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Paul McFadden

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The Production of Politics in Front-Line Service Work: “Body Work” in the Labour Process of the Call Centre Worker

PAUL MCFADDEN

This article utilises an examination of the labour process of call centre work as a jumping-off point towards understanding the production of politics, arguing that the properties by which bodies are capable of praxis are becoming central to commodity production. As such, this article contributes to the project of understanding bodies under capitalism and to research on call centres and service work. To read call centre work politically, the article isolates and qualifies “the elementary factors of the labour process” as discussed by Marx in Capital, Vol. I. In light of research on purportedly new forms of labour, this analysis of the labour process points towards the need for a reconfiguration of the concept of body work, which is subsequently deployed in an analysis of the production of politics in service work. By emphasising the reciprocal relationality of processes of the production of bodies, this conceptualisation of body work breaches binary understandings of work/life and therefore has significance beyond labour studies. The article concludes that service work forestalls and limits the potential for politics. Nonetheless, the instrumentalisation of the capacities by which bodies are political can also represent opportunities for the resistance of the pernicious ontological consequences of work.

Introduction

The call centre has come to be a fundamental process in the operation of economy in the global North-West and the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China).¹ The call centre has been a subject of the capital's tendency to offshore production and is an important function in a broad range of global industries such as finance, insurance and utilities.² As such, the call centre is a process of capital accumulation that spans increasingly diaphanous state boundaries. Key issues of concern for call

1. For the global North-West see Vaughan Ellis and Phil Taylor, “‘You Don’t Know What You’ve Got Till It’s Gone’: Re-contextualising the Origins, Development and Impact of the Call Centre”, *New Technology, Work and Employment*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2006), pp. 107–122. For the BRIC countries see Ramkishan S. Rajan and Sadhana Sristava, “Global Outsourcing of Services: Issues and Implications”, *Harvard Asia Pacific Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2007), pp. 39–40; and Jean Paul Simon/European Commission/Joint Research Centre/Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, *The ICT Landscape in BRIC Countries: Brazil, India, China* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011), EUR 24933 EN.

centre research have been their importance to the policy and practice of the “knowledge economy”, their role in global networks of production, distribution, exchange and consumption and as testing grounds for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and for management technologies which are subsequently adapted for deployment in other industries.³ However, the consideration of these problematics in terms of the reciprocity that pertains between the production of bodies in work and the production of the politics of work has often been lacking.

The politics of work is attendant to the technical organisation of work. Relations of subordination and domination, consent and resistance are produced when people enter into productive relations with one another. As Burawoy states, “alongside the organisation of production ... there are distinctive political and ideological *apparatuses of production*”.⁴ Developments in the character of processes of capital accumulation such as the proliferation of service work and the requirements for affective and so-called immaterial abilities in industrial production indicate that emergent forms of labour must be a fundamental empirical basis in the project of understanding the co-production of bodies and of politics.⁵ These emergent forms are identified by concepts of immaterial labour, affective labour, emotional labour and aesthetic labour.⁶

This article contends that workers’ bodies and consumers’ bodies create one another in the labour process of call centre work. A “reciprocal relationality” persists in the process of bodies acting on bodies within which bodies undergo alterations.⁷ In work, the character of these alterations is attendant to the politics of work. The focus of this article is not the worker–consumer relation but rather the worker–work relation; it examines how the organisation of call centre work bears upon how the worker’s body is produced as an appropriate bearer of labour-power. Labour-power is indeterminate; it must be *put* to work before it becomes actual labour. The article examines how the production of politics in work is affected by ideological prescriptions that alter the character of this indeterminacy. Of course,

2. Phil Taylor and Peter Bain, “Reflections on the Call Centre—a Reply to Glucksmann”, *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2007), pp. 349–362; John Urry, *Offshoring* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014).

3. For the first point see Paul Thompson, Chris Warhurst and George Callaghan, “Ignorant Theory and Knowledgeable Workers: Interrogating the Connections between Knowledge, Skills and Services”, *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 7 (2001), pp. 923–942. For the second see Miriam A. Glucksmann, “Call Configurations: Varieties of Call Centre and Divisions of Labour”, *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2004), pp. 795–811. For the third see Phil Taylor *et al.*, “Work Organization, Control and the Experience of Work in Call Centres”, *Work Employment Society*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2002), pp. 133–150.

4. Michael Burawoy. *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 8; emphasis original.

5. On the proliferation of service work see Chris Warhurst and Dennis Nickson, *Looking Good, Sounding Right: Style Counselling in the New Economy* (London: The Industrial Society, 2001). On immaterial labour in industrial production see Andre Gorz, *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

6. Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor”, in Paulo Virno and Michael Hardt (eds.), *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 133–150; Michael Hardt, “Affective Labor”, *boundary 2*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1999), pp. 89–100; Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Chris Warhurst *et al.*, “Aesthetic Labour in Interactive Service Work: Some Case Study Evidence from the ‘New Glasgow’”, *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2000), pp. 1–18.

7. Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx’s Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (2nd ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); and Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx’s Method* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

indeterminacy remains a basic category for understanding the labour/capital antagonism that underpins the politics of work, but these ideological prescriptions to labour-power bear upon the potential and the desire of workers to engage in a “politics beyond singular or individual moments of resistance and microconflictuality”.⁸ This making of bodies is an ideological foreclosing upon the potential for a more antagonistic form of indeterminacy, and therefore of resistance; a foreclosing that is coded in the organisation of work. To address this problematic this article proposes a conception of “body work” which represents labour that utilises the embodied properties of workers. Three reciprocally relational factors of body work are disaggregated: how workers work on their own bodies; how they work on the bodies of others; and how work inscribes itself on the body. This approach to work dovetails with projects to understand the embeddedness of the corporeal and embodied character of the processes of international political economy and with the critique of “cognitive capitalism” theories.⁹ This examination of call centre work addresses itself to the fundamental blind spot in the cognitive capitalism thesis: despite their many contributions, the problem with the writings of Negri, Virno, Hardt, Boutang *et al.* is that they “dismiss the range and complexity of the forces ... that make capitalism more unstable and, at the same time, more enduring”.¹⁰ In light of developments in forms of capital accumulation, the concept of body work is an appropriate and necessary analytical tool which reveals the production of capitalistic subjects in this apparent *corporeal capitalism*. As such, I offer a working definition of corporeal capitalism as a variant of the capitalist mode of production in which the embodied character of labour-power is fundamental to developments in the form of value production.

This article examines the political problems that ensue from the centrality of the body in capital accumulation by first analysing the “elementary factors” of the labour process of the front-line call centre worker.¹¹ The labour process of call centre work demonstrates that the production of the object is simultaneously the production of economic value and the production of bodies. This analysis of the labour process is, therefore, a necessary precursor to an examination of the reciprocal relationality between the extent of the production of bodies in work and the production of the politics of work. This article reconfigures the concept of body work in order to isolate the particular properties of the body that are utilised in call centre work, concluding that it is those embodied properties with which subjects create political relationships that are exploited. In light of theories on the increasingly communicative character of labour and the embeddedness of embodiment in the organisation of work, this article argues that the concept of body work must be central to studies in the political economy of work.¹² It is worth quoting Burawoy at length here, both to situate this assertion and also to highlight that the coercive dimensions of front-line

8. Emma Dowling, “Producing the Dining Experience: Measure, Subjectivity and the Affective Worker”, *Ephemera*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2007), p. 118.

9. On the first point see J.J. Pettman, “Writing the Body: Transnational Sex”, in G. Youngs (ed.), *Political Economy, Power and the Body* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 52–74; and Nicola Smith, “Corporeal Capitalism: Invisible Male Bodies in the Global Sexual Economy”, in Angus Cameron, Jen Dickinson and Nicola Smith (eds.), *Body/State* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2013), pp. 95–114.

10. George Caffentzis, “A Critique of ‘Cognitive Capitalism’”, in Michael A. Peters and Ergin Bulut (eds.), *Cognitive Capitalism, Education and Digital Labor* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), p. 24.

11. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I: *A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production* (translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling) (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2003), pp. 174–176.

12. On the embeddedness of embodiment see Carol Wolkowitz, *Bodies at Work* (London: Sage, 2006).

service work (FLSW) are not “new” but rather that the processes by which bodies are made in work are more apparent in FLSW. He states:

Any work context involves an economic dimension (production of things), a political dimension (production of social relations), and an ideological dimension (production of an experience of these relations). These three dimensions are inseparable.¹³

The elementary factors of the labour process of FLSW demonstrate this inseparability. In FLSW the production of a thing is the production of a person; the intended aim of the call centre labour process is the production of a particular feeling and/or a particular value in the body of the person receiving the service. The use-value of labour-power is, therefore, its ability to produce a social relation that results in the formative shaping of the subject. This production of thing/social relation is the production of an experience of a social relation that accords to capitalist norms of accumulation; the alteration of the object contributes to the production of the ideological and cultural environment which both worker and customer create and exist within. This article addresses the unity of these dimensions of work through the analysis of questions regarding the relation between the production of economic value in wage-labour and the production of political subjects and of bodies. What does the “obscure structure”, as opposed to the visible structure, of the labour process of call centre work reveal about the production of bodies in FLSW?¹⁴ What properties of the body are mobilised in FLSW? Do these properties have a political character and how does the formative shaping of bodies in work react onto the potential for a politics “within and against” capitalist norms of accumulation?¹⁵ There are pernicious ontological consequences to the making of one’s own body in accordance with the requirements of call centre work. Call centre work is not simply the exercise of embodied capacities; it is the separation of these capacities from the body and their transformation—and thus the transformation of the body itself—into something else. Therefore, in the context of the indeterminacy of labour-power, the article poses the problem of where opportunities for resistance to the capitalistic making of bodies might be and how they might proceed.

As such, this article frames an empirical examination of the call centre labour process in light of theories of the politics and sociology of work. It draws upon Labour Process Theory (LPT) approaches to call centre work, post-operaismo theories on the politics of work, Hochschild’s theory of emotional labour, and the aesthetic labour thesis.¹⁶ This analysis of the elementary factors of the call centre

13. Burawoy, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

14. See Daniel Little, *The Scientific Marx* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) for some features of the dialectical method.

15. Kathi Weeks, “Life Within and Against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics”, *Ephemera*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2007), pp. 233–249.

16. On LPT see Peter Bain *et al.*, “Taylorism, Targets and the Pursuit of Quantity and Quality by Call Centre Management”, *New Technology, Work and Employment*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2002), pp. 170–185; Taylor *et al.*, *op. cit.*; on post-operaismo see Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Paolo Virno, “Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus”, in Virno and Hardt, *op. cit.*, pp. 189–212; Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), pp. 189–212; on emotional labour see Hochschild, *op. cit.*; Paul Brook,

labour process reveals the “innerrelationality” of body work practices and therefore implicates a need to reconfigure the concept.¹⁷ By emphasising this innerrelationality, this reconfiguration illuminates how the body’s capacity to change is exploited, how the body is made an alterity in the FLSW labour process, and a concomitant politics is thereby produced. The bodily mode of labour in the call centre, in which the body is the site of struggle between labour and capital, produces an ideological relation that is attendant to the extension of capitalist logics into the everyday experience of one’s body and the bodies of others both inside and outside work. This embodied character of labour in the call centre demonstrates new dimensions to the subsumption of bodies under capital. This reconfiguration of the concept of body work contributes to the project of bringing the body back into labour studies, bringing labour back into studies in political economy, and to the corpus of research on emergent forms of labour.¹⁸

The Elementary Factors of the Call Centre Labour Process

The capitalist labour process is a political apparatus. It is not merely the unity of activity and material by which value is created; it is a mechanism for the wielding of power and the subordination of people.¹⁹ Labour under capitalism is immediately political; as Johnson states, “work is a relationship of power”.²⁰ In chapter VII of *Capital*, Vol. I, Marx states that all labour processes are constituted by three elementary factors: first, “the personal activity of man”; second, “the subject of that work”, that is, the object that is worked upon; and third, “its instruments”. Thus, the labour process is activity that interposes instruments of labour between itself and its object, separating the object from its “immediate connexion” with its environment by effecting an alteration upon it.²¹ Following Marx, I argue that defining the factors of a given labour process is crucial to the project of penetrating the surface phenomena of work and thereby understanding the politics that both shape work and are produced by it. Before examining the elementary factors of the labour process of FLSW in the call centre, it is important to frame this discussion with reference to an important caveat in the analysis of call centres. There are differences in the extent and intensity of management methods of control over the labour process; standards that direct the regulation of behaviour vary, as do the specific characteristics of the technological systems that are employed in this task. The organisation of work in the call centre often varies according to

“In Critical Defence of ‘Emotional Labour’: Refuting Bolton’s Critique of Hochschild’s Concept”, *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (2009), pp. 531–548; on aesthetic labour see Dennis Nickson *et al.*, “Bringing in the Excluded? Aesthetic Labour, Skill and Training in the ‘New’ Economy”, *Journal of Education and Work*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2003), pp. 185–203.

17. On innerrelationality see Paul Paolucci, *Marx and the Politics of Abstraction* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2012), pp. 57–61.

18. See Wolkowitz, *Bodies at Work*, *op. cit.* on bringing the body back into labour studies; and David A. Spencer, *The Political Economy of Work* (London: Routledge, 2009) on bringing labour back into political economy.

19. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), pp. 36–37.

20. Terry Johnson, “Work and Power”, in Geoff Esland and Graeme Salaman (eds.), *The Politics of Work and Occupations* (Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1980), p. 335.

21. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, pp. 174–176.

companies' "market segmentation strategies".²² While most call centres respond to inbound calls, there are some centres that make outbound calls with the aim of soliciting new customers. Of the inbound type, there are three modes of organisation of call centre work: "mass-production, professional services, and hybrid mass-customization".²³ The analysis here is based on an examination of inbound call centres across these three modes of organisation. Despite variations, there is a general form of labour process for the front-line call centre worker that is composed of the elementary factors that Marx sets out in *Capital*, Vol. I. I will proceed to isolate these factors of the call centre labour process by drawing on a broad range of interview-based and ethnographic research on call centre work. I do so in order to compel a rethinking of the character of the elementary factors of the call centre labour process by considering the political consequences of the instrumentalisation of the body in call centre work.

Much of the research on call centre work conflates the object, instrument and activity of the labour process in its presentation. This is not surprising; as Marx states, the labour process is "the moving unity" of its elementary factors and because the research I draw upon is framed around other concerns there is no reason to expect a sorting of elementary factors.²⁴ As a surface phenomenon—i.e., according to its visible structure—labour activity in the call centre is listening and talking.²⁵ This involves interaction with the instruments of labour, i.e., ICT.²⁶ Its aim is the relaying and manipulating of information, which is the object of labour.²⁷ Thus, Warhurst *et al.* claim that the labour process of the call centre is labour activity that interposes ICT between itself and the customer in order to produce a product, i.e., "a good or a service".²⁸ In order to penetrate the visible structure of the call centre labour process, I will now focus on these elementary factors of the labour process in turn.

The stream of research on service work following C. Wright Mills' investigation of white collar work in the 1950s makes a definitive contribution to the argument that it is not simply information that is the object of labour in the call centre. Of course, information is *an* object; a key part of the labour process of call centre work is to "use ... customer records and make any changes to the client's file".²⁹ As Jenkins *et al.* note, "work involves receiving and processing information".³⁰ Thus, information is an object that is altered by the labour process. However, the principle object of the labour process is the body of the customer. Jenkins *et al.*

22. Phil Taylor and Peter Bain, "'India Calling to the Far Away Towns': The Call Centre Labour Process and Globalization", *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2005), p. 263.

23. *Ibid.*

24. On the labour process as a moving unity see Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (translated by Martin Nicolaus) (London: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 691.

25. Bain *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

26. Taylor and Bain, "Reflections on the Call Centre", *op. cit.*, p. 354.

27. Glucksmann, *op. cit.*, p. 801.

28. Chris Warhurst, Paul Thompson and Dennis Nickson, "Labor Process Theory: Putting the Materialism Back into the Meaning of Service Work", in Marek Korczynski and Cameron Lynne Macdonald (eds.), *Service Work: Critical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 98.

29. Bob Russell, "The Talk Shop and Shop Talk: Employment and Work in a Call Centre", *The Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (2002), p. 99.

30. Sarah Jenkins, Rick Delbridge and Ashley Roberts, "Emotional Management in a Mass Customised Call Centre: Examining Skill and Knowledgeability in Interactive Service Work", *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2010), p. 553.

go on to find that workers maintain “a social display which requires them to adapt their emotions depending on the client”, highlighting the worker’s role in the production of a customer’s experience of service, and Deery *et al.* observe that call centre work involves “the continuous need to ... shape the expectations of service recipients”.³¹ This managing of expectations is only one aspect of the formative shaping of the customer. Call centre work involves “working both *for* and *on* the customer”. The formative shaping of the customer’s body may be as simple as a communication of fact, “billing and product information” for example or the making of a transaction such as “booking a train or concert ticket”.³² The alteration also extends to the shaping of the customer in accordance with ideologies that reproduce the capitalist mode of production. Call centres “provide the opportunity to reinforce brand messages on a one-to-one basis”.³³ As Gabriel suggests, “branding, framing, packaging, hyping ... depend vitally on ... work, whether it be called imagination, emotional labour, aesthetic labour or merely messing around with ideas”.³⁴ The call centre is the key site for business-to-customer contact for many commodities, from cable TV to the electricity that facilitates its watching. The call centre, as Brophy argues, has “become an essential apparatus for mediating the relationship between the institutions and the subjects of cognitive capitalism, gauging public opinion, offering us assistance through technological mishaps, and registering our numerous complaints”.³⁵ Notwithstanding differences in the extent of the formative shaping of the customer, the customer is nonetheless the object of the labour process.

The instrument of the call centre labour process is the worker. Of course, the surface appearance of the call centre labour process offers ICT as the instrument. Much like a blacksmith’s hammer, ICT is interposed between the worker and the object. However, when we keep in mind the general form of service work, which occurs both remotely and face-to-face, we see that ICT merely performs a spatial function in the labour process, connecting the worker to the object over distance. Burgess and Connell note that ICT has facilitated the “globalisation of service sector work”; therefore this connection is not unimportant, but by considering distance we can demonstrate that while ICT plays a key role in the connection of labour activity to the object, it plays only a limited role in the shaping of the object.³⁶ The instrument of the labour process is not *interposed* between the worker and the object, but rather the worker instrumentalises aspects of their

31. *Ibid.*; Stephen J. Deery, Roderick D. Iverson and Janet T. Walsh, “Coping Strategies in Call Centres: Work Intensity and the Role of Co-workers and Supervisors”, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2010), p. 182.

32. Rosemary Batt, “Work Organisation, Technology, and Performance in Customer Service and Sales”, *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (1999), p. 545; Phil Taylor and Peter Bain, “An Assembly Line in the Head: Work and Employee Relations in the Call Centre”, *Industrial Relations Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1999), p. 107.

33. Nick Kinnie, Sue Hutchinson and John Purcell, “‘Fun and Surveillance’: The Paradox of High Commitment Management in Call Centres”, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 11, No. 5 (2000), p. 969.

34. Yiannis Gabriel, “Conclusion—Latte Capitalism and Late Capitalism: Reflections on Fantasy and Care as Part of the Service Triangle”, in Korczynski and Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

35. Enda Brophy, “Language Put to Work: Cognitive Capitalism, Call Center Labor, and Worker Inquiry”, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (2011), p. 412.

36. John Burgess and Julia Connell, “Introduction”, in John Burgess and Julia Connell (eds.), *Developments in the Call Centre Industry: Analysis, Changes and Challenges* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 3.

being in order to shape the object of labour, i.e., the customer. Taylor and Bain's observations of management "techniques aimed at eliciting employee commitment and involvement" are widespread.³⁷ Brannan records that "Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) [are] encouraged to develop 'relationships' with the clients they work with on a daily basis".³⁸ The worker is required to use their capacity to build relationships as an instrument in a labour process because "economic value", apparently, "is found more in the intangibles, such as ... relationships".³⁹ The production of the customer in call centre work proceeds from the instrumentalisation of workers' bodies. This instrumentalisation of being, which persists in the conflict between capitalist control of the labour process and the indeterminacy of labour-power, is the essence of the pernicious ontological consequences of call centre work upon the worker.

Labour activity is the putting into action of communicative abilities in such a manner as to produce the intended outcome of the labour process while manually manipulating ICT. Taylor and Bain argue that "there is a common and defining call centre labour process in which operators scan and interpret information on VDU screens, manipulate keyboards to enter or retrieve data and simultaneously communicate with phone-based customers".⁴⁰ I argue that in speaking of the labour activity of the call centre labour process, the political character of the processes of the exploitation of labour-power illustrates the difficulty in discerning labour activity from the instrument of labour by revealing properties of the body that have been previously ignored. Call centre work is organised in such a way that the properties of bodies by which they are political are instrumentalised and separated from the worker.

This is the political economic problem of call centre work: these properties of bodies, the properties by which bodies are political and capable of praxis, are becoming central to the production of the object, i.e., the commodity.⁴¹ Invoking "praxis" is not a simple task and one for which the limitations of this article cannot do justice. But the element of praxis that I want to focus on is encapsulated by Carpenter and Mojab:

In the third chapter of the first volume of *Capital*, Marx demonstrates for us how, theoretically, capital has no limits ... Marx, however, quickly moves on and by chapter nine has imposed on capital a colossal, but timid, limit: the power of humanity; the power to work and to learn and to change.⁴²

37. Taylor and Bain, "An Assembly Line in the Head", *op. cit.*, pp. 106–107.

38. Matthew J. Brannan, "Once More with Feeling: Ethnographic Reflections on the Mediation of Tension in a Small Team of Call Centre Workers", *Gender, Work and Organization*, Vol. 12, No. 5 (2005), p. 430.

39. Scottish Enterprise, in Thompson *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 924.

40. Taylor and Bain, "An Assembly Line in the Head", *op. cit.*, p. 108.

41. On praxis, see Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach", in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), pp. 13–15; Gajo Petrovic, "The Philosophical Concept of Revolution", in Mihailo Markovic and Gajo Petrovic (eds.), *Praxis: Yugoslav Essays in the Philosophy and Methodology of the Social Sciences* (translated by J. Coddington *et al.*) (Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel Publishing, 1979), pp. 151–164.

42. In Sara Carpenter, Genevieve Ritchie and Shahzad Mojab, "The Dialectics of Praxis", *Socialist Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2013), p. 3.

The potential for praxis is in this colossal, but timid, limit. The worker's capacity to work, learn and change has been the object of capital since the phase of the formal subsumption of labour under capital when workers produced at home in exchange for a wage.⁴³ The exploitation of more and more capacities of workers' bodies is capital pushing upon the timidity of this colossal limit. Call centre work demonstrates new dimensions to the subsumption of bodies under capital by revealing that bodies' capacity to change oneself, to change others and to change the social world—i.e., to be political—is made into an instrument of the FLSW labour process and work is organised so that this capacity is transformed in accordance with the economic, political, cultural and ideological requirements of capital's reproduction. By revealing the obscure structure of the labour process, i.e., the character of the elementary factors of the call centre labour process and the utilisation of the body of the worker as the instrument of labour, we see that call centre work puts into motion those impalpable aspects of self by which we form political relationships with one another and thereby shape our world.⁴⁴

Work, the Worker and the Product

There is a blurring of the distinction between what is work, what is the worker and what is the product in the call centre. Thompson *et al.* argue that “employees, and the way they look, sound and act, *are themselves* part of the product”.⁴⁵ This is a definition of the worker devoid of technical skill, or for whom technical skills are irrelevant; the worker is merely a possessor of embodied capacities who is *made* a product as a result of work. In light of Lefebvre's definition of a product as that which “can be reproduced exactly, and is in fact the result of repetitive acts and gestures”, this reification of the worker indicates that call centre work is not simply labour-power proceeding through a set of productive tasks that are designed to produce a product; call centre work is labour-power proceeding through a set of tasks designed so that labour-power itself becomes a standardised product.⁴⁶ But labour-power is too broad a definition for the processes at work here. The use-value of labour-power in service work is the ability of bodies to be political, to make social relationships and to create and shape the normative values of political subjects. In wage-labour these abilities are confined to the reproduction of capital. Thus, firstly there is an ideological dimension to the production and reproduction of these qualities as labour-power that is concomitant of norms of capital accumulation. Secondly, the use-value of labour-power rests in the body's capacity to change in accordance with the requirements of the labour process, bureaucratic, organisational and ideological techniques aimed at exploiting the use-value of labour-power. The exploitation of this capacity in accordance with these requirements undermines the essential antagonism between labour and capital.

The ability of bodies to manage their own aesthetic qualities, to manage their emotions and the emotions of others and to communicate with one another and

43. Carlo Vercellone, “From Formal Subsumption to General Intellect: Elements for a Marxist Reading of the Thesis of Cognitive Capitalism”, *Historical Materialism*, Vol. 15 (2007), pp. 13–36.

44. Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach”, *op. cit.*

45. Thompson *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 930; emphasis original.

46. Henri Lefebvre, in Matt Davies, “Works, Products, and the Division of Labour”, in Jacqueline Best and Mathew Peterson (eds.), *Cultural Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 57.

produce affective relationships is mobilised as an instrument in a labour process that produces commodities. The production of the object in call centre work, and FLSW in general, accords to Lazzarato's conception of the commodity of immaterial labour. This commodity, he states, is "not destroyed in the act of consumption, but rather ... enlarges, transforms and creates the 'ideological' and cultural environment of the consumer".⁴⁷ This consumption does not merely create an "environment", but rather creates the subjects that inhabit this environment. Thus the character of commodity production is a fundamental aspect of these processes of the production of subjectivity. Call centre work is an epitomic example of the formative shaping of embodied capacities according to capitalist norms of accumulation. The political character of the utilisation of the embodied capacities of workers demonstrates that capitalist norms of accumulation act as the reference point for the reproduction of the processes by which these same capacities are exploited in the production of economic value.

The intensity with which these properties are mobilised, the quantity and quality of interactions, differ. At one end of the qualitative spectrum, the effects of work upon the subject are akin to factory labour on a moving assembly line, what Taylor and Bain call the "assembly line in the head". Quantitatively, a low intensity of labour often requires the worker to disengage from "work", yet remain vigilant. A high intensity of labour requires the constant mobilisation of attention; as Hampson *et al.* note, even apparently mundane work in the call centre "requires constant alertness".⁴⁸ At the other end of the qualitative spectrum, labour activity is complex, requiring the engagement of emotional self-management and focused attention on the production of emotional and affective relations. When complexity is coupled with a high rate of intensity, work constitutes a constant mobilisation of embodied capacities. Despite qualitative and quantitative differences, labour processes are mandated according to ideals that are codified in targets, required behaviours and other bureaucratic, managerial and normative compulsions on the shop floor. Contrary to the theories of cognitive capitalism, apparently "immaterial" forms of labour are measurable and subject to capitalist command. The call centre is demonstrably one of the "new techniques of the centralisation of cognitive workers" that Caffentzis highlights.⁴⁹

The character of each of the elementary factors of the labour process indicates that it is bodies which are regulated in work. The mobilisation of bodies' articulations and productions of affect, emotion and aesthetic is well documented in the corpus of research on affective, aesthetic, emotional and immaterial labour. The work of reading this mobilisation politically is not yet completed.⁵⁰ Contributions to this project have emerged from studies of flight attendants, waitresses, nurses and beauty salon workers.⁵¹ These forms of analysis have also been

47. Lazzarato, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

48. Caroline Lloyd and Jonathan Payne, "'Full of Sound and Fury, Signifying Nothing': Interrogating New Skill Concepts in Service Work—the View from Two UK Call Centres", *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (2009), p. 621.

49. Caffentzis, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

50. Thomas Atzert, "About Immaterial Labor and Biopower", *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2006), pp. 58–64; Donald J. Winiecki, "Subjects, Subjectivity, and Subjectification in Call Centre Work: The Doing of Doings", *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 36 (2007), pp. 351–377.

51. On flight attendants see Steve Taylor and Melissa Tyler, "Emotional Labour and Sexual Difference in the Airline Industry", *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2000), pp. 77–95; Claire Williams, "Sky Service: The Demands of Emotional Labour in the Airline Industry", *Gender, Work and Organization*,

extended out from service work to the examination of fashion modelling work.⁵² It is noteworthy to comment that these contributions highlight the gendered politics of these forms of work that are regrettably absent from this article. The emotional, immaterial, affective and aesthetic labour theses each make fundamental but nonetheless partial contributions to the understanding of the politics of FLSW and each bring with them a political perspective or philosophical assumption that I do not wish to reproduce. The deployment of aesthetic labour by its original proponents, the Strathclyde Group, oftentimes offers a depoliticised workplace because it fails to consider the processes of the production of dispositions.⁵³ The possibility of a “public” and a “private” self in Hochschild’s theory of emotional labour is incongruent with an examination of the marks that workers’ bodies carry from work to their everyday lives or with reciprocity that pertains between work and what workers do to their own body outside work. The concept of immaterial/affective labour, as Dowling, Federici and Toscano note, implies a society of “elemental communism”.⁵⁴ The reification of the worker as a standardised product—measurable and reproducible—belies the idea of an emancipatory character to work. Nonetheless, it is the very partialness or incompleteness of these accounts that illuminates the complexity of the politics of FLSW and each makes a contribution. I argue that a future track for reading service work politically is indicated by the material process of service work: these articulations and productions of affect, emotion and aesthetic, albeit standardised, are borne of the impalpable, intimate, essential properties of the body. These are the properties of bodies that are mobilised when we engage in praxis.

Body Work and Political Potentiality

A problem of definition emerges from the analysis of the elementary factors of the labour process. How do we define bodies’ potential for praxis? How do we say “this is it, it is *this* quality or property from whence the potential for praxis emerges”? I hope to address this problem of conceiving of bodies’ potential for praxis in terms of its mobilisation in the labour process with recourse to its very *impalpability*. The problem of definition is intrinsic to the problematic posed by

Vol. 10, No. 5 (2003), pp. 513–550; on waitresses see Emma Dowling, “Producing the Dining Experience: Measure, Subjectivity and the Affective Worker”, *Ephemera*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2007), pp. 117–132; Emma Dowling, “The Waitress: On Affect, Method, and (Re)Presentation”, *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2012), pp. 109–117; on nurses see Sarah Dyer, Linda McDowell and Adina Batnitzky, “Emotional Labour/Body Work: The Caring Labours of Migrants in the UK’s National Health Service”, *Geoforum*, Vol. 39, No. 6 (2008), pp. 2030–2038; on beauty salon workers see Merran Toerien and Celia Kitzinger, “Emotional Labour in the Beauty Salon: Turn Design of Task-Directed Talk”, *Feminism Psychology*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2007), pp. 162–172.

52. Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wissinger, “Keeping up Appearances: Aesthetic Labour in the Fashion Modelling Industries of London and New York”, *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (2006), pp. 774–794; Elizabeth Wissinger, “Modelling a Way of Life: Immaterial and Affective Labour in the Fashion Modelling Industry”, *Ephemera*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2007), pp. 250–269.

53. Thompson *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 923–942; Warhurst and Nickson, *Looking Good*, *op. cit.*; Warhurst *et al.* “Labor Process Theory”, *op. cit.*, pp. 91–112.

54. Emma Dowling, “Pedagogies of Cognitive Capitalism: Challenging the Critical Subject”, in Peters and Bulut, *op. cit.*, pp. 195–210; Silvia Federici, “On Affective Labor”, in Peters and Bulut, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–74; Alberto Toscano, “The Limits of Autonomy: Cognitive Capitalism and University Struggles”, in Peters and Bulut, *op. cit.*, pp. 259–274.

the labour process as a political apparatus in FLSW. The historical development of the political economic processes that produce bodies by means of the wage-labour relation indicates that there is what Althusser and Balibar call “a variation in the problematic and the object”, a variation that lies at the centre of Harvey’s identification of capital’s tendency to utilise the body as an accumulation strategy.⁵⁵ To make a contribution to this problematic, I reconfigure the concept of body work in accordance with Marx’s method of abstraction in order to examine how bodies relate to one another, and how they produce and reproduce one another under the wage-labour relation.

The concept of body work emerged as a tool to understand the work that people do on their own bodies.⁵⁶ It has been developed to include the work that people do on the bodies of others.⁵⁷ It has also been extended to include emotional labour.⁵⁸ Finally, it has been used to conceptualise ways in which labour inscribes itself on the body.⁵⁹ This four-pronged representation of body work is common across the literature, which is predominantly sociological in its focus.⁶⁰ These factors are presented as bearing upon one another but are treated as though they primarily relate to one another in terms of their similar characteristics. By deploying the Marxist method of abstraction upon the concept of body work, I propose a more holistic understanding.

Marx’s method of abstraction is a theoretico-conceptual process by which we reconstruct the unintelligible complexity of the “real concrete”, i.e., the real world, into something sensible, the “thought concrete”. The process of abstraction is the process of “breaking [reality] down into manageable parts”.⁶¹ This reconstruction proceeds across two polarities. First, “the degree of historical specificity” understands phenomena at four different levels: the universal (I), the mode of production (II), variant in the mode of production (III) and the specific concrete (IV). Second, the “abstract-concrete polarity” understands phenomena in terms of their categorical location as economic, political or social. Thus, body work in the call centre is an example of an abstraction of the (economic) capital–labour relation at the historical polarity of a variant in the mode of production (III).⁶² I deploy the method of abstraction for two reasons.

First, abstractions “focus on and incorporate both change and interaction” while also recognising continuity.⁶³ As demonstrated above, the character of both the instrument and the object of the labour process of call centre work indicate a tendency towards the body as an accumulation strategy. There is a development of capital–labour relations at level (III). The worker uses their body as the *instrument*

55. Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (translated by Ben Brewster) (London: Verso, 2009), p. 186; David Harvey, “The Body as an Accumulation Strategy”, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1998), pp. 401–421.

56. Chris Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 1993), pp. 103–134.

57. Carol Wolkowitz, “The Social Relations of Body Work”, *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2002), pp. 497–510.

58. Dyer *et al.*, *op. cit.*

59. Wolkowitz, *Bodies at Work*, *op. cit.*

60. Debra Gimlin, “What Is ‘Body Work’? A Review of the Literature”, *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2007), pp. 353–370.

61. Karl Marx, in Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

62. R.J. Horvath and K.D. Gibson, “Abstraction in Marx’s Method”, *Antipode*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1984), pp. 12–25.

63. Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

of labour, often working on it beforehand, and the *object* of call centre work is another body, i.e., the customer. But the labour process is still constituted by activity, instrument and object and it is still wage-labour. Thus, we see that the process of abstraction at level (III) takes into account the historical specificity of level (I) and (II) productive relations.

Second, although each singular process of abstraction is brought to bear upon a single conceptual unit, as the focus here is on the exploitation of particular properties of the body in wage-labour, an overriding concern for *innerconnections* between the institutions and practices of a given society at detailed and general levels is intrinsic to the method. Current definitions of the concept of body work indicate that it is made up of four factors that are regarded as interrelated in various ways. However, I contend that the interrelations between these factors have been considered only heuristically and that there are more fundamental innerconnections that tie each factor of body work to the others. By considering the innerconnections between factors of body work, we see practices that “entail each other in an ontological sense” and thereby understand the political economic processes that link work and the body.⁶⁴ Therefore, we do so with regard to their historical specificity as phenomena under capitalism (II), as a variant in the historical development of capitalism (III), in terms of a universal (I) understanding of work as “human action with a view to the production of use-values” and as constitutive of the relationship between variations across the abstract-concrete polarity, i.e., between capital relations and variant state, ideological and social forms.⁶⁵

To begin the process of abstraction, one purported factor of body work must first be shed in order to understand the reciprocal relationality between its factors. The notion of managing emotions and producing emotions in others is contained in the concepts of work one does on one’s own body, work performed on other bodies and the inscriptions that work makes on the body. The separation of this emotional capacity from the body, as it is represented by the other factors of the concept, implicates a Cartesian mind/body dualism that is incompatible with the innerconnections of body work practices. In order to comprehend this innerrelationality, the idea of separating emotion from the body must be discarded but the substantive content of this factor of the concept must be retained within our understanding of the other three factors of body work. Second, by stripping the concept down to the universal (I) category of historical specificity, we can position body work within the categories of work and labour: all work is performed by the body, but body work is work that is performed on bodies, whether they are workers’ bodies or the body of someone other than the worker. This work is labour when it is abstract wage-labour and produces exchange value, as opposed to when it is work and produces only use-value; body work is labour when it is waged and therefore produces commodities.⁶⁶ Finally, my focus here on call centre work implicates a form of body work in which the subjective capacities of the body are mobilised as an instrument for the formative shaping of the subjective capacities of bodies under wage-labour.

A Marxist conception of body work is sensitive to the reciprocal relationality that occurs between its factors. It represents a taxonomic category of work/labour made

64. Paolucci, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

65. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

66. On the distinction between work and labour see Engels in Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 54fn.

up of three factors: work on one's own body, work on the bodies of others and the marks made upon the body by work. The form of work one does on one's own body is in determinate relation to the form of the inscription of the body by work, and *vice versa* and so on across all three factors. The factors change their appearance depending upon the perspective from which we view body work and their character is always dependent upon the cultural, economic and political conditions under which they occur. For example, body work practices as mundane as bathing have been shown to be historically specific.⁶⁷ They should be regarded as work performed upon one's own body as a precursor to work/labour performed on the bodies of others. "Bathing" has variant forms and frequencies that are historically conditioned by the political, socio-economic and cultural conditions, i.e., the mode of production, in which it is practised.⁶⁸ Thus, the practice of bathing is an inscription that is etched upon the body by life, by labour and by work. Using call centre work as a focus, with the notion of the body as the instrument of labour at the centre of the analysis, I seek to frame the struggle between labour and capital over the worker's body. Therefore, my focus here is on factors one and three: work that one does on one's own body and the inscriptions that work makes upon the body. This is not to say that the remaining factor of body work does not bear upon this problematic—given the dialectical nature of the practice and of the analysis, of course it does—but rather that its bearing indicates a range of relations that are beyond the aims and limitations of this article.

The corporeal content of call centre work is often brought under a reconfigured category of "skill". The Strathclyde Group point to the prioritisation of so-called aesthetic and social skills above technical skills.⁶⁹ They and others highlight "the trend to re-label as skill what would in the past have been considered personal attributes, dispositions or behaviours".⁷⁰ We can track the development of skill *qua* disposition from the recruitment process through to the labour process. The recruitment process is driven by person specifications that emphasise the interpersonal qualities required in potential workers: "Management seek workers with personal characteristics likely to make them interact spontaneously."⁷¹ As Vicki, a call centre manager, states, "if somebody comes in and they've got the right attitude, I will take them on".⁷² Call centre training is designed so as to continue to form and shape these "intangible qualities".⁷³ Thus, through the concept of skill, we can understand how call centre work prioritises a certain set of embodied qualities and how work inscribes itself upon the worker's body. As Thompson *et al.* argue, "a common theme that emerged [from research on call centres] was the extent to which organisations ... continued to seek to mould people".⁷⁴

However, "skill" does not fully capture the processes of the production of the worker in FLSW as an alterity, that is, as being different to what they were

67. Elizabeth Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: The Social Organization of Normality* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

68. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), p. 37.

69. Warhurst *et al.*, "Labor Process Theory", *op. cit.*; Nickson *et al.*, *op. cit.*; Thompson *et al.*, *op. cit.*

70. Lloyd and Payne, *op. cit.*, p. 618.

71. Warhurst *et al.*, "Aesthetic Labour in Interactive Service Work", *op. cit.*, p. 3.

72. Jenkins *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 551.

73. Warhurst *et al.*, "Aesthetic Labour in Interactive Service Work", *op. cit.*, p. 3.

74. Thompson *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 932.

before the wage-labour exchange. In FLSW “skill” is a discourse that naturalises and thereby depoliticises the processes of the making of bodies. The skill discourse assumes that “the right attitude” is simply a pre-existing quality of bodies, thereby forgoing cultural political economic questions regarding how attitudes and dispositions are produced. As Johnson states, “skill is not a given individual capacity ... [it] is a product of social power”.⁷⁵ “Having the right attitude” is something that results from the worker working upon their own body and is not simply a pre-existing phenomenon. This recognition opens up the possibility to explore potentially deleterious consequences to body work. Requirements for workers “to be first of all, very, very enthusiastic” and to be able to “think about what they need to do to change themselves in order to build rapport” is not a precursor to simply an internalisation of “managerial service norms”.⁷⁶ These specifications indicate that the key requirement of the job is the ability to work on one’s own body, change one’s ideas and alter one’s values. A cursory reading of this century’s Human Resources Management literature reveals that work is designed to shape bodies. The goal is to “change not how we *act* so much as how we *think* ... it is not about *changing what we do* so much as it is about *changing who we are*”.⁷⁷ Production in the call centre is not based around skill, nor is it designed to facilitate worker autonomy, but is intended to harness the capacity to be autonomous and transform the subject in that same process, demonstrating Caffentzis’s argument that “there is no direct formula connecting capitalism, knowledge-production and political”.⁷⁸ On the contrary, production in the call centre demonstrates the pressures that are brought to bear on the potential for political liberation. As a CSR remarks, “they [workers] are all different personalities, but they’re [management] trying to mould them into a Telebank person ... and they’re always pushing, pushing ...”.⁷⁹ The self-directing practice of the capacities of the body within the labour process is not coordinate to autonomy but is a practice in which the potential for autonomy comes under siege. As Toscano elaborates, “the political problem lies precisely with the *premise* of autonomy”. Cognitive capitalism theorists are correct in identifying that there *has* been a change in the organisation of labour and there is a concomitant production of politics. This insight should be brought to bear on our understanding of the processes of the production of subjectivity in terms of an alteration in the “reproduction of the capital-labour relation”. But it is an entirely different matter to interpret this variation “solely or primarily through the lens of the affirmation of an autonomy of living labour”.⁸⁰

In the call centre the “skill” discourse comingles with the “authenticity” discourse that has come to be prominent in these types of organisation and, as Fleming argues, should be seen as a “continuation of the classic corporate objective to exact domination”.⁸¹ Therefore, as well as repudiating what

75. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

76. Manager 3, in George Callaghan and Paul Thompson, “‘We Recruit Attitude’: The Selection and Shaping of Routine Call Centre Labour”, *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2002), p. 240; Manager 7, in *ibid.*, p. 242.

77. Lesley Yerkes, *Fun Works: Creating Places Where People Love to Work* (2nd ed.) (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2007), p. 180; emphasis original.

78. Caffentzis, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

79. In Callaghan and Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

80. Toscano, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

81. Peter Fleming, *Authenticity and the Cultural Politics of Work: New Forms of Informal Control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 28.

Zanini calls the post-*operaisti* “hypostatisation of the mechanisms of the reproduction of subjectivity” that follows from their prefiguration of the autonomy of living labour, we must turn the conclusions of LPT approaches on the tendency towards Taylorisation in the call centre to also reflect the limitations of the hierarchical power structure in the production of bodies.⁸² A hierarchical power structure cannot coercively produce subjects in a direct sense but can only do so by conditioning them socially, psychologically and existentially to “accept or choose precisely what can no longer be imposed”.⁸³ As well as training, many call centres seek to harness workers’ capacity for autonomy through what Russell calls “*manufactured sociability*”.⁸⁴ Requirements to *authentically* be “chatty”, “bubbly”, “sober”, “reserved”, “caring” and “empathetic” necessitate the ability “to change yourself”.⁸⁵ Thus, body work is not simply a set of practices that involve work on bodies but is a conceptual apparatus that reveals the inner-relations between the power-laden practices that produce bodies.

In the call centre the practice of all three factors of body work is regulated by targets. The assemblage of bureaucratic, technological and normative methods of control in the call centre is synthesised as targets, both tacit and explicit. Targets are formulated so as to subsume the body under capitalist norms of accumulation and have coercive and consensual dimensions. The production of “fun” in the call centre is a common theme and its end is always towards the worker’s acceptance of the corporeal conditions of work.⁸⁶ With the caveats regarding variations in call centre labour processes in mind, the compulsion of stylised worker–customer interactions that engage the affective, emotional and aesthetic capabilities of bodies is a general one.⁸⁷ Compulsion is articulated through managerial/technological methods such as the monitoring and scoring of calls against targets that include objective measures such as compliance with scripted portions of calls and the regulation of behaviours such as the pace and pitch of speech. Taylorist principles of work organisation are applied through the use of technology, such as Automated Call Distribution (ACD) systems. These control methods facilitate the production of value, i.e., relative surplus value, through intensification of work, by measuring “quality” and by disciplining the body in accordance with prescribed targets. LPT approaches recognise value production that is contingent on the exercise of the body’s communicative, emotional and affective capacities. As Bain *et al.* point out, “the essence of the labour process is located not simply in the *quantity* of calls ... but also in the *quality* of each employee–customer interaction”.⁸⁸ The production of performance statistics, as noted by Winiecki, in combination with the inequality of the wage-labour exchange and broader political problems such as the growing precariousness of work, operate as mechanisms for the self-regulation of labour activity.⁸⁹ It is, however, the processes of the

82. Adelino Zanini, “On the ‘Philosophical Foundations’ of Italian Workerism: A Conceptual Approach”, *Historical Materialism*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2010), p. 41.

83. Gorz, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

84. Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 485; emphasis original.

85. Jenkins *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 553; trainer, in Thompson *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 936.

86. Chris Baldry and Jerry Hallier, “Welcome to the House of Fun: Work Space and Social Identity”, *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2010), pp. 150–172.

87. Glucksmann, *op. cit.*

88. Bain *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 172; emphasis original.

89. Winiecki, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

instrumentalisation of the subjective capacities of bodies that demonstrate capital's attempts at making the subject. Targets' emphasis on rapport-building, empathy, the worker's ability to judge the "value" of the customer and to self-regulate the instrumentalisation of the body and the amount of time spent on each particular labour process demonstrates again that "attitudes themselves are productive" in the call centre.⁹⁰ The everyday practice of making one's own body in accordance with the prerogatives of economic value prescribed in work is the ontological consequence of FLSW and must be the starting point for the project of resistance.

Conclusion

Call centre work demands that workers work upon their own bodies. The intended aim of the labour process is work upon, and a concomitant formative shaping of, the bodies of customers. Work on workers' own bodies is attendant to the requirements of the labour process. Thus, work is an assemblage of processes that inscribe the body. My examination of the elementary factors of the labour process of call centre work, i.e., its object, instrument and activity, demonstrates that there is a specific character to the elementary factors of the labour process of FLSW. FLSW is work in which the worker's body is a site of conflict; the embodied capacities by which bodies relate to one another politically and are capable of praxis are shaped under the weight of the wage-labour relation and according to capitalist norms of accumulation.

Call centre work is a continuation of the abjection and abasement of the human body that is central to value production under capitalism. This indictment is neither insightful nor controversial; Marx was talking about the impact of work upon the integrity of the body back in 1844. However, the capacities by which bodies are political have not been the concern of most capitalist processes of value production before; this analysis of the call centre labour process demonstrates the centrality of bodies' capacities to be political to the production of value. Body work under capitalism is the production of alterity. The mobilisation of the political potential of bodies in value production is contingent upon the production of a self that is coordinate to the requirements of value production. Thus, the centrality of the body in processes of capital accumulation does not simply bear upon bodies' *capacities*; it bears upon the *potential* of bodies to participate in a politics informed by the rejection of the capitalist organisation of work. This is not to say that domination is interminable, but rather that the simple exercise of so-called autonomous capacities is not coordinate with autonomy nor does it represent a purportedly immanent anti-capitalist future. The practice of these capacities, instrumentalised as they are, does not represent the potential for liberation from capital but is an aspect of capital's domination extending further into the sphere of the reproduction of labour. Praxis—the colossal but timid limit to capital—lies in the indeterminacy of labour-power. The question remains as to how to struggle against the exploitation of more and more properties of the body as an accumulation strategy when this strategy itself aims for the worker's self-internalisation of exploitation.

90. Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 70.

In order to more fully understand the political economy of the variation in the capitalist mode of production, the effects of worker–customer body-making practices must also be integrated into the schema. An understanding of the shaping of workers’ capacities to be political should be brought to bear upon the project to organise call centre workers and other service workers, either in trade unions or in other forms, in order to inform strategies of recruitment and resistance. A politics of resistance begins with the recognition that labour is not simply the practice of the body’s capacities; labour is the separation of these capacities from the body and their transformation into something else.

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About the Author

Paul McFadden is a PhD Candidate in the School of Geography, Politics, and Sociology at Newcastle University, UK. Thanks to an award from the ESRC Newcastle-Durham Doctoral Training Centre, he is currently working on “Work, Power, and the Politics of Alienation”. This project interrogates notions and concepts of contemporary forms of labour by deploying alienation theory to investigate forms of political subjectivity and the political consequences of changes in labour, economic-value and the commodity.