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Producing the Dining Experience: Measure, Subjectivity and the Affective Worker*

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abstract One of the major contributions of the operaista tradition is the concept – and hands-on investigation – of class compostion. A detailed analysis of the real conditions of workers today is necessary to validate any analysis of contemporary capitalism, as well as its potential sites of struggle; only thus can the concepts of immaterial and affective labour be useful politically. This article is a contribution to such an effort. Working as a waitress in a restaurant in a metropolitan city, where both the product of my work and the means by which it was produced were highly 'affective', I have been in a privileged position to experience first-hand the material conditions of this type of labour. This article addresses the way in which affective and immaterial labour have been characterised in the literature from the point of view of my experience. How well does the way in which these forms of labour are defined apply to the service work I performed? In particular I will take up the debates around the organisation and (im-)measurability of affective labour, and how this can (or cannot) open up possibilities for resistance in the specific context of my example. I then wish to show what can be generalised from this case study and consider what this means for the further development of the debates around affective and immaterial labour.

In the immaterial labour literature service work, as affective work, is considered one of its components. Having worked as a waitress for ten years, I have been in a privileged position to think about the lived experiences of such a worker. The contribution I offer here is an autobiographical engagement with one particular employment experience. I have not conducted a full-scale inquiry or co-research using interviews; nor did I work as a waitress for research purposes, hence I did not engage in conscious covert or overt participant observation whilst working. Rather, as someone employed full-time as a waitress in this establishment over a period of 18 months, I draw from my recollections the points I discuss in this article.

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* This is a slightly reworked and renamed version of the article 'Formulating New Social Subjects? An Inquiry Into the Realities of an Affective Worker', which was first presented at the Conference *Immaterial Labour, Multitudes and New Social Subjects: Class Composition in Cognitive Capitalism*, organised by Ed Emery at King's College, University of Cambridge, 29th-30th April 2006 [http://www.geocities.com/immateriallabour]. It generated some very interesting discussions on the web, which can be found at [http://poltergeist.blogsome.com/2006/08/01/the-problematic-aura-of-immaterial-labour/] and [http://whatinthehell.blogsome.com/2006/05/15/makes-it-so-easy-to-fuck-up-electronically/]. I am also very grateful to Massimo de Angelis, Rodrigo Nunes, Ben Trott, Nate Holdren and Erik Asall for their helpful comments. All shortcomings remain my own.

In this endeavour, Maurizio Lazzarato's 1996 text on immaterial labour provides a starting point for analysis, whereby the writings of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000 and 2005) are where I find the most explicit incorporation of affective labour into the immaterial labour thesis. My view is that this thesis is indeed useful in understanding the labour process affective work is part of, but I think that a wholesale application of the theory to my example poses an important problem.

I wish to argue in my example of an affective form of labour that whilst we can see how capital attempts to control worker's subjectivity, we cannot say that it this labour is 'beyond measure' or 'immeasurable' (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 294; 2005: 145), nor can we take for granted that this labour carries with it such a definitive potential for an 'elementary communism' internal to the labour itself and external to capital (Hardt and Negri, 2005: 147). My argument is that we must be more cautious about what forms of labour the immaterial labour thesis might pertain to and need to have a much more nuanced understanding of what is at stake in particular struggles. Further to this, if we desire to understand potential openings for a liberatory politics, we can only make sense of the affective work of a waitress in relation to other more explicitly material forms of labour without which the service element of the work would not be possible; crucial here is also the necessity of situating service work within the overall production cycle of the restaurant. Consequently, I argue that we need to ask (for my example here), what this might mean for a politics beyond singular or individual moments of resistance and microconflictuality. In short, we must re-think not only how certain forms of affective labour as the one I'm describing fit the assertions made in the immaterial labour literature, but more importantly how these kinds of workers can create and act upon the openings for 'exodus' or 'self-valorisation' in their context.

With this argument, I am not attempting to call into question the whole of the immaterial labour thesis with regards to the problems I raise. Of concern to me here is what motivated our desire to explore immaterial and affective labour with this special issue of ephemera, namely the insufficient attention paid to affective work in the immaterial labour literature. Not much analysis appears beyond a definition of what affective labour is coupled with a mere mention of affective labour as 'service with a smile', 'care labour', 'women's (reproductive) work', 'kin work', or the 'entertainment industry' (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 292; 2005: 110). Firstly, this implicit conflation of the paid and unpaid forms of affective labour actually poses a problem for analysis, because these different types of activity - whether understood as labour or not, which is an important debate in itself - carry with them different political issues in relation to exploitation and the capital relation. Not only this, but much of the development of the actual theory of immaterial labour as advanced by Hardt and Negri pertains to types of such labour which are more closely associated with informatic labour mediated through communication technology, of which affective labour becomes an implicit part by virtue of being considered to be immaterial labour,[1] as opposed to being an explicitly discussed element with reference to the forms in which it exists today.

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1 Dyer-Witheford notes, "although the concept of immateriality [has been enlarged by Hardt and Negri] to embrace 'affective' work […], it's defining features continue to be attributes of the 'cyborg' worker" (Dyer- Witheford, 2005: 157). Crucially, Dyer-Witheford recognises a "theoretical

My analysis begins with a contextualisation of how my waitressing work, as a form of paid work, can be considered to be affective labour. Secondly, I discuss the mechanisms through which I was subjected to forms of control and how my work was measured and its nature altered by the active constitution of it by the wage relation. Thirdly, I will place my affective labour in the politico-economic context of the restaurant and the wage hierarchy, before finally concluding with some questions about the problems for a political organisation of restaurant workers in this context.

The Waitress as Affective Worker

Generally, immaterial labour is labour that "produces immaterial goods, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge or communication" (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 291), it is "labour which produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" (Lazzarato, 1996). Of the three types of immaterial labour set out by Hardt and Negri,[2] affective labour is the one that "involves the production and manipulation of affect and requires (virtual or actual) human contact, labour in the bodily mode (…) the labour is immaterial, even if it is corporeal and affective, in the sense that its products are intangible, a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement or passion" (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 292). Importantly, it is not the labour in itself which is immaterial, as "it involves our bodies and brains as all labour does" (Hardt and Negri, 2005: 109), but rather its product. Affective labour, according to Hardt and Negri, produces "social networks, forms of community, biopower [where] the instrumental action of economic production has been united with the communicative action of human relations" (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 293).

What was striking about the restaurant I worked for was the omnipresence of a discourse of affect, imposed by management.[3] Affect played a significant role in the management strategy, both in terms of enhancing the affective quality of the service work performed, but also in structuring relations amongst co-workers, whereby kitchen porters, cleaners, bar staff and waiters were all required by management to behave

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slight of hand" in that, "In *Empire*, there is a continuing affirmation of the immaterial labour thesis, ostensibly expanding the designation to very broad swathe of workers, yet still deriving its primary models from those in close proximity to computer and communication technologies" (Dyer-Witheford, 2005: 154). Even with the publication of *Multitude* (2005), where some aspects of immaterial labour are restated, I would argue this problem still persists.

2 The first type denotes labour "involved in an industrial production that has been informationalised and has incorporated communication technology in a way that transforms the production process itself", the second type is "the immaterial labour of analytical and symbolic tasks which itself breaks down into creative and intelligent manipulation on the one hand and routine symbolic tasks on the other" (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 292).

3 When I refer to 'management' in this article, I am aware of the fact that many workers who occupy management positions are equally wage labourers, albeit with higher incomes and more freedom the higher up the management hierarchy one moves. In this article, I do not wish to engage in the important discussion about class composition and management hierarchies and the complex antagonisms that pertain to this discussion (see for example Hindess, 1987) as I think it goes beyond the scope of analysis at hand; thus, I use 'management' as a shorthand for the structure which acts on behalf of and in the interest of capital and the owners of the restaurant.

towards one another as well as towards guests in line with the company's 'core values'.[4] In other words, there was an increased attention to the affective aspects of a form of labour that has always had an affective quality to it.

As a waitress, my job was explicitly to make the customer feel happy, contented and entertained, in a way that they experienced "the restaurant as theatre".[5] Indeed, "performance ha[d] been put to work" and "the product [was] the act itself" (Hardt and Negri, 2005: 200). This centrality of affect was achieved through a restructuring of the labour process in order to put the affective element at the heart of the server's work. In my example, a good deal of the time that I might otherwise have spent carrying plates, mopping up spillages, polishing cutlery or cleaning the coffee machine was now freed up for me to focus on the guest, because other workers were doing these tasks.

My role entailed following a designated sequence of service involving an enthusiastic welcoming of the guest to explain the concept of the restaurant, providing in-depth information about the dishes served (the composition, tastes and content in case of allergies and other dietary requirements); recommendations for drinks (wine and cocktail suggestions), with an emphasis on providing both in-depth knowledge about the products as well as making them sound irresistible whilst keeping the guest entertained with light conversation; constantly anticipating their unspoken needs which I was there to satisfy, so long as these were within the realms of ethics and the law.[6] In order to do this, I received training in all aspects of the food and beverages served as well as on the sequence of service that would maximise the efficient (hence most productive) running of the restaurant operation and thus, customer satisfaction and expenditure. A substantive element of the investment in me on behalf of the company was in the training of my affective skills in line with the requirements of the restaurant and the script provided, although the service provision also relied extensively on my social skills, on me 'being myself' for its success.

In sum, it is the waiting staff's creation of the dining *experience* that restaurants like the one I worked for look to for the increased production of value.[7] What makes this restaurant special is understood to be predominantly the overall *sensual* package it provides. This excerpt from the restaurant's *Philosophy of Hospitality* explains it.

> We are throwing a party – it's going to be very hip and fun, lots of people will be coming and going. We want our guests to feel at home and cared for. We have to make them feel that they are the only ones at the party that are important to us. We never want our guests to feel ignored, unwelcome or rushed. You are the key (…) you have to be the perfect host or hostess: cheery, relaxed, unflappable. You set the tone for each table the way you greet each guest. In short, you are graceful, sincere and refined. We will achieve this by anticipating guest needs.[8]

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4 I shall explain the core values in detail as this article unfolds.

5 Restaurant *Philosophy of Hospitality*, undisclosed source. Funnily enough, when the restaurant first opened, part of the concept was to employ actors as waiting staff.

6 This is specifically stated in this way in the restaurant training manual, undisclosed source.

7 See also Arlie Hochschild's work on emotional labour in the airline industry, 1983.

8 Restaurant *Philosophy of Hospitality*, undisclosed source.

From the moment when the guest sat down, my performance began. How to behave at the table, what tasks had to be performed and how revenue was to be generated were meticulously set out in a 25-point 'sequence of service' by management, which I was continuously assessed on through written examinations and oral spot tests. At the same time, the provision of the service depended on me using my intelligence, charisma and charm to create the table performance, because it was understood that the workers should not all be completely the same and that further value (and thus competitive advantage for the company) would be added to the product by granting us the scope to let our own personalities shape our engagement with the guest. I was supposed to understand myself as a real person interacting with other real people, not 'merely' a paid worker providing a service for a paying customer. If we were not too busy, conversation (as entertainment) with guests was encouraged by management, as the feeling of familiarity (uncomplicated, non-conventional engagement with the guest) was paramount to the product we were selling. This was a different process to one where the employee is supposed to simply 'sell the product' more effectively, either by being extra nice to the customer or by encouraging the customer to buy a product by pointing out all of its positive features etc. This process was one in which the experience of dining in the restaurant was intrinsically part of the overall product being sold, thus our labour as affective workers was constituent not attributive.[9]

Much of the management's aim was to free up as much of our time as possible to spend it at the table, a central tenet of our training being to entertain our guests as if they were our own personal guests in our own homes. We should 'own the guest'[10] and their experience with us personally.[11] The company pledge read:

> We believe that 'experience rules'; we believe we must satisfy our guest's lust for differentiated experiences, we will keep it continuously new and fresh, we will be guest-centric and put the guest at the centre of everything we do, we will delight our guests, we will fully engage all of our employees in fulfilling this promise.[12]

This meant pretending that guests were our personal acquaintances despite the fact that they were not and extremely seldom ever became. Also, this exemplified a form of management which sought to ensure that an explicit responsibility was taken for every task and that it was followed through effectively, so as to engender a decentralised form of management that gave us a sense of independence and expertise, whilst avoiding costly and ineffective micro-management.

This resonates with the observation of Lazzarato (1996) that "what modern management techniques are looking for is for the worker's soul to become part of the factory (...) the worker's personality and subjectivity have to be made susceptible to organisation and command". On the one hand, I was supposed to act in this 'restaurant as theatre', but on the other hand, I was supposed to really mean what I did and said and

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9 Thank you to Erik Asall for his comments on the original conference article on [http://www.poltergeist.blogsome.com], which provoked to make this clarification.

10 Hotel training manual, undisclosed source. Cf. footnote 25 for a brief clarification on the difference between the hotel and restaurant in this case study.

11 Cf. Crang (1994) for a different study that registers the same phenomenon.

12 Restaurant training manual, undisclosed source.

in so doing, as was the intention of the company, also learn transferable skills for my own personal life, a process I unpack in more detail below.

In conclusion, what has changed today from former articulations of service work is the extent to which the affective element of this labour is systematically made productive for capital. Strikingly, this focus on affect increases the higher up the ladder we climb, in that it is prestigious, 'high-class' establishments like the one I analyse here that look to the service experience to provide them with their qualitative differentiation, both in relation to other outlets within the same price range attracting the same kind of customer, as well as to differentiate themselves from more 'mundane' eateries. This is their competitive edge, captured neatly in this particular company's self-image: 'The EDGE', the 'Engaging Dynamic Guest Experience'.[13]

Active Subjectivity and Core Values

Core values, incentive schemes and participatory management are all examples of how employees were managed in a way that encouraged their active participation in the running of the restaurant. In the following paragraphs I will explain how these processes functioned in a way that resonates with what Lazzarato (1996) describes when he says that,

> Work can thus be defined as the capacity to activate and manage productive cooperation. In this phase, workers are expected to become 'active subjects' in the coordination of the various functions of production, instead of being subjected to it as simple command.

On the one hand, there were specific prescriptions or 'commands' that sought to engender certain types of behaviour. Obviously, the aforementioned sequence of service was one, but also, there were prescriptions with regard to how workers were supposed to treat guests, co-workers and management in attempts to foster more 'affective' relations. For example, there was the 'five-ten rule': When approaching someone, you had to smile at them and make eye contact when you were ten feet away and at five feet, greet them[14]. In training sessions that were undergone by all staff from floor managers to kitchen porters, role-play was used to 'teach' these core values. Each worker received a plastic card the size of a credit card to carry around with them and an accompanying pocket-size booklet, so that they could always check what the values of the company were if they ever needed to, at work, or in their personal lives. Subsequently, these core values, ordained from upon high personally by the ethical guru of the company, its founder and previous owner,[15] would be continuously invoked in the every-day running of the restaurant in the discourses of management.

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13 Hotel training manual, undisclosed source.

14 Restaurant training manual, undisclosed source.

15 The restaurant was part of a high-class hotel chain, however the two companies were separate entities, nevertheless working together on a variety of aspects, including personnel management.

The seven (patented) core values of this company were to be 'gracious', 'attentive', 'authentic', 'fun', 'friendly', 'accountable' and 'original'.[16] Importantly, we were expected to actively 'embody', not just simply adhere to, these core values and were paid to be 'engaging', 'intelligent', to 'enjoy' our work, to 'have fun and make money'.[17] Independent thought and originality signalled not only the requirement of providing individually tailored guest-centric, 'outside of the box'[18] service, but encompassed the demand to think independently even if this meant challenging management decisions. This strategy of determining an environment for the active role of workers in decision-making processes that directly affected them (a form of 'participatory management') was implemented through daily meetings between staff and management, not only for management to reinforce rules and regulations but also for staff to express their concerns and problems, discussing together with management how a given problem could be ameliorated. Obviously, this process existed for the sole purposes of enhancing productivity whilst seeking to foster a subjectivity in which workers see the company's interests as their own (Lazzarato, 1996). This process did not have to be explicitly hierarchical for one to recognise that this chain of command remained top-down. This is because in itself, the socialisation process at work here tended to produce the kinds of subjects who would fulfil the required function of being 'good' employees. In turn, this was backed up by a certain element force. Not only were there surveillance cameras installed in most parts of the restaurant[19], it was also clear that anyone who (as an individual) were to resist the disciplining process too openly, would not last very long in the job.

Incentive schemes existed to reinforce the core values and the necessary subjectivity of the workers. Each week there would be a £50 cash prize for the employee who had most eminently exhibited one of the core values. The process by which it was decided who would win was one in which all employees were encouraged to write to the management telling them about how they had experienced a situation in which a colleague had exhibited a core value in either being a 'good colleague' to co-workers or providing a personalised, individualised service to a customer. For example, I was 'rewarded' once for helping a guest who had had far too many cocktails get home safely. It is perhaps interesting to note that my motivation for assisting this person stemmed, not from coercion, the prospect of reward or an adherence to my designated job description, but from my genuine fear that something might happen to them if they were not put in a taxi and taken home. It is precisely this kind of human emotion/compassion that the company wished to profit from, thus trying to encourage it through incentive schemes (which is different from remuneration). At the same time, such schemes were not just limited to the affective aspect of my work. There were also prizes for the server who generated more revenue in selling the highest number of weekly or monthly special drinks or dishes.

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16 Restaurant training manual, undisclosed source.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

19 These were hidden from view, but existed with our knowledge due to the fact that whilst it is legal under UK legislation to monitor one's employees (to 'enhance productivity', to prevent theft etc.), it has to be done with their knowledge and consent. (UK Information Commissioner's Office, Employment Practices Code [http://www.ico.gov.uk]).

The production of the 'willing worker' was further reinforced through loyalty creation and discourses of privilege to be working for this company. Staff were given considerable discounts when dining in the restaurant and the management discourse was one of 'yes we can', rather than prohibition. As employees, we were constantly reminded that we were working for the company out of choice; as stated in a management training session, we had the option to 'vote with our feet'; we could either 'accept the company and its values', or go and work somewhere else, the suggestion being that it wouldn't be as rewarding. Feeding into this was, as already mentioned, the fact that this restaurant was a well-known, high-class establishment which was supposed to be (and in my experience was) a much more interesting environment to be working in than the fast food outlet around the corner, not least because it was financially more rewarding, especially for the waiting staff because of the tips that we could make in serving people who had money to spend.

Beyond Measure?

The basis for Hardt and Negri to argue that immaterial labour is today beyond measure lies in their assertion that socially necessary labour time ceases to be the relevant measure today. This is based on Marx's own articulation that,

> As soon as labour, in its direct form, has ceased to be the main source of wealth, then labour time ceases, and must cease, to be its standard of measurement, and thus exchange value must cease to be the measurement of use value. (Marx, 1973: 705)

Hardt and Negri state that "labour does remain the fundamental source of value in capitalist production" (2005: 145) thus these authors cannot be critiqued for denying the continued importance of direct labour. They state that the "temporal unity of labour as the basic measure of value today makes no sense" (2005: 145). Their concern is that we "have to investigate what kind of labour we are dealing with and what its temporalities are" (*ibid.*). They posit that "today, with the passage from Fordism to Post-Fordism, the increased flexibility and mobility imposed on workers, and the decline of stable, long-term employment typical of factory work" (*ibid.*), the "regulatory rhythms of factory production and its clear divisions of work time and non-work time tend to decline in the realm of immaterial labour" (*ibid.*). In my investigation of a specific form of service work, the above does not hold true because not only were there very clearly demarcated lines between when I was 'on duty' in the factory that is the restaurant and when I was not, the way I behaved, the social relations I engaged in were different in the workplace and outside it.

Nonetheless, it would be a too superficial reading of the immaterial labour thesis to counter the overall argument with this observation, although I would maintain it remains an important fact. Hardt and Negri state that crucially, it is in the nature of immaterial/affective work, the fact that it "produces social life itself", as opposed to simply the "means of social life", that we find its liberatory, and its 'excessive' qualities

with respect to the "value that capital can extract from it";[20] because ultimately, it holds its "foundation in the common" (Hardt and Negri, 2005: 145-7). This is the reason why it is designated as 'immeasurable', because this feature leads the labour to be unquantifiable in separate units of time and supposedly because exchange value ceases to be the measurement of use value.

Of course any type of affective work by definition is social in nature, whereby the worker produces "forms of community" (*ibid.*: 293) of sorts which rely heavily on the worker's interpersonal skills that they learned in common with other people throughout their working and non-working lives. The fact that I was nice to my guests, engaged with them in conversation and read their every desire from their body language, personalities and conversations, did not mean that we were together creating a common "internal to labour" (*ibid.*: 147) and "external to capital" (*ibid.*). Firstly, the form of community that was created between the guest and myself was an unequal one in which I was not simply under command to relate to other people in a way that I would anyway whether the capital relation existed or not, but one in which precisely because of the capital relation, I had to behave towards my guests in a particular way, namely one which involved me pandering to their needs and desires so that the company could make its profit. Hence, the active involvement of capital fundamentally changed the nature of my relationship with the people who were my guests. Whereas the potential for the kinds of life activity that my labour as a waitress consisted of existed prior to the capital relation I was bound up in, it was capital that gave it its particular form in the relations established in the restaurant. The exaggerated treatment of the guests, this exaggeration of what any normal relationship would be like, and not least the fact that the relationship was not just about creating social forms of life with them, but in serving them, in ways that also are often sexualised, within a complex power relation that cannot be separated from the capital relations with which it exists,[21] set the measure for this kind of labour. This form of labour was not just alienating because it was performed under command (Hardt and Negri, 2005: 111) or because it became automated and mechanical as opposed to spontaneous and natural. Importantly, the social relations created were completely altered by the active presence and active intervention of

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20 An important discussion to be had beyond the limits of this article is the discussion around 'living labour' as that which capital can never capture completely. I agree with Hardt and Negri that capital can never capture the whole of human existence; but to refer to "the fundamental human faculty – the ability to engage the world actively and create social life" (Hardt and Negri, 2005: 146) as a form of labour I think elicits problems. In my view, perhaps "living labour" could be better understood as 'life activity' (David Harvie, personal conversation). This is because referring to all life activities as 'labour' seems to me to reinforce the exploitation of our every action by capital. Thus, rather than refusing to allow all human interactions to become subsumed under capital, both actually and discursively, we endorse denominating them as 'labour', as that activity which is organised through the capital relation, thereby entering into the discussion on capital's terms. This goes to the heart of the meaning of 'labour', and posits the question of whether 'labour' is to be understood as exclusively being about waged labour and the organisational process of capitalism that creates it as such. This is something both Marxist feminist critiques with regard so-called unproductive labour and the reproductive labour of women's domestic work address (Cf. James and Dalla Costa, 1972), as well as being an issue that lies at the very core of the premises by which Hardt and Negri speak of real subsumption under capital. This is a serious issue within the debate at hand but warrants a more in-depth assessment than I can do justice to here.

21 Cf. Ogbonna and Harris (2002).

capital. At the same time, my example of helping the drunken guest get home safely as described above in many ways is a case that proves rather than disproves Hardt and Negri's point. Thus, I think it is important to understand the nuanced ways in which affective labour interacts with capital and the wage relation, which pertains to the debate about measure. Below I wish to elaborate on how the use value of my affective labour was constantly 'objectively' established through specific processes of measurement that served to quantify its corresponding exchange value.

Mystery Dining

'Mystery dining' is a common practice in the service industry.[22] Restaurants employ mystery dining firms to assess how well the dining experience conforms to the standards they set for themselves, which are continuously assessed and improved upon. Neither floor managers nor workers know they are being visited by a mystery diner, as obviously this would defeat the purpose of the objective. In the case of the restaurant I worked at, mystery diners would dine in the restaurant and conduct their reports on a monthly basis.

As a waitress, I was assessed by mystery diners as to how well I performed the sequence of service in the minutest of detail.[23] The mystery diner also performed the corresponding checks on the person in the call centre receiving the original table booking and the performance of the receptionists and floor managers, as well as assessing that of the kitchen and bar staff (through the evaluation of the food and beverages) during the same visit, i.e. the whole experience was evaluated.

This information was then collated in an overall report and sent to the company. The written report correlated elapsed time and key moments in the sequence of service with the overall fulfilment of the service requirements, measured in percent. In a further correlation, the scores for fulfilment by department (reservations, kitchen, management etc) and fulfilment by key indicators (service, hospitality, attention to detail, revenue generation, food, atmosphere) were compared with former reports at the same restaurant as well as the percentage averages of other restaurants owned by the same company, shown in bar charts and correlation matrices with the respective percentage figures. Good results were shared with the staff at briefings and used to promote enthusiasm amongst workers. The assessed waiter was also rewarded with an invitation to dine at the restaurant, an incentive not to get bad results. Extra training would be provided for those performing badly; although this seldom occurred. Due to the fact that these standards were associated with generating more revenue and earning more tips through providing excellent service, this acted as the most effective incentive to comply with the requirements (and management would leave you be).

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22 See for example, http://www.mysterydining.co.uk.

23 It was recorded what time the customer sat down at the table, what time I first approached the table, what time I took the order, how much time elapsed until the drinks arrived, repeating this for each of my moves through the whole meal until I presented the check at the end (we had two hours max. to complete each dining experience). What was being measured was my efficiency and time keeping, coupled with how well I completed the desired tasks and generated the maximum amount of revenue.

In the example of the mystery diner we can see that in order to increase productivity, workers were measured in relation to an ideal standard of what they should be doing and how they should be behaving. As De Angelis argues, "a measure is always a discursive device that acts as a point of reference, a benchmark, a typical norm, a standard" (De Angelis, 2007: 176). Further, he argues,

> when we reflect on this connection [between individuals and the social body peculiar to it], we encounter another measure of commodity value, a translation of the external one and one that shifts our attention from the done to the doing, from commodities to work, from things to life processes and their corresponding social relations. Following Marx, we can call this the immanent measure of value that corresponds to that labour which is socially necessary for the production of a commodity. As its corresponding external measure, this immanent measure of value is also constituted by the ongoing working of capitalist disciplinary processes (and therefore value struggles) passing through markets, as well as their state-implanted simulations. To appreciate this immanent measure we must look at the market as a continuous process of value (price) formation through the distribution of rewards and punishments and not, as in mainstream economics and a variety of strands of radical political economy, as a static structure. (De Angelis, 2007: 180)

Thus, whilst we might believe that we cannot place a value on affect in any abstract way, we can see that activities are not beyond measure when the purpose of the measurement activity described is to place an objective value on the affective labour of the worker, to measure and through this determine the value produced. This practice of mystery dining is not simply a mechanism of control; although it has a disciplining function, it actually serves to create a use-value for the customer out of the affective work done by the waitress and other staff, and this creation, this output, is subjected to the calculating eye of capital and its measure, interested in the exchange value that can potentially be generated for the company and the correspondent profit rate. The mystery diner, in other words, serves the purpose of setting standards as to what, and how much can be demanded of workers. To a certain extent, this process is influenced by the intervention of the consumer, in some ways both the customer and the worker co-constitute the product, as Lazzarato (1996) argues. Granted, the capital relation is one which exploits, it does not create, but this relation is much more interactive, a two-way process or a feedback mechanism, one in which capital simply relies on the creative capacities of labour. Thus understanding the role that measure plays in this process is useful to understand the specificity and significance of this relationship.

Restaurant owners or shareholders wish to make money through both fulfilling and creating desire on behalf of their clientele in order to make a profit and this, as the example of the mystery diner shows, requires a process in which the value that could be produced through this manipulation of desires and their subsequent fulfilment by workers can be 'objectively'[24] measured. Whereas there is an element of interplay between the innovative input of workers and the imposition of standards by capital, hence the reliance on so-called participatory forms of management, this process is much

24 'Objective' here has to be understood not in epistemological or metaphysical terms, but in terms of the 'objectivity' of the measurement of value that the mystery dining process serves to place on the work of the employees. If we discard this notion because we understand that we cannot place any abstract value on human activity, then we undermine our analysis of the specific types of exploitation that pertain to this process; thus here, I wish to hold on to the term 'objective' as understood within the parameters of the measurement process that is taking place.

more complex, and capital's interests, as embodied by the management of the restaurant, play a much more dominant role in shaping how worker's input is made productive for capital than is acknowledged by Hardt and Negri when they celebrate the power of the communicative and innovative activities of immaterial workers. A second example of measurement practices is found in the wage structure, characterised by service charge and gratuity.

Wage Relations

Service charge is a percentage, usually between 10 and 15% of the sum total of the products consumed added to the guest's bill. This is a discretionary charge, i.e. the guest can opt out of paying it if they feel that the service was not up to the standard they expected. This service charge, collected by the company when diners pay their bill, is divided up amongst the workers to constitute a wage per shift in addition to a basic shift pay (with different percentages of it going to workers who perform different tasks, e.g. the manager gets a higher percentage than the waitress and the waitress gets a higher percentage than the receptionist). What is interesting about this service charge is that it is a direct outsourcing of labour cost to the customer, and thus an indirect form of control that the management exercises over the staff, as well as a measuring device which not only forces the waiter to conform to the standards in order to get paid, but also measures the performance of the restaurant in relation to other restaurants in the same price category, as it is based on this experience of other restaurants that the guest will measure whether the service is worthy of the service charge or not.

Gratuity or tips are monetary 'gifts' made directly to the waiting staff as an incentive or 'thank you' for the service provided. Whilst empirical research has shown that there is little statistical relation between customers actually tipping more due to good service and vice versa (Videbeck, 2004; Lynn, 2001), it is the reward aspect of tipping that management use as a motivation for workers to do their job better or more efficiently. This practice also further complexifies the relationship between service staff and guest, because it is a wage relation set up directly between the guest and the server, or to put it in different terms, it is collusion between employer and customer, where, similar to the service charge, the employer seeks an indirect control over the worker's performance through asking the customer to evaluate how well the duties are performed (Ogbonna and Harris, 2002: 744). Here, the server is being directly measured and disciplined into performing her role of producing affect; the better she does, the more money she will make.

However, the dining experience the customer is evaluating and valuing by agreeing to pay a service charge and leave a tip, does not depend solely on the affective work of the waitress. This affective labour is part of the end product of a whole array of material labour without which the waitress would not be able to provide her services. A central importance of tips is that they serve as a mechanism of keeping the wages of the waiting staff down whilst retaining the kind of staff that are used to being able to demand a higher income than the minimum wage. This example shows how capital continuously

seeks to externalise labour costs;[25] by outsourcing the variable cost of labour to the customer through the service charge and through the active endorsement of a tipping culture, management can keep actual wages to a minimum. Moreover, from my personal experience I can confirm that service staff are usually more than happy to consent to this, because they know they can always earn a great deal more by agreeing to this arrangement than if they were to only receive a wage from the company. Even if wages were a little higher to compensate for the absence of tips or service charge, it is almost inconceivable they would be as high as the money staff are able to make with tips.[26]

At the same time, a hierarchy between workers exists in that it is only the waiting staff that get the tip in many establishments, including the one I am discussing in this article, where tips are not divided up between all workers. For example, if the kitchen staff perform badly, they risk reprehension, if the waiting staff make mistakes, they 'only' risk losing their tip, which is one reason why we need to look at the overall political economy of the restaurant.

The Political Economy of the Restaurant

In my introduction I argued that the affective worker cannot be seen out of context of the labour process that he or she is part of. In the restaurant that forms the basis of my inquiry here, the affective work of the waitress could not be done without the labour of the person who cleans the uniforms and all the linen, the chef, the kitchen porter, the drinks dispenser, or for that matter, any of the material labour involved with creating the interior of the restaurant (the tables, chairs, plates, glasses, sound system etc). All of the labour process is subject to specific measuring processes, the rationale of which is the maximisation of profit for the restaurant and the correspondent minimisation of cost. For this reason, it seems to me that we cannot so quickly do away with the idea that the process creating socially necessary labour time constitutes the exchange value (even of immaterial labour) and that this value is a site of struggle.[27] Whilst there are different aspects to the way that when we look at the aggregate worker, socially necessary labour time remains a vital measure of all of the manual and immaterial labour that goes into producing the product of the dining experience with all its components. As Marx himself states,

> If we consider the aggregate worker, i.e. if we take all the members comprising the workshop [in this case the restaurant] together, then we see that their combined activity results materially in an aggregate product which is at the same time a quantity of goods. And here it is quite immaterial whether the job of a particular worker, who is merely a limb of this aggregate worker, is at a greater or smaller distance from the actual manual worker. (Marx, 1976: 1040)

Whilst Hardt and Negri do not dispute this, they use this argument of Marx's to state that it provides the grounds to understanding the potential of the commons, if we

25 See also Wright (2005: 39).

26 See for example interviews conducted with waiting staff by Ogbonna and Harris (2002).

27 See also, Cleaver (2000); De Angelis (2006).

understand how the practices of immaterial labour are inherently co-operative (Hardt and Negri, 2005: 144-5). This may be true at specific times and in specific instances, but, the form of labour that I was a constituent part of as a waitress is predicated upon capital creating the conditions for the co-operation. Without capital's active intervention, this form of co-operation would not exist in the way that it is performed within the confines of the restaurant. Moreover, it is capital that provides certain necessary means for the workers to produce in this particular way, even if the workers means are drawn on too, e.g. their skills, emotions, abilities and creativity. This is why I argue that we must interrogate this interplay as mediated and constituted by forms of measure.

In the relations between staff, capital set up measures between workers and established a wage hierarchy which sought to impose capital as the structural force upon all relations. There may have been a certain degree of 'general intellect'[28] guiding the production process of the dining experience, because we used our interpersonal skills to assess the requirements of the moment and worked co-operatively using our 'common sense' and acquired skills to make the operation happen. Yet, crucially, there remained a clear division of labour, clear assignments and a clear command structure as opposed to a networked decentralised form of activity that are understood as a predominant feature of immaterial forms of labour (Hardt and Negri, 2005 : 142). Not least, once we move from understanding the individual labour form of the waitress as affective worker to analysing the aggregate labour of the restaurant, we see that socially necessary labour time remains the basic measure of value, precisely because put in a rather straightforward way, management still seeks to generate the maximum amount of profit whilst paying staff as little as they have to in order to achieve this goal: this is inherent to the logic of the undertaking.

Thus, it seems to me somewhat contradictory that Hardt and Negri do not dispute Marx's assertion as cited above but then make the claim that socially necessary labour time is no longer a valid form of measure, which we can see is still valid when we situate the affective worker within the labour process of the restaurant with regard to the type of labour performed, as well as in terms of the wage hierarchy and sociological make-up of the workers who occupy different positions within the labour process. For example, the fact that, when one takes both service charge and gratuity into consideration, waiters are paid a lot more than kitchen, bar or cleaning staff (and actually more than junior managers as well), shows that we need to put affective labour into the context of material and 'immiserated labour'.[29] Moreover, most visible 'front of house' staff were middle-class, well-educated and predominantly from countries of the so-called 'Global North', or if not, then they were nonetheless from middle-class backgrounds with excellent English skills, usually with secure permanent contracts, often only doing service work as a stepping stone to becoming an academic, an artist, a media worker or a lawyer. The flipside of this was the invisible more precarious and most often migrant labour at the 'back of house' (with the exception of qualified chefs).

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28 A concept taken from Marx, to mean "the general productive forces of the social brain" (Marx, 1973: 694) or "general social knowledge" (Marx, 1973: 706); for a further discussion on the concept of the 'general intellect', see Dyer-Witheford (1999, 2005).

29 See Dyer-Witheford (2005: 15).

Beyond Capital? Concluding Questions

In this article, my intention has been to apply the immaterial labour thesis as developed by Lazzarato and Hardt and Negri in particular to a specific example of affective labour to assess how the general tenets of this thesis conform to the specificities of such work. I acknowledge the relevance of the concepts of immaterial and affective labour as developed in the literature; particularly Lazzarato's understanding of active subjectivity conforms to much of my experience of management strategies within the restaurant. Also, it is evident that the inherent and learned emotional and interpersonal skills, i.e. workers' ability to create affective relations, are exploited in the valorisation process. But in turn, they are also manipulated and transformed for the purpose of surplus value extraction. The specific problem I address here is that affective labour cannot be said to be 'beyond measure', nor is it indicative of an 'elementary communism', if we understand how capital actively changes the nature of affective relations in its pursuit of profit, whereby measure must remain a central component of our analysis. On the one hand, I chart how specific forms of measure such as mystery dining, service charge and tipping, are used as both a form of control, and as a form of measure, on the other, I situate the affective labour of the waitress within the labour process of the restaurant whereby I argue that socially necessary labour time is still a relevant category of analysis. Whilst on the one hand we may be able to talk about a 'production of value from below', ready to be expropriated, manipulated and in turn determined by capital, it is much harder to see where any liberatory politics might become possible. Where in the restaurant lies the line of flight, apart from individual moments of micro-conflictuality that exist in the everyday life of any working environment (for example petty theft, workers not following company rules in wearing their uniform properly or a chef cooking some food for a colleague when they not supposed to)? What happens when affect becomes both a form of command as well as the actual product as I have shown in this article?

The struggle between capitalist valorisation, self-valorisation and politics is one that remains to be elaborated. My goal here has been to add an analysis of a concrete affective labour experience to the debate. In offering my insight of how capital functions to organise the labour process of the restaurant as opposed to merely extracting value from the immaterial labour performed, I am equally posing the question of how we articulate what 'exodus' can mean and what role affective labour plays in this, understood as situated within the overall production cycle it is a constitutive part of where the struggle over measure remains central.

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