

## Visiting Professor

# Affect, Authority, Antagonism: The New Cultures of Customer Service

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The Sonia and Edward Kossoy Conference Room (307), Buchmann Faculty of Law



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The contemporary consumer economy is marked by a transfer of work from corporations to customers, technology platforms with high failure rates, deep devotion to byzantine bureaucratic procedures, and the conspicuous, constant valuing of high-status customers over low-status ones.

Current affective culture is thus notable for the conversion of customer service encounters to transactions routinely characterized by frustration, impotence, and fury. In this project I consider how what I call the "antagonistic interface" arises as a function of the way early twenty first century Americans so often identify with the interests of capital and technology.

I suggest that the prevaricating tactics, dehumanizing and deceptive practices and technical control exercised by large corporations in increasingly oligopolistic commercial environments significantly inform broadly felt experiences of alienation, anger, and dispossession in the US. In this talk I to explore a set of affective responses to current political and economic conditions that are being channelled through forms of hyper-rationalized customer service. Amidst the complex sociality of commerce and its increasingly combative micro relations, I also examine the proliferation of command-based corporate structures and performed affects, arguing that antagonistic tone is partly set by new vocabularies and speech styles. Accordingly, this analysis of the downstream social effects of technologization and profit concentration will consider developments such as corporate gaslighting in which corporations present their own compulsory practices and policies as consumer choices.