ALIGNING THE AFFECTIVE BODY

Commercial Surrogacy in Moscow and the Emotional Labour of *Nastraivatsya*

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Abstract

Drawing on the concepts of «emotional labour» (Hochschild) and «technologies of the self» (Foucault), this article explores how women align their affective and thus risky bodies in order to become effective surrogate workers in Moscow. I argue that this alignment entails «dis-emotionalising» the pregnancy by strategically essentialising the female body. This essentialisation also serves as an authoritative tool of control and conceals the power disparities at hand.

Keywords: *surrogacy, Russia, affects, emotional labour, technologies of the self*

«More than half of the surrogates don't want to give away the child after birth. Some even disappear with it. [...] This woman carries the child for nine months, of course she develops a bond! That's only natural», Tatyana Vasilyevna[1] explains to me when we meet in her small art gallery in Moscow city centre. Any «normal woman» would develop this kind of maternal instinct, she continues. After all, it is women's nature to be nurturing and caring. Tatyana Vasilyevna is a trained embryologist but quit her job in an infertility clinic after realising that she could not reconcile her religious beliefs with the workings of the infertility industry. Now, besides running the art gallery, she is an active opponent of surrogacy in Russia. Rather than reflecting the experiences of surrogate workers, I suggest that Tatyana Vasilyevna's words reveal powerful imaginaries that dominate public discourse in and beyond Russia. It is the imaginary of children as «happy objects» (Ahmed 2010), as objects to which happiness «sticks» in a way that would inevitably leave surrogates unhappy and desperate if this happiness were taken from them. While supposedly natural qualities of the human body have been «troubled» by many scholars (Butler 1993, Lock 2001, Roberts 2007, Fine 2017), they remain surprisingly pre-eminent when it comes to pregnancy and the issue of maternal attachment (e.g. Dow 2015). In a convincing analysis of psychosocial scholarship, anthropologist Elly Teman (2008) argues that scholars continuously – yet unsuccessfully – seek proof that surrogates are psychologically or morally deviant women and / or have to engage in a great amount of self-deception in order to participate in surrogacy. Teman makes a plea for acknowledging that the contingencies of bonding are related to social and economic factors such as poverty and

[1] All names have been changed. I use first name and father's name (a common combination in Russian) when writing about actors with whom I had a more formal and distant relationship. I use only the first name when writing about surrogate workers, with whom I had a closer relationship.

life expectancy – reflecting different «reproductive strategies» (Scheper-Hughes 1985) – as well as to a conscious decision that women take. She insists on moving beyond supposedly natural categories in order to investigate instead how surrogates «manoeuver within these cultural assumptions and preserve their social identities as ‹normal› women and as ‹good mothers› while involved in a process that threatens to cast them as ‹other» (Teman 2008: 1110). Making this my agenda, I am interested in exploring the figure of the good surrogate worker – «good» in the double sense of acting in an ethically «correct» way and in the sense of being an effective worker.

As Tatyana Vasilyevna's quote shows, the surrogate body is perceived as affective and unpredictable. It is thus a risky body (Mitra 2017) that needs to be turned into an effective body through an elaborate system of external and internal control. This article focuses on the latter aspect, exploring how surrogates engage in what I call technologies of alignment. I develop this concept from the notion of *nastraivatsya* (to align oneself), a term often used by different actors in surrogacy. These technologies of alignment can be seen as a «technology of the self» (Foucault 2000) and are part of the «emotional labour» (Hochschild 2003) that surrogate workers fulfil and are expected to fulfil, in order to find the right balance between care and distance in relation to the child they carry, and not to «fall victim» to their hormonal bodies. When seeking to grasp this dynamic, the conceptual distinction between affects and emotions becomes necessary. Inspired by scholars such as Hemmings (2005) or Seigworth et al. (2010), I define «affects» as rather unmediated, involuntary, physical and non-conscious force. With the term «emotion», I draw attention to the social interpretation of these forces. Such a distinction is fruitful on a conceptual level but cannot always be drawn on an empirical one. The word «feeling» will therefore be used where the distinction does not make sense or is not stressed. While I see affects as having a certain autonomy and immediacy, they are always linked to «past histories of association» that make specific affects «stick» to specific objects (Ahmed 2004). Affects have no location; they do not dwell in the subject or in the object. They are relational and emerge in the «in-betweenness» (Seigworth et al. 2010). But through the circulation and performativity of associations, they become embodied and appear as located in the body and triggered by objects. These associations are variable across time and space. The works of Badinter (1985) and Zelizer (2013), for instance, show that children have not always been the «happy objects» they are often seen as today.

Recognising the challenges of studying and writing about such an elusive matter as affect, I am not seeking some form of ultimate truth behind the surrogates' affective states. Rather, I am interested in how the theoretical lenses of subjectivity and affect foreground the making of specific subjects and how such a perspective reveals the shaky grounds of essentialist claims based on biology.

In this article, I argue that the surrogates' emotional labour involves appropriating and adapting essentialist discourses about the female body. I trace how surrogates oscillate between emphasising and de-emphasising their own power in controlling «natural» affects. Furthermore, I show that the ability to *do it business-style* constitutes an important qualification for becoming a good surrogate worker in Russia. However, while this means that the surrogates' technologies of alignment are largely connected to keeping emotions and affects at bay, these nevertheless exist and have to be attended to. I conclude that the surrogates' efforts to essentialise their bodies represent a double-edged sword: while offering soothing explanations in moments of affective turmoil, the same discourse is an authoritative tool of control and conceals power disparities by psychologising and internalising affects.

Nastraivatsya as technology of alignment

«There are so many women who want to become surrogates... but not all of them are good», the clinic's surrogate manager Natasha Sergeevna says while giving me a worried look across the table. The «good» ones are picked out by psychologist Aleksandra Denisova. Surrogacy candidates spend around one to two hours in her small consultation room, which is decorated with a painting of a naked woman swimming amidst thousands of tiny sperm cells. The comprehensive testing methods – about which Aleksandra Denisova remains secretive – enable identifying those women whose intellectual level is too low to «understand how many tablets they have to take» or who are too critical and might thus question too many of the doctors' orders. Other women are rejected because the psychometric examinations reveal an «inclination towards adventurous and spontaneous behaviour» or a disposition that could lead to becoming overly attached to the child. One agency also told me about using lie detectors as additional measure.

These examinations ensure that only those women are chosen who are capable of «following the path», as one of the doctors phrased it, using her hands to indicate a narrow corridor. In order to follow the path, surrogates are expected to engage in what Arlie Hochschild (2003) has termed emotional labour. She adds this dimension to other forms of labour that are performed for commercial reasons, such as physical and mental labour, and describes it as the conscious display of emotions oriented towards others and / or the transmutation of emotion work (the effort to actively change an emo-

tion in degree or quality within oneself) into the commercial realm. I conceptualise emotional labour as an aspect of what Foucault has termed technologies of the self. Through these technologies the subject «constitutes itself in an active fashion» (Foucault 2000: 291) and conducts «a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being» (*op. cit.*: 225) in order to reach a certain state. Thinking about the field of surrogacy through Foucault, I develop the concept of «technologies of alignment». I derive this notion from the Russian verb *nastraivatsya* used by many surrogates in a similar way to getting or being prepared. According to the *Oxford Concise Russian Dictionary* (1998) the term can be translated as «to dispose» oneself to something or «to make up one's mind». But *nastraivatsya* is also the passive or reflexive form of the verb *nastraivat*, which can mean «to align», «adjust», «at / tune» or «configure» something (e.g. a technical device, an instrument, a computer) or – in another set of meanings – to «build».[2] For the purpose of my research, the translation of «*aligning oneself*» seems most adequate as it implies the technical aspect of bringing oneself into the right mode to follow the straight path of surrogacy.

Technologies of alignment speak of the simultaneity of elements of subjugation and freedom so prominent in Foucault's writing on subjectivity. His focus on how specific subjects come into being – rather than being simply «out there» – adds an important dimension to Hochschild's work, whose theories seem to imply some kind of inner self that is authentic and entirely private.[3] What both scholars share is the importance they attribute to structural forces. Emotional labour is closely linked to so-called «feeling rules», the often subtle social guidelines that shape how we want to feel or how we think we should feel (Hochschild 2003). Similarly, Foucault (2000: 291) notes that technologies are not invented by the individual but reflect models «proposed, suggested, imposed» in a particular culture or group. It is therefore necessary to explore the context within which technologies of alignment take place.

Several studies have shown that emotional labour – though not always termed this way – is an important issue in commercial and altruistic surrogacy (Teman 2003, 2009, Pande 2010, Jacobson 2016, Toledano et al. 2017, among others). However, the feeling rules and thus the types of emotional labour can differ widely, depending on regionally and culturally specific norms and values. Surrogacy in the USA, for instance, is situated within a discourse of altruism and gift-giving, leading to close relationships between intended parents and surrogates, while surrogates whose material interest is too evident are often rejected by clinics and agencies (e.g. Ragoné 1994, Berend 2016, Jacobson 2016). Close relationships between surrogates and intended parents are also common for surrogacy in Israel (Teman 2009) and although close relations are not frequent in India, in most cases both parties do at least know each other (Mitra 2017).

As opposed to these conceptualisations, surrogacy in Russia is understood as a work relationship that women enter as «entrepreneurs» for financial reasons (Rivkin-Fish 2013, Siegl 2015, Weis 2015).[4] Many of my interview partners stated that they prefer «doing it business-style» (as one intended mother formulated it). Consequently, affects and emotions often have no place in surrogacy arrangements. This is aided and influenced by the fact that contact between intended parents and surrogates is often distant and restricted, especially when both meet through an agency rather than through one of the online platforms, where private announcements can be posted. The stories of the women I met during my eleven months of fieldwork in Moscow were very much dominated by this lack of interaction. This can be partly explained by the composition of my group of interview partners: two-thirds of the around 40 surrogates I spoke to were women who worked for the Altra Vita IVF-Clinic in Moscow – which was a clinic and agency combined. The staff strongly promoted the idea that both sides should not meet. Many surrogate workers did not know – or only found out at a late stage in the pregnancy or while / after giving birth – whose child they were carrying. I conducted three months of participant observation at Altra Vita, accompanying surrogates to their medical examinations and embryo transfers, waiting with them between appointments or drinking tea in the clinic's «surrogate flats». With some women, the contact extended beyond this spatial and temporal frame, and I could follow their pregnancies for several months – in the case of Lena and Katya, from the very beginning to the end. In the second part of this article I will

[2] I draw on translations from the *Oxford Concise Russian Dictionary* in addition to the online dictionaries linguee.com, en.bab.la, pons.com and multitran.ru.

[3] The distinction Hochschild makes between «emotion work» and «emotional labour» seems to rest on this problematic assumption. Surrogacy challenges this differentiation, as it is an intimate full-time job you cannot «go home» from. Nevertheless, I follow Hochschild (2013) in using «emotional labour» when speaking about surrogacy.

[4] I therefore adopt Weis's (2015) suggestion of speaking of «surrogate workers» rather than «surrogate mothers».

therefore zoom in on their experiences, focusing on our meeting after they had given birth – a particularly delicate and challenging moment requiring emotional labour.

The data I draw on here also include interviews and informal conversations with intended parents, doctors, agents and psychologists, most of whom lived in Moscow but also in other parts of Russia as well as Ukraine.

Modes and moods of alignment

Many of the surrogates' narratives indicate that their decision to become a surrogate involved a process of inner *alignment*. In some cases this alignment is described as a rather effortless and technical moment, as becomes clear in the following statement by Zhenya:

> *Even if I strongly oppose something, all I need is a certain push to change my mind. I can go beyond anything if the material incentive is high enough. You just need to prepare yourself emotionally. It happens on the inside. It's like a switch.* (Zhenya, surrogate worker)

By referring to a «switch», Zhenya emphasises that her «inside» is adaptable to the circumstances of her life. She tells me that six years ago she would have felt offended had somebody suggested she become a surrogate. But now the situation has changed. The material incentive gave her the «certain push» she speaks about and made it possible for her to flick the «switch».

Other surrogates talk about longer processes of reflection, by the end of which they had come to «understand» what surrogacy was about, felt «(emotionally) prepared» and had «aligned themselves» properly. Marina, for instance, states that it took her over a year to make the decision to become a surrogate, because she could not understand how anyone could give away a child they had carried. She finally managed to align herself by doing extensive research on the Internet. This made her realise that the child would be «somebody else's» (*chuzhoi*),[5] that she would not be like a mother because there were no shared genes. While other studies have shown how surrogates distance themselves from the foetus by arguing that parenthood is a matter of intent (e.g. Ragoné 1994), the Russian surrogates I spoke to stressed genetic relatedness. Marina was thus not giving away «her» child, but rather she was like a nanny – a reassuring metaphor she had encountered in a talk show that helped her make the final decision. Despite the long process of reflection, however, Marina does not regard becoming a surrogate as a difficult decision; she states that she merely had to «find the right words».

Conceiving of these practices as technologies of the self, the right words and the right understanding are part of a linguistic repertoire «proposed, suggested, imposed» (Foucault 2000: 291) upon the surrogate worker through television, magazines, online fora or conversations with other people working in the field of surrogacy. Similarly, Vora (2009) argues that surrogates are «guided into the right understanding» by clinic staff, while Berend (2016) shows how surrogates «socialise» each other into this understanding on online fora. Seeking the right understanding, actors selectively appropriate some cultural norms in order to undermine others. While the constant mantra that «this child is *not mine*, it's somebody else's» reflects the primacy of genetic relatedness over gestation, the surrogacy-internal discourse draws on this primacy to stress that «natural» maternal bonding does not – and in fact *cannot* – take place if there is no genetic bond. This logic works as a basis for the surrogates' emotional labour while simultaneously helping them «naturalise» and «normalise» (Thompson 2005) what might otherwise be seen as unfeminine behaviour. Speaking with Sara Ahmed (2010), surrogates use this repertoire to repudiate being perceived as «affect aliens» – women who do not experience the socially appropriate affects for the children they bear. This was also reflected in one surrogate's statement that she «cannot love somebody else's child». As such, surrogates' alignment is not so much directed towards detaching, as often assumed, but rather towards *not* attaching. For some surrogates, this required no effort, because there simply was no attachment. One surrogate worker even mentioned she was afraid that negative feelings towards the child could erupt, suggesting that, because she was not the mother, she might have less patience or tolerance for the child's needs. Thus, emotional labour not only must entail keeping attachment at bay but can also require allowing a certain amount of bonding for the child's sake. Marina's words, for instance, show that she engaged in a «responsible form of bonding» (Toledano et al. 2017) by caring but not loving, by being a nanny but not a mother. Surrogates use technologies of alignment to carefully balance responsibilities towards themselves, towards the children and – ultimately – also towards the waiting parents.

[5] The adjective *chuzhoi* can be translated as «alien», «strange», «other», «not of me», or «somebody else's». None of these terms seems to fully grasp the Russian expression. Due to the strong negative connotation of the two former expressions, I therefore chose the translation «somebody else's».

This balancing takes place within the context of specific «moods». Drawing on Heidegger, Flatley (2008) conceptualises moods as «a kind of affective atmosphere» (*op. cit.*: 19), «a state of readiness for some affects and not others» (*op. cit.*: 17). Heidegger uses the term «being-attuned» – another possible translation of *nastraivatsya* – to describe what he means by mood. Being an atmosphere, however, these moods are neither purely internal nor external but rather «in-between» (Seigworth et al. 2010). They are re- / produced by the many persons, objects, words that come together in a given moment. They support the feeling rules, as became clear to me when visiting the clinic's surrogate flats. These flats – situated in a nearby building – accommodate surrogates who are not from Moscow. While those who spend their entire pregnancy in the capital have an apartment to themselves or share with one other person, there is also one communal flat for those who stay short-term. I could not help but notice that particularly in this latter flat, many women cultivated an attitude of being mainly concerned with money, while being ostensibly indifferent towards «their» intended parents. When sitting around the kitchen table, Zhenya told me: «What do I need this personal contact for? I do my job and get money for it; that's all I need to know.» This was a feeling rule that new surrogates seemed to be socialised into and the mood created by statements such as Zhenya's supported this socialisation.

Redirecting attachment

The surrogates I spoke to presented alignment as a state that, once achieved, remained stable and continuous. However, a more careful reading of their narratives revealed that emotional labour is a continuous process and the shape it takes varies throughout the surrogacy programme. The processual and changing character of alignment comes into view when contrasting the different stages of pregnancy with each other. For some women, the (non-existent) relationship with the parents becomes a more salient topic in the course of the pregnancy. Lena was one of the «indifferent» women. Having initially told me that she did not want to meet the intended parents, she changed her mind several months later. Being in contact with the parents would help her emotionally, she says, because then it would feel much clearer that the child is not hers – now, without the contact, it instead feels like she is carrying her own child.

Once the pregnancy is well underway, many surrogates start wondering who the parents are, whose child they are carrying. Not least because the surrogates feel a great responsibility for the children and are worried that they might not end up in good hands. Establishing a relationship with the intended parents opens up the possibility to redirect feelings from the child to the parents, hence making it easier to *stay aligned* and realise that «it is not my child and there are people waiting for this child» (Lena). Other studies have shown that sharing the pregnancy (Toledano et al. 2017) or shifting the pregnancy from the surrogate body to the intended mother (Teman 2009) are important parts of the emotional labour surrogates perform. This is a dynamic that agencies can also make use of. Some – albeit only a few – agencies in Russia and Ukraine advise intended parents to meet their surrogate at least once, so that the latter understands the couple's history of suffering. This affectively binds them to the intended parents, making them more responsible workers.

The surrogates' act of redirecting affects from the child to other objects becomes particularly evident in post-birth narratives, as in my conversation with Katya, the day after she was discharged from the maternity hospital. The doctor had told her to avoid sitting, so we are standing at the edge of a playground close to the surrogates' flats, watching her five-year-old daughter on the swings. Katya seems melancholic and as soon as the other young mothers are out of earshot, it becomes clear why: «I have a feeling of emptiness, of mental and inner emptiness. Someone should be here but they took him away», she says with a weary smile:

> *Of course you understand in your head that the child is not yours; you have made an arrangement and the mission has been successfully accomplished – everything is good, everything is fine, everything is wonderful. You did a good deed; you received money for it; both sides are happy and satisfied. But inside it's difficult; we're all humans… Good that they gave me pills straight away to stop lactation. If there had been milk, I don't know, it would have been horrible for my maternal feelings. Nature didn't think of it in this way: the child is meant to be yours. It's very difficult to trick nature; instinct remains instinct.* (Katya, surrogate worker)

The doctor was reluctant to show her the child after birth. «Of course she was afraid I would develop a maternal instinct and that I would then have a hard time.» But Katya insisted. Like many other surrogates, she stresses the importance of «seeing the result» in order to know that all went well:

> *The important thing is to align yourself; it is important to see the result. Of course, there was the instinct but you have to align yourself and let go. You need to see things with your head. The more you cling, the worse it gets. So you have to let go of all this, with happiness, with God, with peace [laughs].* (Katya, surrogate worker)

It was difficult not to have her own daughter around. Katya even had to take tranquillisers on the third day after delivery, because she was «going crazy». She stares at the ground, then adds: «Well I'm very much looking forward to the dog.» Katya had decided to buy a Golden Retriever in order to fill the void.

Katya's words speak of the tension between what one should and what one really does feel. Taking her sadness as a natural given, she nevertheless actively tries to counteract this nature by «seeing things with the head» – thus with rationality – as opposed to with the affective body. She also reminds herself that the surrogacy arrangement is an economic one and that she therefore has no reason to be sad. Katya experiences an excess of affect that she actively seeks to attach to other objects – her daughter and the dog. But the quotes also exemplify another aspect concerning how Katya deals with the challenging moment of birth – the uncontrollability of affects and the «naturalness» of instincts.

Controlling hormonal bodies

The influence of affects, instincts and hormones is even more apparent in Lena's post-birth account. She had wanted the *bio-mother* to be present during the delivery so «I don't have to see or hear the child and it goes straight into her arms. I know what kind of maternal instinct I would develop otherwise.» When we celebrate the successful completion of the surrogacy process with beer and snacks, Lena tells me that the intended mother did attend the delivery. Nevertheless, she caught a glimpse of the child and describes it to me with much affection and fascination. I ask her whether she saw it again after the delivery: «No!», she exclaims. «That would be dangerous. You know, these children... The female organism can react in very different ways.» And after a brief pause she laughs and says: «Tears were running down my cheeks. It just happened. I was looking at her – she was so *small*. The mother was standing there taking photos and I was just like buhuuu [simulating crying]», Lena says, still laughing at herself. «My emotions just ran wild. I was holding and holding back for such a long time. And you know, shit, giving birth is hard. It just got me. I don't know whether I was crying for joy or was I...» She does not finish her sentence but instead speaks of her concurrent feelings of self-pity, pride and happiness. «You know, there has to be some kind of outlet for all these emotions. And these were good emotions; I saw these toes, it was above all the toes – I saw them and that was it... These *small toes*.» Lena suggests that it was the child's toes in particular that made her cry, that brought to the fore affects – she speaks of «emotions» – she had held back for so long. But what kind of affects these were and why she felt that they needed to be held back remains unclear. She says they were «good emotions» and she is happy that the whole process of surrogacy and delivery was finally over. At the same time Lena clearly states that the affects she experienced were triggered by the child and that ultimately these affects were dangerous, implying that they could cause harm and pain. She thus seems to imply that she was feeling happy, while simultaneously being aware that her «female organism» could have easily corrupted this feeling by imposing a physical response beyond her control.

Picking up what Katya had said, I ask whether she experienced any feeling of emptiness. Lena says no. She does not understand where such a feeling might come from but suggests that it would be linked to «other problems», problems not connected to the surrogacy.

The discourse about the «female organism» enables surrogates to make sense of affects they do not «feel» or do not want to feel. Consciously or non-consciously, they strategically essentialise and naturalise their own body in order to rationalise the affective responses and explain why these are beyond their control. Not only during or after delivery but also throughout the entire pregnancy:

> *The pregnancy was like an emotional roller-coaster ride. Sometimes you want to cry; you feel really sorry for yourself. But at the same time, you know that these are just the hormones and you know that actually everything is OK. You understand that it is just temporary, so you can calm down and let yourself be a bit capricious for a while.* (Marina, surrogate worker)

However, while such «hormone-talk» helps surrogates to «calm down», as Marina says, the same rhetoric provides the grounds for implementing a strict system of control over the surrogate bodies. Referring to the surrogates' potential capriciousness is a powerful way in which agencies legitimise their existence. As Larisa Ossipova, who works for a Kiev-based agency, explains to me, the hormonal medicine can make a surrogate «very emotional – she cries, she laughs, she has fears, she has doubts and everything». This can make women behave in «not so good ways», for instance asking for additional money. In such cases, Larisa Ossipova tells the client: «Look, her behaviour is a bit inappropriate because she is pregnant, but don't worry, we will handle it.» Or she does not tell them at all, because «they are stressed enough» anyway.

As noted above, many agencies propagate the idea that mutual contact is dangerous, not only because intended parents risk being burdened or blackmailed by the surrogates' claims but also because surrogates risk being exposed

to unreasonable demands and surveillance by the intended parents. Buying into this narrative of threat, the de-personalised approach offered by agencies comes in handy for those intended parents who in some way or another feel threatened by the surrogate. All of the Russian intended parents I spoke to – they were all women and had all found their surrogates through online announcements – stated that they thought money was a good motivation. Altruistic motives, however, were met with scepticism and caution. «Help, so-called charity, this is very dangerous», one intended mother contended. She feared that a woman's altruistic feelings coupled with the pregnancy hormones could turn into strong attachment to the child. The female body – often already perceived as dangerous and erratic – becomes even more so due to the unpredictable influence of hormones during pregnancy, which contributed to this particular intended mother's wish to keep the relationship between herself and the surrogate worker distant and unemotional. The fact that, according to the Russian law, the gestating woman is considered the mother of the child until she renounces this right after delivery crucially adds to the perception of the risky surrogate body. Ensuring that surrogates act out of economic necessity and not altruism is one way of increasing security. In consequence, affects and emotions often have little or no place in the surrogacy process and are actively discouraged.

However, a «business-style» approach to surrogacy cannot override the affective and emotional element involved. This became clear to me when I received a message from Lena, in the course of writing this article. Two and a half years after completing the surrogacy programme, she stated: «I shouldn't have done this; now I regret my decision. [...] This was a mistake!» Lena added a smiley with a tear in one eye. She did not know where this feeling came from or even how to describe it but «it's about the soul and the conscience». It is not a feeling that evolved recently, as she had already felt regret while pregnant. «Life is such a turbulent [*stremitel'no*] thing! You want to live in a happy and unconstrained way and without sins! But that doesn't work out. [...] But time goes by; they say that time heals all wounds.»

Lena's messages threw me off balance. What did it mean that she had already experienced regret during the pregnancy, all the while maintaining the image of a happy and carefree woman towards me? Was it coincidence that exactly those two women I accompanied over such a long period voiced «emptiness» and «regret»? Would more surrogates have articulated similar feelings had we have had a closer relationship? While there are no certain answers to these questions, I argue that much explanatory power can be derived from the metaphor of the switch. As mentioned, the switch suggests that emotional labour is a momentous act with a stable effect. Linked to a notion of surrogacy as a business relationship largely free of emotions and affects, there is little conceptual space for articulating how one feels during and after the pregnancy, especially when the arrangement is mediated by an agency. Emotions that cannot be rationalised away by referring to instincts or hormones become signs of individual failure of alignment. This, of course, does not invite an open exchange about or an «outlet» (Lena) for the emotional challenges surrogacy can entail[6].

Conclusion: Politicising the «natural»

My findings in Russia – and Ukraine – stand in stark contrast to research from other contexts, where surrogates are invoked as altruistic helpers or caring mothers rather than workers. Nevertheless, there are related aspects of emotional labour across these different contexts. Teman (2003, 2009), for instance, shows how surrogates in Israel attribute the absence of maternal feelings to the artificial character of the pregnancy, while simultaneously «choosing» what to feel when and when not. These similarities are not surprising for cultural settings in which affective bonding between gestating woman and child is considered natural as well as a sign of proper motherly / feminine behaviour. In dialogue with their cultural context, surrogates perform emotional labour in order to align themselves with the predominant feeling rules. As I have shown throughout this article, they engage in technologies of alignment on the one hand through internalising a clinic / agency discourse that stresses the importance of *understanding* and *being prepared*. By making these technologies sound like they are merely a matter of operating the «switch» (Zhenya) or «finding the right words» (Marina), they become concrete and controllable. Alignment implies aligning oneself with a specific mood, making the self receptive to some but not other feelings. On the other hand, surrogates selectively appropriate social and medical discourses when it comes to explaining «hormones» or «instincts», which they perceive as beyond their control. Their physical responses are explained by «strategically naturalising» (Thompson 2005) the female body. Unwanted affects are dealt with by redirecting them towards others (e.g. in Katya's case her child and

[6] Mitra and Schicktanz (2016) have made a similar point, arguing that surrogates cannot articulate grief about failed conceptions, because this might be read as inappropriate attachment to the embryo.

the dog) or by trying to avoid them (e.g. in Lena's case not wanting to see the child). Through these distinct strategies surrogates aim to «dis-emotionalise» their pregnancies. This enables them to remain effective workers while preserving their ethical integrity as good women and mothers.

However, some attempts at «dis-emotionalising» reveal cracks. While an anonymous «business-style» approach to surrogacy tries to keep the economic and the affective / emotional aspects apart – because the latter might pollute the former (Zelizer 2013) – Katya's and Lena's stories show that the intimate elements of pregnancy and childbirth cannot be ruled out. Ultimately they find their way back into the equation, at least as long as surrogacy takes place in a broader context in which pregnancy and childbirth are perceived as inherently intimate processes. The intimate character is a result of the complex entanglement of materiality, affects, norms and discourses – an entanglement that makes it impossible to delineate where nature stops and culture starts, because historically dominant gender norms and body imaginaries shape ideas about the «natural» feelings of pregnant women (Malich 2017). Analysing how these norms and imaginaries have changed over the centuries and how they might relate to social, political and economic developments, Lisa Malich argues that «the explanation influences what needs to be explained» (2017: 387; my own translation). One explanation, thus, always covers up alternative ones. Not only have women commonly been seen as the more emotional gender, in addition their affects / emotions have often been psychologised, locating them «inside» of women. Such a view leads to the concealment of structural factors that influence how we feel. This dynamic allows agents such as Larisa Ossipova to dismiss the surrogates' discontent as hormonal mood swings that have no legitimate trigger but are rather interpreted as a sign that surrogates need to be strictly controlled. Hormone-talk also allows Lena to rationally explain her tears and Katya to make sense of her feeling of emptiness. To develop a fuller understanding, however, long-term fieldwork is a decisive component, as it allows learning more about the specific contexts and biographies in which surrogacy takes place. It is crucial to take into account, for instance, that Katya had fled her bombed hometown of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine in 2014 due to the ongoing military conflict; that she had mentioned feeling objectified by the doctors, who assumed they could ask anything of her because she was paid for the pregnancy; or that she saw her right to a private sphere infringed by the clinic staff's unannounced control visits. In addition, one certainly needs to consider the «feeling rules» that allow no space for voicing feelings, as well as the by and large judgmental discourse about surrogacy. Being confronted with images that cast surrogates as immoral, having to keep the pregnancy secret and lacking adequate opportunities for exchange – with other surrogates as well as with the intended parents – it is no surprise that some surrogates might be left with the sensation of having committed a «sin», as Lena implies.

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