting it with the work of the nineteenth-century writer Jules Vallès, a supporter of the Second Republic and an active member of the Paris Commune, the editor of its most popular newspaper, *Le cri du peuple*. Vallès's autobiographical novel series the Vingtras trilogy makes no attempt to distance itself from defeat's structure of feeling; indeed he clearly locates it in the narrator's own unhappy childhood, as it develops through the three novels, *L'Enfant*, *Le Bachelier,* and *L'Insurgé*. McCracken explores how this emotional recognition and engagement provides the resources to think through the experience of defeat and move beyond it, in ways that has its uses today.

David Hendy approaches mood as a historian of broadcasting, exploring the cluster of elements that contributed to a particular 'sonic-mindedness' within the BBC between 1929 and 1939, in particular, the desire to create an atmosphere of calm and moderation, underpinned by the idea of home, through broadcast radio. This atmosphere, he argues, cannot simply be explained by rational Reithian ideology, underpinned by Arnoldian high-cultural principles, but rather needs to be understood primarily in emotional terms, as the desire to inhabit and create a mood through sound, 'forged … by a group of complex, fallible men and women who entered their workplace every morning carrying with them a whole, messy hinterland of feelings'. This sonic-mindedness - 'an alertness to the rich set of meanings various sounds were capable of conveying', can be seen as an extension of the wider development of technologies of sound - the phonograph, the telephone, and the loudspeaker as well as the radio. But it was above all the sensory experience of the First World War, with its overwhelming noise, that both shaped the precise experience of central figures such as Lance Sieveking, and played into a desire to shape a world in which the volume could really be turned down, within a broader psychological framework that defined noise and psychic stress as inextricably intertwined.

Asking 'Where does public mood live?', Margaretta Jolly focuses on1979 - the year in which Margaret Thatcher came to power. This was also the year in which the Conservative MP John Corrie introduced a Private Member's Bill aiming to drastically limit women's access to legal abortion, and the Trade Union Movement launched a momentous defence of women's rights over their bodies by joining other feminist campaigners in the National Abortion Campaign, in a rare alliance of formal and informal structures.

While staunchly defending women's right to choose, many feminists were also wary of the limitations of the rhetoric of public campaigning, wishing to create discursive spaces and a shared mood that recognised many women's need to express their difficult and ambivalent feelings about abortion itself. Jolly explores the emergence of these 'feelings about feelings', first powerfully articulated by Eileen Fairweather's *Spare Rib* article of 1979 'The Feelings Behind the Slogans', and draws on contemporary accounts and more recent interviews to unpick the complex and often difficult politics of mood of that momentous time.

We end with an essay that is both historical and ethnographic, where the weight of labour is on the production of mood descriptions. For Jennifer Carlson and Kathleen Stewart mood doesn't exist in a declarative form (I am fearful, I am on tenterhooks, I am calm), rather it adheres to the mundane practices and scenes of daily life. Their essay, bookended by theoretical reflections, consists of two ethnographic accounts of 'mood-scenes' where mood work acts as an undertow shaping the way a freezer might be filled and how that might matter, or how cleaning products could be used and how that might matter too. Mood, in these lively ethnographies, is neither just the habitual, the constant, or the sudden eruptions of affective intensity; it is rather the habitual world that can carry such eruptions on its broad back; it is the sea whose surface turbulence hides an unfathomable environment beneath it. While these ethnographies are separated by history and geography (1950s USA, 2000s Germany) together they suggest a practice of mood-ethnography where the work of mood isn't simply describing what is palpably there but also using language to describe the liquid solutions of mood that the palpable exists in.

This issue of *new formations* is intended to open up a field of investigation that has already been well-cultivated by those interested in the politics of emotions and affect. We think that 'mood work' can add to this, help expand it and, importantly, to make vivid the collective and historical dimension of felt culture. We think that those working in the field of cultural analysis could be excellent contributors in the production of mood work aimed at producing counter-moods, alternate-moods and re-mooding historical moments that have been 'mooded' by the Right as one dimensional and complete (think of the 'winter of discontent' for instance). This might mean re-enlivening Raymond Williams' project of analysing 'structures of feeling', which was a way of exploring the tension between what was or is being explicitly articulated in culture and 'a pattern of impulses, restraints, tones' that rub against the explicit to suggest an incipient counter-mood percolating through culture.[7] The past often most vividly wears the moods of those whose views hold sway in the archive, and those sways are being formed in the present. In seeking to do mood work then we want to echo Jonathan Flatley's view that: 'Any kind of political project must have the "making and using" of mood as part and parcel of the project; for, no matter how clever or correct the critique or achievable the project, collective action is impossible if people are not, so to speak, *in the mood*'.

7. Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review*, London, Verso, 1981, p159.

8. Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2008, p23.