

**Baristi and the One Best Way:  
Organizational Structures of Employment in Specialty Coffee Chains**

by

**Emily Elizabeth Raine B.A. (Hons)  
McGill University, Montreal**

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## Abstract

This study identifies several points of convergence between specialty café chain labourers and the organizations that employ them. Café chains are premised upon their consistent reproduction of experience in numerous locations, so organizations must put multiple systems of control into place to ensure their homogeneity across the chain. Foremost among these are Fordism and Taylorism, two systems that emphasize rational and efficient routines made up of highly segmented and de-skilled tasks, so that each step in the productive process is done the “one best way.” Because employees’ friendly service is part of the experience that cafés attempt to reproduce across the chain, the social behaviours of workers are subjected to training and management supervision. The workers, and particularly those workers engaged in “barista” labour, are foregrounded in the cafés’ corporate literature, and organizational relations with employees are often used by the companies in marketing and promotional materials. In particular, barista employees are advertised as models of satisfied workers, which discursively situates the companies that employ them as enlightened employers.

## Résumé

Cette étude identifie plusieurs points de contact entre les travailleurs des chaînes de cafés fins et les organisations qui les emploient. Les chaînes de cafés sont fondées sur l'idée qu'ils puissent reproduire la même expérience dans divers espaces, donc chaque organisation doit introduire plusieurs systèmes afin d'assurer que tous les endroits soient homogènes. Ils utilisent surtout les idées de «Fordisme» et «Taylorisme», deux systèmes qui mettent l'accent sur des routines rationnelles et efficaces qui se composent de tâches divisées et sans compétences. Ainsi, chaque étape du processus de production sera effectuée « la seule meilleure façon.» Parce que le service chaleureux fait parti de l'expérience des clients, les caractères des employés sont aussi supervisés. Les travailleurs, et surtout ceux qui sont engagés comme «barista» sont au centre de la littérature produite par les organisations. En particulier, les baristi sont présentés en tant qu'employés satisfaits de leur position, une construction rhétorique qui positionne les compagnies qui les emploient comme employeurs « enlightened ».

## Opening Remarks

I would like to give effusive thanks to my supervisor, mentor and friend, Jonathan Sterne, for his incredibly patient and erudite guidance in this and other projects; without his help this would be a much shoddier production, indeed.

I am also endlessly grateful to Aaron Gordon for his uncomplaining proofreads, errand-running, affection and support. I would like also to show appreciation to my family, Christine, David, David, Laurence and Melodie. Thanks as well to Mady Carlea, Howard Tsui, Jeffrey Malecki, Colin Vincent and the other Ottawa kids for their sanity-related assistance and for providing another home to escape to.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Specialty coffee houses have grown ubiquitous only in the last fifteen years, quickly multiplying to become some of the most prominent features of urban space. Starbucks in particular has arguably ousted even McDonald's to become the primary symbol of globalized brands and cultural monopoly, as well as generating a string of comparable chains including The Second Cup, Timothy's, Van Houtte, Java U and Café Depot in Canada alone. These luxury cafés exist alongside the distinctly North American donut shops such as Tim Horton's, Dunkin' Donuts or CountryStyle, and they have created a new cachet not only for their own products but for coffee as a whole.

The few academic accounts that have critically engaged the specialty café chains have focused on the social experiences that these provide for their clientele, and all of these have taken Starbucks specifically as the principal site of investigation. These consumer and brand analyses have attended to the sociability of the cafés (St. Germain 2001), the ways in which their products are marketed and consumed (Bollier 1996; Elliott 2002; Fry 2000; Thompson & Arsel 2004) or have situated the chains in a longer history of coffee house culture and community (Ellis 2004). My intention in the present contribution to this growing body of literature is to provide an account of the organizational and experiential dimensions of employment in these cafés. In light of the considerable similarities between the numerous café chains, I attempt to fashion this critique in as broad a manner as possible, so as to address the general experience of the employees across chains rather than focusing on one particular brand.

My motivation for writing this account is intensely personal. I chose this project after returning to Montreal as a graduate student with little money and rusty French, when I took a job at The Second Cup. It should have been a great job, and indeed there is no good reason why it couldn't have been a sociable and pleasant work experience. Instead, however, it was boring, demeaning, repetitive and stressful. The employees worked hard, yet we were unable to subsist solely on our wages. We all groused about having to work so hard to produce commodities that are physiologically unnecessary, if not detrimental, to the health of those who consume them. We grew tired of being polite and warm to people who were rude in response. I began my research in order to investigate why and how we hated our jobs. This project is a response to my own great disappointment with the conditions of this kind of labour.

It is noteworthy that so little attention has been given to the employees of these chains because, as I will argue, the presentation and training of employees in specialty coffee shops is central to the product positioning of these services to their prospective clientele. While the topics addressed in the above accounts do necessarily speak to factors that concern café employees' labour conditions, these workers, of course, do not interact in the same way with their working environments as do their customers. In this study, I will focus upon the ways in which the organizations and employees relate by directing attention toward the day-to-day structures and practices of workers and identifying how these link up with the larger systems of the corporate organizations. Attention to local practices such as the spatial layouts of stores, employee training and so on provides not only valuable knowledge about this burgeoning rank of employees, but it also reveals a

great deal about the architectonics of the organization itself, particularly how these organizations see themselves as social actors.

The organization of cafés into chains requires the imposition of a system that demands uniformity, rationality and standardization—a system that supersedes the ability of individual workers to act independently. By outlining the ‘one best way’ to perform every task, chains override workers’ creativity and individuality in matters as diverse as emotive interaction with clientele, self-presentation in public spaces and productive procedures at work. The rationalization of labour, as numerous critics have remarked (Gramsci 1971; Marcuse 1995; Reiter 1991; Ritzer 2000; Sennett 1998) makes work much less satisfying for personnel. Rationalized production systems have been implemented in numerous industries, but the present case is particularly intriguing because of the degree to which barista labour is foregrounded and their benevolent treatment by the corporation branded and used as advertising fodder.

Replicating an initial outlet as a chain requires the systematic reproduction of the same products and atmosphere in numerous places in order to create a consistent brand experience for the clientele in any location. The central focus of this study is the network of systems that are deployed by companies in order to establish this uniformity and how they shape the working conditions and experiences of a chain’s employees who cannot, of course, be consistently reproduced. The automation of preparatory routines, standardization of spatial practices, arrangement of social interactions and employee training constitute the forces that dictate the ways that labourers are engaged in such a way as to maximize the homogeneity of consumer experiences in luxury chain cafés.

## Methodology

Given the dearth of existing analyses aimed specifically at café staffs, my project applies several methodologies conjointly. A great deal of the material used was gleaned from my own experiences and observations during my eight-month stint working at a popular downtown Montreal Second Cup.<sup>1</sup> I was hired in September 2003, gave my notice in March of 2004, and I worked between fifteen and twenty-five hours per week during this time. This engagement was not a formal ethnography; I conceived of the research project during my employment and did not seek to do academic work in this field at the time of my being hired.

During this period I was trained in both general service and also in the marginally more difficult “barista” tasks. “Barista” is the industry’s term for the person who operates an espresso machine, who “tamps” (fills and pats down coffee grinds into an espresso filter) and “draws” (forces pressurized hot water through the filter to produce coffee) espresso shots and steams milk to make the manifold available coffee and espresso drinks. This title is used in all of the café chains, while service workers in other capacities take titles specific to the chain; Starbucks, for example, hires “partners,” while The Second Cup employs “coffee agents” or “conseillers en café.”<sup>2</sup> In many cases, the term barista is used to signify employees working in any capacity in the café, whether they are

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<sup>1</sup> Because of Starbucks’ prominence and the wealth of information available about the company, I would like to have done an ethnography at Starbucks after I conceived of this project. However, Starbucks routinely includes a publication restriction clause in worker agreements before training begins, so that I could not do so and continue with my research work. There was no such a waiver at The Second Cup.

<sup>2</sup> Second Cup Coffee Co. *Manuel du conseiller en café* (date and location unknown); Second Cup Coffee Co.; “About Us” (online, 2004) *Second Cup* <http://www.secondcup.com/about>. Accessed 28 May 2005; Starbucks Coffee Company “Starbucks Timeline and History” (online, 2005) *Starbucks* <http://www.starbucks.com/aboutus/timeline.asp>, Accessed 30 March, 2005; Starbucks Coffee Company, *Living Our Values: Corporate Social Responsibility, Fiscal 2003 Annual Report* (Seattle: 2004).

stationed at the espresso machine or not. In this study, I use barista in two ways: first, when I address the specifics of labour processes in the cafés I use “barista” to indicate only those workers operating the espresso machine. However, when I invoke the title in the context of popular discourse, I use barista as a general term to denote all café workers. This confusing double usage is necessary for two reasons: first, because “barista” is the term by which café employees are typically named in popular culture and in many cases by the companies themselves; secondly, I do so in order to avoid applying the brand-specific titles given by each company in order to signify the broader category of employee across the chains.

With regard to the present project, my engagement in the café served to crystallize several points of approach for my analysis of the specialty café chain. For example, the work directed my attention toward similarities between what Robin Leidner (1996) calls “interactive service work” in fast food chains and the same positions in specialty cafés. Through this study I was also able to observe my own and others’ interactions with one another and with customers in some detail, and to assess the conditions and consequences of the distribution of machinery and labour in the productive space behind the service counter. Additionally, my work experience gave me access to the cafés’ training practices and materials, which figure prominently into this account.

In addition to the background information obtained by working in a café, I consulted a wide range of materials regarding numerous aspects of the specialty coffee industry, including coffee cultivation, importation, marketing and history. I read academic accounts of the history of coffee and café culture, as well as several historical

and theoretical reviews of service work in general. I collected whatever materials were available on the cafés, including fiscal and promotional releases, an employee manual and countless newspaper and trade publications about their marketing initiatives and expansion methods, in addition to a series of web sites, blogs and other online materials. I reviewed a cross-section of pertinent literature about labour and monopoly capitalism, particularly those addressing the expanding service class specifically. Finally, I culled a vast body of literature addressing the working conditions of fast food and analyses of the means by which chains organize labour in order to produce consistent brand experiences.

While my own café work experience was entirely at The Second Cup, I also spent many hours in other chain and independent cafés around Montreal observing interactions between clientele, staff and management and noting their structural arrangements.

Furthermore, the greater access to employee processes specific to The Second Cup was counterbalanced somewhat by the discursive preponderance of Starbucks. In this thesis, aside from those occasions when one company, mostly either Starbucks or the Second Cup, is identified by name, my intention is to address the form of the specialty chain café in general; further, I argue that many of those critiques that can be applied to a specific company can be made in general about the class of outlets as a whole.<sup>3</sup> This thesis is compatible with Craig J. Thompson and Zeynep Arsel (2004)'s theory of the hegemonic brandscape:

A hegemonic brandscape is a cultural system of servicescapes that are linked together and structured by discursive, symbolic, and competitive relationships to a dominant (market-driven) experiential brand. The hegemonic brandscape not only structures an experience economy market but also shapes consumer lifestyles by functioning as a

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<sup>3</sup> One exception to this general rule is the invocation of The Starbucks' Coffee Company's Bean Stock and other employee benefit options plans, which do not exist in any of the other companies I studied.

cultural model that consumers act, think, and feel through... Cultural models are socially shared because they are objectified through public discourses, material objects, and the design of the physical environment.<sup>4</sup>

While Thompson and Arsel introduced the term with specific reference and attention to consumer experiences, I argue that the same can be said of employee experiences, which are bound to be similarly organized when engaged in analogously systematized service spaces. As Markman Ellis (2004) posits,

coffee-bar chains have some features in common, features that are deeply imbedded in their chain structure. Each chain establishes prototypical solutions to retail problems across its markets: it seeks to identify single answers, and established patterns of response, to the daily difficulties of running a coffee shop. In the same way that the coffee, food and interiors of the coffee bars have a stylistic consistency, so too do the management solutions.<sup>5</sup>

While the various chains articulate their organizational structure differently, for example by being operated by the company or as franchises, on an *experiential* level the companies are the same for their employees. Further, employees themselves attest to the facility of transferring between chains and locations fluidly, since almost no additional training or information is needed to move from one outlet or organization to another.

Because I am attempting to provide a comprehensive review of the experience of labour in specialty cafés, the interpretive frameworks deployed in each section vary significantly. The work is divided into four chapters, followed by a concluding discussion. The first and present section serves primarily to introduce the subject matter and to outline the methodology. In addition, I provide a brief history of café cultures and describe the “rationalization” of cafés as they are submitted to the standardization procedures deployed by chains. Finally, I supply a short description of the makeup of

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<sup>4</sup> Craig J. Thompson and Zeynep Arsel, “The Starbucks Brandscape and Consumers’ (Anticorporate) Experiences of Glocalization,” in *Journal of Consumer Research* Vol. 31, 3 (Dec 2004), 632.

coffee chains in Montreal, as well as a brief exposition of the composition of the personnel in these chains.

In the next chapter, “Fordism, Machinery and the One Best Way,” I apply Marxist and labour theory in order to explore the relationship between café and Fordist organizational schemes. First, I outline the paradigmatic example of the assembly line, that of the Ford Model T plants in Michigan in the late 1910s. The next section of this chapter engages with the substantial body of work profiling the implementation of Fordist models in fast food outlets. I argue here that because both fast food outlets and many luxury cafés are organized into chains, they are very much alike. The practice of structuring chains to guarantee the highest possible degree of uniformity between locations of a given company ultimately ensures a great deal of similarity not only within but across chain organizations and service genres. The chain cafés have more in common with fast food than with other chains because both are structured with strictly divided yet cross-trained labour processes, spatial layouts that share a counter where employees work that is designated for ordering and receiving products, and a client-oriented seating space. Both styles of restaurant make abundant use of the ideas of Fordism and Taylorism and share comparable employee bases and compensation packages. The last section of this chapter will address the Fordist-style workflows used in chain cafés, focusing in particular on how labour processes are structured around productive machinery.

The chapter that follows is called “Training, Spatial Organization and Conduct” and this portion documents techniques of training employees and customers, with greater attention to post-Fordist mechanisms. Café customers need not only to learn how to “use”

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<sup>5</sup> Markman Ellis, *The Coffee House* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004), 255.

the café, for example by discovering where to order, learning any brand-specific lingo and exploring how to interact with the staff and other customers; they must also be trained to perform some productive labour in order to actualize their own experience, such as bussing the seating area, dressing their coffees, and so on. This section also inaugurates a discussion of the spatial practices and social conventions of specialty cafés. I also address the training of employees' knowledge and behaviours, for example by looking at what kinds of training are deemed appropriate and necessary for new employees or through discussions of the management's surveillance of the staff.

My final chapter, "Organizing and Marketing Warmth," attends to the marketing and management of the affective labour of service industry employees. As numerous writers have noted (Leidner 1996; MacDonald & Sirianni 1996; Reich 1991; Wharton 1996), the primary distinction between manufacturing and service work is that the end-users of the product are present, so that one of the things that service employees must "produce" is a friendly demeanor and pleasant experience for the clientele. In fact, the manufacture of experience is one of the most salient characteristics of service labour in general and of cafés specifically. Arlie Hochschild (1983) calls the exertions of service industry workers involved in producing customer experience "emotional labour," and she and several other critics attend to the consequences of giving organizations and management the authority to direct and regulate employee affect in at-work interactions. I conduct a genealogy of labour in the end-user production of coffee in order to tease out the origins of regulated affect in café labour, then conclude with a discussion of the affective role of barista workers in the present case.

Finally, I conclude with a discussion of several of the more salient themes introduced in the course of my research and analysis, including possible courses for future research and tactics for employee engagement and resistance.

### **A Brief History of Café Culture and Chains**

While chain cafés today are often appended to bookstores such as Indigo, Chapters or Borders, coffeehouses have a long historical affiliation with academic, literary, journalistic and political cultures. The introduction of coffee houses as public spaces dedicated to the shared consumption of coffee was more or less concurrent with that of the substance itself into European society in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the good and practice both imported by occidental traders who operated in what is now the middle East.<sup>6</sup> Coffee service stalls were introduced between 1645 and 1670 in the major urban centres in Austria, Britain, Germany, France and Italy, and the first North American licensed coffee houses were opened in 1670 in Boston and New York in 1696.<sup>7</sup> The coffeehouses of this period have grown near legendary for their facilitation of inter-class fraternization, dissemination of news and political debate. They were known as the “penny universities,” where men of all classes—and only men were allowed in as patrons—could pay a penny for their coffees as entrance charge to the exchange of newspapers and lively discussions that waited within.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 1-24; Gregory Dicum & Nina Luttinger, *The Coffee Book: An Anatomy of an Industry from Crop to the Last Drop* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Stewart Lee Allen *The Devil's Cup: Coffee, The Driving Force in History* (New York: Soho Press, 1999), 144, 203-4; Ellis, *The Coffee House*, xi, 77-78; Dicum & Luttinger, *The Coffee Book*, 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 185-6; Aytoun Ellis, *The Penny Universities: A History of the Coffee-Houses* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1956).

These penny universities were famed as sites of social and political debate, and they engendered the development of institutions as diverse as The Royal Society and the London Stock Exchange, in addition to countless newspapers, circles of literary criticism, and other intellectual and political projects. Habermas (1991) cites the coffee houses of this age as a paradigmatic instance of the bourgeois public sphere, which he describes as “the sphere of private people come together as a public...to engage in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people’s public use of their reason.”<sup>9</sup> In the bourgeois public sphere, which he describes as emerging more or less concurrently with coffee house culture, individuals meet in public space to converse and determine the symbolic value of art, literature, music, theater and politics. Such publics allowed the citizenry to engage in political and ideological debate outside of aristocratic and hegemonic society, allowing for the articulation of political critiques so that anyone from any station could participate in political issues.<sup>10</sup>

Ray Oldenburg (1989) likewise names the English coffee houses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as egalitarian spaces of intellectual and community interaction, adding that there is a great individual and collective benefit to having such spaces outside of work and the home. In particular, Oldenburg applauds the ability of

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<sup>9</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* trans. Thomas Burger & Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 27. See Erin Mackie, Ed. *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from The Tattler and The Spectator* (Boston: Bedford/St.Martin’s, 1998), 16-18, and Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 223-4 for discussions of coffeehouses in relation to Habermas.

<sup>10</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 28.

what he calls “Third Places” to facilitate chance encounters between citizens from dissimilar social classes and backgrounds that would be unlikely to meet or engage as equals under different social circumstances. Writing much later than Habermas, Oldenburg also qualifies his argument to state that he finds no comparable sites in a contemporary culture dominated by franchised chains.<sup>11</sup>

As one coffee house historian has argued, since “most of the coffee-houses were laid out to a set pattern, it was the people who frequented any particular institution that gave it its social character.”<sup>12</sup> Specific cafés have been strongly linked to countless intellectual and artistic movements including Dryden’s literary circle at Will’s in London; the founders of The Royal Society at the Grecian; Austrian modernists such as Schiele, Klimt and Loos at Kaffeehauses in turn-of-the-century Vienna; dadaist and surrealist poets who gathered at the Rotonde in Paris; French existentialists at the Café Flore; the American beat literary and countercultural movement at Café Trieste and others; and the “new left” cultural studies scholars including Stuart Hall and Charles Taylor who founded the Partisan Coffee House in London—and this list is nowhere near exhaustive.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, 186-199. This last qualification is interesting given that Starbucks’ Chairman Schultz has repeatedly invoked his own chain as an example of Oldenburg’s Third Place. In Howard Schultz and Dori Jones Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It: How Starbucks built a company one cup at a time* (New York: Hyperion), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ellis, *The Penny Universities*, xiv. For example, the “beaux” (men of rank and fashion) would meet at Man’s (72), while literati met at Will’s, (76), men of science (and particularly those involved in the founding of The Royal Society) at the Grecian (82), the clergy at Child’s (105), newspapermen at Button’s (161), merchants and marine traders at Lloyd’s (117-8), stockjobbers at Jonathan’s (35) and so on.

<sup>13</sup> See Allen, *The Devil’s Cup*, 154, 203-4; Ellis, *The Penny Universities*; Ellis, *The Coffee House*; Mackie, *The Commerce of Everyday Life*; Clinton R. Starr “‘I Want to Be with My Own Kind’: Individual Resistance and Collective Action in the Beat Counterculture” in Jennie Skerl (ed.) *Reconstructing the Beats* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 41-54.

While numerous independent cafés flourish in cities across North America, this market is now clearly dominated by chains. Organizations that are structured as chains necessarily function much differently than do independent businesses. George Ritzer (2000) has written extensively on the culture of what he calls “McDonaldized” businesses, named for the paradigmatic franchised organization. The fundamental premise of the chain is the consistent reproduction of a service in multiple locations in order to capitalize on the success of the original, and this repetition is achieved by a standardization of the service’s products, prices and atmosphere.<sup>14</sup> Ritzer argues that McDonaldization is essentially an exercise in rationalization, and he deliberately invokes “rationalization” in the sense intended by Max Weber, who foresaw a society in which all social actions were circumscribed by an “iron cage” of formal rationality.<sup>15</sup> For Weber, the iron cage implies a limitation of human potential because he imagined that individuals would eventually become trapped by rationality and therefore unable to feel or express fundamental irrationalities of humanity (as in the society depicted in Godard’s *Alphaville*); he feared that because individuals must always achieve their ends through regulated structures, rather than struggling through challenges in their own ways.<sup>16</sup>

Ritzer finds that McDonald’s has pioneered a business model that has since been applied in manifold other services and which concentrates on four rational qualities:

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<sup>14</sup> George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*. Revised New Century Ed. (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2000), 1-6. Discussion of chains has most frequently been geared toward food and hospitality services, but numerous other services have been “McDonaldized,” including funeral homes, child care, medical services, house cleaning and education, to name just a few.

<sup>15</sup> George Ritzer, “Islands of the Living Dead: The Social Geography of McDonaldization” pp. 119-36 in *American Behavioral Scientist* Vol. 47, No. 2 (October 2003), 120; Max Weber, *Economy and Sociology: An Introduction to Interpretive Sociology*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff et. al., Guenther Roth & Claus Wittich (Eds.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>16</sup> Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, 25-8.

efficiency, calculability, predictability and control through non-human technology. McDonalidized businesses are efficient because they provide a fast, convenient and inexpensive satisfaction of a need. This service can be quickly provided because of the internal efficiency of the business itself, where organizational rules simplify and standardize processes to ensure productive efficaciousness. Calculability is manifest in the quantitative controls placed upon such services through standardization. The productive aspects of the services are calculable because they use set portion sizes, recipes and time limits for product delivery, and this reliability also enables the customers to calculate. A consumer might reasonably guess, for example, how long it might take to feed three children between the swimming practice of the eldest and the piano lessons of the youngest. This calculability ensures the third quality, predictability, because every aspect of the service experience and products has been measured and standardized in advance. Significantly, the expectation of predictability includes homogenous service, so employees' interactions with consumers, too, are scripted and standardized. Finally, control through non-human technology underlies all of the above processes and ensures that they are smoothly executed by guaranteeing that human actors will not interfere with the logic of the system itself. Ritzer argues that there are many advantages to operating McDonalidized businesses, including the ability to make products available to a broader range of consumers, a greater availability of goods in general, uniform quantity and quality in services, and the stability and comfort of predictability.<sup>17</sup> The obvious weakness of McDonalidization for its human components is that systems are automated at the expense of individuals' tastes and idiosyncrasies and that work in them is very dull.

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<sup>17</sup> George Ritzer (ed.) et. al. *McDonaldization: A Reader* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2002), 16-20.

The ultimate goal of chains is to rationalize every aspect of the system in order to recreate a consistent experience at every node in the brand, so that a Starbucks customer accustomed to having a latte in downtown Manhattan can have more or less the same brand experience in Verdun. The day-to-day operation of café chains and the structures through which their uniformity and atmosphere are maintained are determined in part by the structure of the chain itself. With few exceptions, chain outlets are operated within two constellations of ownership and regulation. In franchises, individuals buy an outlet of the chain from the company and operate it on their behalf. They purchase the brand but in most senses still operate the business autonomously, so long as they abide by company regulations. As Eric Schlosser puts it, “Becoming a franchisee is an odd combination of starting your own business and going to work for someone else.” The franchiser (the corporation) has the benefit of expanding its brand, while the franchisee (the outlet owner) is able to open a business associated with an established brand name without incurring the liabilities associated with new ideas. The franchisee invests the startup capital and labour, while the franchiser supplies the familiarity of the chain brand and a shared-cost national advertising campaign otherwise unimaginable to an independent business owner.<sup>18</sup>

In company-operated chains, most or all of the outlets are run by the corporation, which hires management staff to supervise the day-to-day operations of the outlet but has no direct stake in its ownership.<sup>19</sup> In franchises, organizations often employ a “ratchet” or benchmark system, using the performance of one outlet to set the standard for another in

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<sup>18</sup> Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 94.

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey L. Bradach, *Franchise Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1998), 83.

order to motivate franchisees to do better.<sup>20</sup> However, since the operators are themselves the owners, they cannot be subjected to the same degree of control as a company-run or licensed outlet, nor do they particularly need to be since operators have a direct stake in the restaurant's profitability. Having said this, though, franchisees are heavily regulated and monitored by the parent company, which retains the right to revoke the licensee's enfranchisement if they are unable to meet the terms of their contract, for example by failing to meet sales quotas, by deviating from the company aesthetic, preparation or other guidelines, by purchasing from outside suppliers and so on—in essence, anything that would interfere with the overall uniformity of the brand.<sup>21</sup> In company-run organizations the corporation has many more mechanisms for controlling the practices of its outlets; Bradach argues that “the company arrangement was built on a management philosophy of close and redundant control aimed at maintaining uniformity.”<sup>22</sup>

Both the franchise and company-run structures use multiple and redundant systems of performance evaluation, but the three most common are field inspections, mystery shoppers and input-output audits. Field inspections are company examinations of the premises, which are intended to monitor the cleanliness and standardization of processes and machinery on behalf of the organization, for example through equipment spot-checks, by timing the service performance of staff and evaluating the overall aesthetic and cleanliness of an outlet on behalf of the organization. Mystery shoppers are apparently ordinary clientele who are sent in by the company and who evaluate the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>21</sup> Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, 99-100.

quality and friendliness of service and check on the standardization of food stuffs. Their results are assessed along the established guidelines of the company, for example by discreetly checking the temperature of a food or beverage, timing the arrival of an order and so on. Input-output audits measure the ability of individual outlets to comply with the company's quantification standards, and these measure the ratio of food shipped in against quantities sold in order to assure that customers are receiving the right portion sizes, to avoid employee theft, waste, and so on.<sup>23</sup> All of these are intended, above all, to ensure the standardization of operations across the chain.

The chain outlet is premised upon its reproduction of a consistent consumer experience regardless of location, so the food, spatial organization on both sides of the counter, productive technology, interior design, staff accouterment, product packaging and overhead costs are standardized across the chain. If successful, the chain becomes, for its customers at least, a non-place, a "placeless place" capable of replicating the same branded space in multiple locations simply by being precisely the same everywhere.<sup>24</sup> In order to do so, the operations of each node within the chain must be systematized so that the system itself can be transported from one locale to another; it must be automated in such a way that its standards can be applied anywhere and by anyone and still achieve consistent and speedy output. As Marx notes in the *Grundrisse*, "the tendency of capital

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<sup>22</sup> Robin Leidner, "Rethinking Questions of Control: Lessons from McDonald's" pp. 29-49 in *Working in the Service Society* eds. Cameron Lynne Macdonald and Carmen Sirianni (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 32; Bradach, *Franchise Organizations*, 85.

<sup>23</sup> Bradach, *Franchise Organizations*, 85.

<sup>24</sup> Markman Ellis (2004) puts forth anthropologist Marc Augé's (1995) notion of the non-place as a heuristic for understanding the spatial organization of Starbucks. Augé defines non-places as the opposite of Mauss' sociological idea of place and as also as "the opposite of utopia: it exists, and it does not contain any organic society." Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* trans. John Howe (London & New York: Verso, 1995), 94, 110-111; Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 255-6.

is thus to give a scientific character to production, reducing direct labour to a simple element in this process.”<sup>25</sup> By systematizing every aspect of the productive process, the organization becomes autonomous, able to operate with minimal input and knowledge on the part of its employees. Thus, no one worker becomes indispensable, so there is less incentive for corporations to negotiate the terms of work with employees.

### **Meet the Chains**

The Starbucks Coffee Company began in 1971 as a small specialty coffee shop inspired by a Berkeley outlet, Peet’s Coffee and Tea. Named for a Herman Melville character, the original Starbucks outfit was established by Jerry Baldwin, Zev Siegl and Gordon Bowker in a Pike Place, a marketplace in Seattle overlooking Puget Sound. The store grew fairly quickly, and within its first eleven years of business, Starbucks had grown to include five stores, a roaster, and a flourishing wholesale bean trade employing eight-five people altogether. It was at this time that the company began working with Howard Schultz, who became the head of retail sales and marketing in 1982. Schultz briefly left the chain to establish his own outfit, Il Giornale, then returned to Starbucks to buy out the original proprietors in 1987.<sup>26</sup> Schultz began to rapidly develop the chain, engaging in an ambitious expansion plan and adding espresso machines as standard units in every location. He quickly realized that the real product of his cafés was an experience, and sought to standardize this experience across geographical areas to create a consistent

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<sup>25</sup> Karl Marx, *Selections from The Grundrisse* trans. David McLellan (ed.) (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 135.

encounter for the clientele at any location.<sup>27</sup> This goal requires a standardized spatial distribution in each café, as well as uniform preparation and customer service guidelines for the workers.

Starbucks has undeniably been successful in this end; it is renowned, vilified and celebrated in popular media for its stylized homogeneity and boasts tremendous profits and a heady number of locations. Thompson and Arsel argue that Starbucks has grown to be so ubiquitous that it has become the brand that other cafés cannot avoid defining themselves alongside or against by virtue of its being the hegemonic “culturally iconic experiential brand.”<sup>28</sup> One study found that the average Starbucks customer visits the chain eighteen times per month, with ten percent visiting twice a day or more.<sup>29</sup> The chain, as of the 2004 Fiscal Year, boasted a staggering 5,200 company-operated and 2,800 licensed outlets, 96,700 employees, well over \$5 billion in sales and \$391.8 million in net income.<sup>30</sup> Given the undeniable success of Starbucks’ operations and expansion, it is hardly surprising that comparable chains have followed suit in their internal organization and orientation.

The second largest player in this industry is The Second Cup, a franchised Canadian chain with over four hundred locations offering its customers the “Ultimate Coffee Experience.” The Second Cup opened in Toronto as a whole bean store with no food or beverage service in 1975 and began to serve as a café when it “launched the latte”

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<sup>26</sup> David Bollier, “Employees As Partners in Growth,” in *Aiming Higher: 25 Stories of How Companies Prosper by Combining Sound Management and Social Vision* (New York: The Business Enterprise Trust, 1996), 213-4; Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 247.

<sup>27</sup> Schultz & Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 119.

<sup>28</sup> Thompson & Arsel, “The Starbucks Brandscape,” 641.

<sup>29</sup> Dicum & Luttinger, *The Coffee Book*, 153.

<sup>30</sup> “Starbucks Coffee Company” in *Hoover’s Company Index*. (Austin: June 1, 2005), 15475.

in 1979. The Second Cup is operated by Cara foods, a corporation whose vast holdings include East Side Mario's, Harvey's and Beaver Foods, the largest Canadian operator of institutional cafeterias in schools, prisons, factories and government offices.<sup>31</sup> The Second Cup, where I worked, features similar product lines, prices and aesthetics to Starbucks, to such a degree that Starbucks has sued the outlet for allegedly copying its stores' atmosphere and aesthetic.<sup>32</sup>

A.L. Van Houtte is a much older chain that licenses over a hundred franchised or company-run locations. It opened its first whole bean retail store in 1919, but it was many more years before it became established as either a café or as a chain. The Van Houtte cafés have largely remained in Quebec, and cater to a local audience that demanded better quality coffee long before the specialty revolution in the United States. Also native to Quebec is Café Dépôt, a company-run chain that opened its first outlet in 1995 and already has some fifty units in Quebec. Timothy's, a large Canadian chain that opened at the same time as The Second Cup, has 130 franchises across Canada but a much less pronounced presence in Quebec. Internationally, Illy, MacDonald's, Coffee Republic, Seggafreddo, Tchibo and several other retail coffee and restaurant powerhouses have also begun to hedge into the specialty café business.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The Second Cup, *Manuel de Conseiller en Café*.

<sup>32</sup> The Second Cup countersued Starbucks for using aggressive "bully tactics," and both suits were eventually settled out of court. Mark Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How It Transformed Our World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 379.

<sup>33</sup> Erick Van Houtte, *La famille Van Houtte: L'histoire d'un bon café* (Outremont: Les Editions Logiques, 2001), 247; Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 250; Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 372; Van Houtte, "About Van Houtte," <http://www.vanhoutte.com/en/company/>. Accessed 20 May 2005; Timothy's, "About Us," <http://www.timothys.com/Content/aboutUs.asp>. Accessed 20 May 2005; Café Dépôt, "History and Philosophy," [http://www.cafedepot.ca/english/history\\_and\\_philosophy.htm](http://www.cafedepot.ca/english/history_and_philosophy.htm). Accessed 10 May 2005.

### **The Composition of Café Personnel**

Café staffs are young, mostly between the ages of eighteen and thirty. They are cosmopolitan and largely well-educated, the latter point marking a continuity with the long-time affiliation of cafés with academic, literary and conversational cultures and a difference from their fast food brethren. For example, at the time of my departure from The Second Cup, there were thirteen employees including the floor manager and accountant, of whom six held at least a bachelor's degree and five others were engaged in full-time University studies. Of these thirteen, eight workers including the accountant and floor manager were female, and the remaining five were male. Eight of the employees were part-time, while only five worked full-time, which at The Second Cup is considered to be anyone who works more than thirty hours per week. All of the workers who were engaged part-time either had other part-time or occasional work or were in school and received external funding. All of the employees were older than twenty, and, aside from the accountant and manager who were in their mid-thirties, under the age of twenty-five.

At both the café where I worked and at Starbucks, two-thirds of employees are at any given time working on a part-time basis, which indicates that the majority of specialty café labourers' engagement at the cafés remains a provisional responsibility that is marginal to the rest of their day-to-day lives and personal priorities. Studies of part-time employment in sociology, management and organizational psychology have noted a marked disengagement of part-time labourers from their employment. This detachment is generally attributed to the understanding that these workers tend to see their positions as temporary, for the most part because of school concerns prior to launching a permanent

career or because the job was taken to provide carry-over funding while seeking a position elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> As Jennifer Talwar (2002) argues about fast food workers,

The balance between legal restrictions [i.e. regarding minors] and the benefits of young people's greater flexibility translates into a nearly universal preference for those who are at least eighteen but not beyond their early twenties—those who are perceived to have no family obligations....The most desirable fast food employees, from a manager's perspective, are the more economically stable who work for pocket change or provide marginal contributions to their households because they are less dependent on the fast food wage for survival.<sup>35</sup>

So, interactive service workers in chain cafés tend not to be wholly dependent upon their own earnings, and would in most cases be unable to make a living wage off of full-time work and tips alone.<sup>36</sup> Further, management statistics indicate that part-time personnel are treated as more expendable and less promotable than full-time workers, and the turnover rate of part-time employees is substantially higher.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the central focus of most employees' energetic investment lies elsewhere, in the pursuit of academic studies with the ostensible end of establishing a permanent career in another labour sector rather than improving the working conditions in the present workplace. Furthermore, due to the similarity of skill sets and working conditions which are remarkable for their homogeneity not only within but also across specific chains, café staffs can alternate easily between various locations and organizations, making the posts equally provisional and interchangeable for the workers who fill them.

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<sup>34</sup> Graham S. Lowe, *The Quality of Work: A People-Centred Agenda* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2000), 110; David C. Allen, *Part-time Employment: An empirical investigation of hourly work schedules and job attitudes, work behaviors and paths to turnover* PhD thesis Kansas State University (1991), 13.

<sup>35</sup> Jennifer Parker Talwar, *Fast Food, Fast Track: Immigrants, Big Business, and the American Dream* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002), 74-5.

<sup>36</sup> As Barbara Ehrenreich concludes upon completing her own attempt to make a living from wage labour, the working class is fundamentally unable to make a living wage these low-paying jobs. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2001), 198-215.

<sup>37</sup> Allen, *Part-time Employment*, 31.

## Chapter Two: Fordism, Machinery and the One Best Way

Under Henry Ford's aegis there was a material transformation of labour processes at the turn of the century that evinced a dramatic shift in the way that western society thought about the role of labour in the production process. In the Fordist model, workers were plugged into modules of action in a predetermined sequence, so that the each one's role in the process was subordinated to the logic of an organization and its technologies.

While Fordism and Taylorism remained the predominant models for and logic of productive labour for the lion's share of the twentieth century, there has recently been a shift toward "lighter" manufacturing models, marked as such by greater flexibility, just-in-time material orders, less permanent infrastructure for greater mobility and an increasing use of sub-contracted and offshore labour. Labour theorists tout a new world of work, marked by fluid career transfers, less loyalty and long-term attachment to specific organizations, a flattening of management and worker responsibilities and more room for employees' creativity.<sup>1</sup> Many speculators have found this manifest in 1990s high-tech jobs, where creative workers with the technical know-how were paid in stock options and given immense leeway for their endeavors.<sup>2</sup> If in the century since Ford industry has moved on, the Fordist organizational model has been diffused into other productive sectors and taken hold there. In particular, the past several decades have seen the implementation of assembly line logics in restaurant chains, which from a labour perspective, have a great deal in common with manufacturing.

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<sup>1</sup> See Ulrich Beck, *The Brave New World of Work* trans. Patrick Camiller (New York: Polity Press, 2000); Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); David Harvey *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990).

Robert Reich's influential *The Work of Nations* (1991) outlines three broad categories in the contemporary labour market, namely routine production services, in-person services and symbolic-analytic services. Symbolic-analytic services, very generally, is that category of labour wherein the worker is employed in the manipulation and production of information; this category is analogous to what is commonly referred to as "white collar" work. Routine production services include repetitive productive tasks, including assembly line work, data entry, all those things "performed by the old foot soldiers of American capitalism in the high-volume enterprise." Routine productive personnel generally work in large spaces with many other people performing similar tasks, under the closely monitored and codified direction of management, and they are paid either by the hour or based on their output.<sup>3</sup>

The third class of worker is employed in-person services. Like the repetitive production workers, their engagement is with simple and repetitive tasks, following a similar pay architecture, surveillance apparatus and range of skill requirements. The central difference, Reich concludes, between the routine production and in-person services is that the object of in-person labour is a specific customer rather than unprocessed material or data, so the beneficiary of in-person labour is physically present, whereas the manufactured goods of the latter category are sold internationally. The ability of service sector consumers to see their product, the service itself that is increasingly rendered in terms of the "experience" it provides, leads to employer

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<sup>2</sup> See Andrew Ross, *No-collar: The Human Workplace and Its Hidden Costs* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Reich, *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Capitalism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 174.

preference for front-line workers with strong interpersonal skills. Reich's analysis finds only one substantial difference between manufacturing and service-oriented work, particularly in those characteristics deemed appropriate by employers. Both categories of labour require employees who are punctual, dependable, efficient and tractable, but in-person services necessitate the additional quality of pleasantness: workers "must smile and exude confidence and good cheer, even when they feel morose. They must be courteous and helpful, even to the most obnoxious of patrons. Above all, they must make others feel happy and at ease."<sup>4</sup> Thus, in Reich's distribution of the labour market, the sole difference between much of industrial and personal service labour is the smile.

Braverman similarly concludes that the distinction between service and manufacturing labour is a differentiation made not by the capitalist, but by the statistician. In the restaurant industry, for example, restaurant labour prepares food, maintains the establishment and produces the experience of the clientele, and thus "carries on tangible production just as much as labor employed in many another manufacturing process; the fact that the consumer is sitting nearby at a counter or table is the chief distinction, in principle, between this industry and those food-processing industries which are classified under 'manufacturing.'" Further, he argues that service industries often operate like assembly lines, particularly when the management orders of each subjects its workers to the same time and motion studies in the production of the final commodity.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Reich, *The Work of Nations*, 176.

<sup>5</sup> Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (New York & London: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 360-2.

This section looks at repetitive production processes in the food service industry where franchised restaurants, with their emphasis upon speed, efficiency and uniformity, have further segmented the productive actions of service labour into smaller movements centred on automated processes. By situating the accounts among philosophical treatments of changing labour practices, I will outline the contours of Fordism's impact in other productive fields and show the nature of debates surrounding the mobilization of café labour. My goal in this chapter is to situate the actual practices of the enlightened employer within critiques of Fordist production processes. In order to better highlight the pivotal role of the companies that make the organization of café chains possible, I will look at several studies of the industrialization of labour in fast-food in order to better isolate how Fordist systems function *as systems* in food service.

### **The Logic of the Line**

The logic of Fordism oversaw a shift from small artisanal shops organized around the activities of individual workers to large-scale manufacturing centers that used assembly lines in order to maximize productivity and increase “throughput” or the fast production of units. To manage the transition, Ford's engineers conducted time-motion studies to find the smallest possible exertions of human energy necessary to perform each micro-segmented step of the production process; they divided the tasks endlessly, giving each labourer in the plant a monad of activity to repeat until the clock whistle commanded their cessation, and they constructed the plant and its technologies so that each step would flow to the next in a continuous motion, a line of assembly. Fordism paid

attention above all to movement: workers were to move as little as possible; parts should travel the shortest possible distance; mechanical apparatuses were employed to transport the car and parts between physical locations within the manufacturing plant, and all difficult or complex activities are excluded so that a given worker, optimally, could perform his or her entire task with just one motion.<sup>6</sup>

The specialization of tasks particularly reinforced a hard split between the “white collar” conceptual work of the management and engineering personnel from that of the “blue collar” manual work of the assembly line, with little communication or interaction between the two. The Fordist factory imposed layer upon layer of in-house surveillance and quality control to ensure that the latter obeyed the edicts of the former. Finally, Ford gave the workers a tremendous wage increase, ostensibly so that, famously, they could afford to buy the cars that they laboured to build.

Without the comparison of labour no notion or standard of efficiency could be arrived at, and the last century has seen the continuous refinement and precision of efficiency standards and evaluations. The most prominent contribution was that of Frederick Winslow Taylor at the turn of the last century.<sup>7</sup> Taylor’s now-infamous time and motion studies were conducted to identify what miniscule exertions and movements could be saved to make labour more efficient. His system, which he called scientific management and has since been known as Taylorism, consisted of submitting human

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<sup>6</sup> Ritzer, *The McDonalidization of Society*, 33.

<sup>7</sup> While Taylor is popularly accredited for pioneering this project, there were time and motion studies in place well before. For example, Josiah Wedgwood hired a junior manager charged solely with the responsibility of discreetly touring the production plant with a stopwatch in the late nineteenth century, and a French pinmaker, M. Perronet, who published a pamphlet in 1762 outlining the minutely detailed production processes in his factory, including the timed outlines for the completion of specific steps in the

agency to the rigours of scientific empiricism in order to find the “one best way” of performing each task. Work, he concluded, should be ruled by four principles: “the development of a true science,” scientific selection of the workers, application of new technologies and processes in the workplace, and parity between workers and management including an equal division of labour between the two bodies of personnel.<sup>8</sup> Taylor also advocated, quoting Harvey, “a systematic separation of the mental labour of conception from the manual labour of execution and so fragments and simplifies the latter that even a ‘trained gorilla’ could do it.”<sup>9</sup>

The goal of scientific management was to rationalize labour to minimize waste and augment productivity. By reducing the conceptual labour of the workers and diminishing the tasks that a given labourer was expected to perform, Taylorism contracted the actual at-work performance of productive labourers to repetitive segmented movements that only made sense within the larger process. The de-skilling of productive labour was not simply a stripping of skills altogether; rather, as Braverman points out, this constituted the disassembly of skills and their reinvestment in management and delegation to machinery.<sup>10</sup>

The underlying premise motivating scientific management is that the simple repetition of tasks is more efficient—and, thus, more productive and more profitable—than less rigorously divided labour. David Noble (1977) has questioned this premise,

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process. Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders* trans. Thomas Dunlop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 319.

<sup>8</sup> Clarence Hooker, *Life in the Shadows of the Crystal Palace 1910-1927: Ford Workers in the Model T Era* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1997), 21-22; Frederick Winslow Taylor, *Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Norton, 1967).

<sup>9</sup> David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 109.

<sup>10</sup> Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 371.

arguing that the adoption of Taylorism coincides with the rise of engineers into the managerial classes, as monopoly capitalism and technology grew inseparably intertwined. The engineers deployed systems used for dealing with technical problems in productive processes, so workers were treated in the same fashion as machines. This imposition of engineering values made productive technologies the center of manufacturing processes and the engineers themselves indispensable to the organizations that employed them. He argues that,

corporate engineers played a double role. As engineers in a capitalist system, they were professionally charged with the profit-maximizing advance of scientific technology. And as corporate functionaries, they assumed the responsibility for coordinating the human elements of the technological enterprise. It was because of this dual role, and without any great imaginative leap on their part, that they began to view the second of their tasks in the same way they viewed the first, as essentially an engineering project. In their minds, the recognition that modern technology was a process of social production compelled them to try to formulate a scientific way of managing that process, a technology of social production.<sup>11</sup>

One of the first and most complete implementations of scientific management was at Ford's infamous Crystal Palace plant in the early twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> Fordism, as it became known, was premised upon a system of "progressive production," where the materials being worked on were processed in a straight line with as few deviations as possible between commencement and completion. By 1914, the Ford plant had a staff of about 570 management staff and a thousand production-line workers and was able to produce an average of a thousand Model Ts daily.<sup>13</sup> Ford argued that "Mass production is

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<sup>11</sup> David Noble, *America by Design* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 298.

<sup>12</sup> Some historians have situated the introduction of assembly lines much earlier, pointing to a continuous production line assembled by Oliver Evans in the late eighteenth century. Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 6.

<sup>13</sup> Hooker, *Life in the Shadows of the Crystal Palace*, 17.

focusing upon a manufacturing operation... [around] seven different principles: power, accuracy, economy, continuity, system, speed, and repetition.”<sup>14</sup>

It was at about this time that the Ford Motor Company began talks to introduce its famous profit-sharing plan, the five-dollar day. The payment and plant reforms consisted of an overall reduction of jobs, flattening of pay rates, and elevating some workers' income to the then-dizzying height of five dollars daily. While there were numerous conditions of eligibility for this pay rate, including inspection of living conditions, minimum output standards, assessment of work habits and preferential treatment for married workers with families, the plan still constituted a dramatic change to an industry noteworthy for its low pay and miserable working conditions. Hooker suggests that much of the incentive for these reforms and particularly the conditions for workers' qualifying for the new payment scheme was to assimilate immigrant workers to “American” social norms and ethics and to impose puritanical values on the social lives of its workers.<sup>15</sup> The ostensible goal for the reforms was to integrate workers into the organization, so that they would self-identify as “Ford Men,” an attempt at internal branding *avant la lettre*.

Antonio Gramsci, however, argues against viewing this monitoring of workers' home lives as merely a puritanical interest in employees' emotional and spiritual lives, positing rather that “the new type of man demanded by the rationalisation of production and work cannot be developed until the sexual instinct has been suitably regulated and until it too has been rationalised.” For him, the Fordist regulation of its workers' home lives indexes a broader trend in industrialism to institutionalize and “mechanize”

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Hooker, *Life in the Shadows of the Crystal Palace*, 28.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-114.

employees' leisure time in order to maximize their at-work performance. Using high pay as an incentive and justification for this regimentation, such interventions aimed to limit the uses to which pay was used in order to maintain a body of workers in optimal condition. Gramsci posits that,

The history of industrialism has always been a continuing struggle (which today takes an even more marked and vigorous form) against the element of 'animality' in man. It has been an uninterrupted, often painful and bloody process of subjugating natural (i.e. animal and primitive) instincts to new, more complex and rigid norms and habits of order, exactitude and precision which can make possible the increasingly complex forms of collective life which are the necessary consequence of industrial development.<sup>16</sup>

Daniel Cohen suggests, and has been widely accepted by other critics in so doing, that the primary goal of the reforms was to fix and attach the workers to the company.<sup>17</sup> Gramsci, likewise, argues that "the human complex (the collective worker) of an enterprise is also a machine which cannot, without considerable loss, be taken to pieces too often and renewed with single new parts." So the industrialist pays his workers more, but ensures that the worker will use the pay "rationally," to renew his energies for the next day's work rather than to deplete them.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, Gramsci argues that the high wages that accompany this period of change are strictly temporary; they are a means of negotiating the workers' complicity during a transitional phase in the productive process, which cannot be accomplished through coercion alone. Once the new system is fully in place and institutionalized and

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<sup>16</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* trans. Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.) New York: International Publishers, 1971), 297-8.

<sup>17</sup> In Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 58.

<sup>18</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 303.

the new kind of worker has been created, then the high wages are gradually subsumed by inflation and revisions to smaller modules of the overall process.<sup>19</sup>

The five dollar day plan has been cast up in posterity as that which allowed the workers to buy the products on which they laboured. Ford himself frequently pointed out that the plan was not charity, but a profit-sharing scheme engineered to upgrade the overall quality of life of the workers, including giving them the privilege of buying his own quality products. By giving workers a stake in the production, it was argued, they would work harder and become more efficient, thus increasing output and profitability, as indeed it did. Numerous critics have since argued that the real agenda for the introduction of the five-dollar day was to reduce high costs related to personnel turnovers. Even with its tremendous output, the company could barely keep up with demand at the time of the labour reforms, and the workers who used their raise to purchase the Model T comprised an insignificant fraction of the company's sales. The poor working conditions of the Ford plant and the dull routine of Taylorized assembly lines created high employee turnover, which in turn raised production costs because management was perpetually occupied with training new workers. Ford bragged that the five-dollar day was the greatest cost-saving technology ever introduced into the company's infrastructure.<sup>20</sup>

### **Fast Food Machines**

The imposition of assembly lines into food service indexes a broader cultural attempt to rationalize every aspect of capitalist production, including its human elements. Noble recounts an anecdote from General Electric, when E.W. Rice, the company's

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 310.

President and an engineer, sought to establish the principles of efficient mechanical production into every aspect of the company's operations, including the nourishment of its many employees. To this end,

In 1917 the staff applied 'engineering principles' to the process of providing food for employees and came up with an automated system in which meals could be served to hungry customers in one minute flat. The procedure was, in effect, no different from any other in the factory; indeed, it was apparently viewed as simply another aspect of the production process: the fueling of the human machinery."<sup>21</sup>

The most complete and systematic manifestation of the Fordist logic of labour organization in food service is found in fast food chains, where the refueling of human workers has itself been made profitable. A study conducted in the mid-1980s by a young graduate student named Ester Reiter who had herself hired at Burger King in order to write about her experience will help illustrate the culmination of this transition. Reiter argues that the franchised restaurant functioned like a "fast-food factory," describing how "instead of assisting workers in the production of the meal, the machines tended by the workers are dominant; we now have an objective organization of machines confronting the worker."<sup>22</sup> As Ritzer has argued, fast food marks the introduction of rationalized processes into consumption, an integration that has substantial consequences both for the system itself and for the workers who use it.<sup>23</sup>

In *The Grundrisse*, Marx outlines the system of the labour machine, where capital automates labour processes through a machine, and the worker becomes an accessory to

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<sup>20</sup> Hooker, *Life in the Shadows of the Crystal Palace*, 109.

<sup>21</sup> Noble, *America by Design*, 268.

<sup>22</sup> Ester Reiter "Life in a Fast-Food Factory" in Craig Heron and Robert Storey (eds.) *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada*, (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press), 312. See also Ester Reiter, *Making Fast Food: From the Frying Pan into the Fryer* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, 31-34.

<sup>23</sup> Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, 42.

the machine, a facilitator of the machine's performance rather than an actor in his or her own right. Once this system is set into motion, "the machine, which possesses skill and force in the worker's place, is itself the virtuoso, with a spirit of its own in the mechanical laws that take effect in it.... The worker's activity, limited to a mere abstraction, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery, not the other way around." With this transition, the individual labourer whose skills have been subsumed into and appropriated by the machinations of the automated labour process becomes insignificant as a unique individual:

Individual labour ceases altogether to be productive as such; or rather, it is productive only in collective labour, which subjects the forces of nature. This promotion of immediate labour to the level of community labour shows that individual work is reduced to helplessness vis-à-vis the concentration of common interest represented in capital.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, it is only as a collective unit that the workers can carve out agency and become something other than dispensable and interchangeable. Marx describes this shift as a phase of capital, which tends to automate or "give a scientific character to production," in order to reduce the investment of capital required to stabilize the labour force.<sup>25</sup>

In a sense, not only the individual processes within a franchise but the franchise system itself can be seen in terms of such automation. While peculiar processes are machinated within the chain, the brand itself becomes automated inasmuch as these processes are replicated across the chain, so that one system for operating a successful restaurant can be imported to other locations which can repeat the operation without the exertions of personal innovation necessary to create novel systems. As economic journalist Theodore Levitt writes about fast-food outlets,

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<sup>24</sup> Marx, *The Grundrisse*, 136.

If machinery is to be viewed as a piece of equipment with the capability of producing a predictably standardized customer-satisfying output while minimizing the discretion of its attendant, that is what a [fast-food] outlet is. It is a machine that produces with the help of totally unskilled machine tenders, a highly polished product.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the franchise's goal of creating uniform experiences regardless of specific location requires a centralized automation of processes that functions regardless of who performs each step within them.

Schlosser, in his popular account of fast food in America, describes the inauguration of the first MacDonald's Speedee Service system, pioneered by the chain's founders Richard and Maurice MacDonald. The brothers invented the system when they grew tired of constantly replacing short-order cooks, carhops, and the utensils that the restaurant's customers persistently stole:

The brothers eliminated almost two-thirds of the items on their old menu. They got rid of everything that had to be eaten with a knife, spoon, or fork....They divided the food preparation into separate tasks performed by different workers. To fill a typical order, one person grilled the hamburger; another 'dressed' and wrapped it; another prepared the milk shake; another made the fries; and another worked the counter. For the first time, the guiding principles of a factory assembly line were applied to a commercial kitchen. The new division of labour meant that a worker only had to be taught how to perform one task. Skilled and expensive short order cooks were no longer necessary.<sup>27</sup>

The Speedee Service system consisted of a shift toward foods that were easily transportable, edible without any utensils other than a paper plate and napkins, required no skills or floor service by the staff, who were individually relied upon much less as a result of the system's automation.

Reiter relates that the overall agenda of employee management at Burger King is to flatten workers' skills to "a common, easily learned level and to provide for cross-

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 132-3.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Reiter, "Life in a Fast-Food Factory," 313.

training” and to teach every worker to perform each set of tasks, so the jobs and the workers who perform them become largely interchangeable.<sup>28</sup> Schlosser, in interviews with fast food leaders, found that the ultimate goal of the franchises was to automate everything, to create a workplace where procedures were so codified that employees would require “zero training.”<sup>29</sup> It is the automation of processes and the regulation of every aspect of productive work that allows the chains to liberate themselves from dependence upon workers’ skills: “Since the motion of the factory proceeds from the machinery and not from the worker, working personnel can continually be replaced. Frequent changes in workers will not disrupt the labour process.”<sup>30</sup>

Sennett finds a similar flattening of skills at a New York bakery where workers use computerized ovens to produce baked goods. He observes that personnel in the automated bakery do not know how to bake bread themselves, merely how to operate the machinery that does this on their behalf.<sup>31</sup> The workers feel no personal attachment to their tasks because automation has made the work illegible. Sennett concludes that it is

the very user-friendliness of the bakery that may account in part for the confusion the people baking feel about themselves as bakers. In all forms of work, from sculpting to serving meals, people identify with tasks which challenge them, tasks which are difficult. But in this flexible workplace... the machinery is the only real standard of order, and so has to be easy for anyone, no matter who, to operate. Difficulty is counterproductive in a flexible regime.<sup>32</sup>

Sennett’s observations are positioned within a larger argument about a new trend in the labour market toward the elimination of difficulty in order to facilitate maximal

<sup>27</sup> Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, 20.

<sup>28</sup> Reiter, “Life in a Fast Food Factory,” 323.

<sup>29</sup> Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, 72.

<sup>30</sup> Reiter, “Life in a Fast Food Factory,” 312.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 68.

flexibility for employee and organization alike. For Sennett, the split between long-term, attached labour and the flexibility and transience of contemporary labour is a double-edged sword: on one side, the worker is constrained by the dullness of repetition and commitment, and on the other he or she is offered no respite from the vagaries of part-time labour or underemployment.<sup>33</sup> He concludes that today's light, flexible employment environments leave subjects prone to perpetual insecurity and anxiety, eroding the salience of at-work community ties and interpersonal bonds; this, in turn, frees workers up so that they can more easily leave.

Reiter argues that the mechanisms of Burger King, which were constructed to deal with high employee turnover and speedy replacement training, allow the organization to run without making any concessions to employee demands regarding working conditions. In her observations, there are indeed frequent changes of workers. She cites an average of ten percent employee turnover per pay period (i.e. every two weeks) at the Burger King where she was employed, which is approximately equivalent to that which I noted at the Second Cup. She says that, "workers saw the alternative available to them as putting up with the demands of Burger King or leaving; in fact, leaving seemed to be the dominant form of protest."<sup>34</sup> Quitting, she argues, is really the salient polemic available to workers whose employers will not concede to any other form of protest, citing any opposition to institutional procedures as a lack of appropriate attitude. Considering this, it is hardly surprising that many have called for a turn toward

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 33-35.

<sup>34</sup> Reiter, "Life in a Fast Food Factory," 321.

unionization and collective agreements, which seems the only way to negotiate with the behemoth companies that manage the chains.

The subordination of contemporary workers to standardized systems and technologies has been critiqued not only for the insecurity and disposability that this imposes upon the workers but also for perceived worsening of the experience of labour. Marcuse, for example, decried the fragmentation of labour tasks in the early 1960s; writing from a psychoanalytic and Marxist perspective, he saw labour as fundamentally alienated, growing incrementally more so with each successive stage of specialization and task division. He caustically posits that most labourers,

work for an apparatus which they do not control, which operates as an independent power to which individuals must submit if they want to live. And it becomes more alien the more specialized the division of labor becomes. Men do not live their lives but perform pre-established functions.<sup>35</sup>

In the 1960s, Marcuse wrote of using emergent technologies to reduce human labour to the absolute minimum required to achieve subsistence, but by the early 1980s, he had abandoned this technological utopianism to argue that the labourers themselves had become little more than cogs within the greater machine of productivity. He saw late capitalism submitting human agency to a technological rationality that surrenders individual achievement to standardized efficiency and the ability to fulfill a small role within the technological apparatus.<sup>36</sup> He condemns a work process that creates jobs with pre-given sets of skills that workers are molded into, so that skills for a given job can be better standardized and more easily and efficiently mastered, essentially “filling in the

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<sup>35</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 45.

empty spaces in which individuality could assert itself.”<sup>37</sup> These ‘filled-in spaces’ include every possible moment of at-work engagement, for workers are expected to be occupied and industrious at all times during their shift. If there are no customers, then employees are expected to clean the floors, wash the windows, to be constantly engaged in the maintenance of the establishment—their efforts regulated by an ethic best encapsulated by the workplace locution, “time to lean, time to clean.”<sup>38</sup> Employees, then, work around the machine, and they are expected to do so without pause for the duration of a shift.

Ultimately, as Reiter observes, machines become the central operations of the fast-food outlet because of their ability to generate the standard-issue comestibles, reducing the labourers themselves to “machine tenders.” Schlosser similarly finds that the machines are often called into play to regulate what little skills are left to the workers; in the case of MacDonalD’s, for example, “cooking instructions are not only printed in the manual, they are often designed into the machines. A McDonald’s kitchen is full of buzzers and flashing lights that tell employees what to do.”<sup>39</sup> Reiter asserts acrimoniously that “more attention is paid to the maintenance of the machinery than to ‘maintaining’ the workers; time is regularly scheduled for cleaning and servicing the equipment, but workers may not leave the kitchen to take a drink or use the bathroom during the lunch and dinner rushes.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Herbert Marcuse, “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology” pp. 138-162 in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (eds.) *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1982), 147.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>38</sup> See Reiter, “Life in a Fast Food Factory,” 316.

<sup>39</sup> Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, 70.

<sup>40</sup> Reiter, “Life in a Fast Food Factory,” 322.

Here, however, Reiter underestimates the depth of industrial logic: fundamentally, the workers are treated *exactly like the machines*. Like the General Electric employees whose lunch counters were engineered for maximum performance to facilitate a more efficient “fueling of the human machinery,” the McPersonnel, too, are maintained and scheduled for refueling at regulated intervals for calculated recuperative rest periods, to eat, sit, excrete and so on. These breaks are, of course, mandated by government labour regulations, and they are accompanied by an expectation of maintained performance levels. The calculated maintenance of the workers is conducted in precisely the same manner as that of machinery—a broiler malfunction during the lunch rush would not be greeted with any greater enthusiasm than a counter-girl with stomach cramps.

Reiter’s observation does, however, highlight the degree to which human workers are submitted to techno-logics, recalling Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of machinic enslavement and social subjection:

There is machinic enslavement when human beings are constituent pieces of a machine that they compose among themselves and with other things (animals, tools), under the control and direction of a higher unity. But there is a subjection when the higher unity constitutes the human being as a subject linked to a now exterior object, which can be an animal, a tool, or even a machine. The human being is no longer a component of the machine but a worker, a user. He or she is subjected *to* the machine and no longer enslaved *by* the machine.<sup>41</sup>

In their classification, the workers described by Reiter have been wholly subordinated to and enslaved by the workplace *techne*, the machines and systems that organize the restaurants. The workers are enslaved by the machines, but they are subjected to the companies. Not only are employees treated as components of the process, but they have

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<sup>41</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 456-7.

also become external elements of the process and liabilities to it. They are the necessary encumbrances that leave the otherwise perfectly standardized system vulnerable to errors and inconsistencies. So, while processes are codified and automated to the highest possible degree, the chains are forced to discover some means of bonding the workers to the company beyond a simple pay cheque in order to secure their continuing subordination to the organization itself.

### **Industrial Logic Has a Latte**

Specialty cafés, like fast food, are organized around machines, and workers are divided between hyper-specific tasks around these machines. For example, during a busy period at a popular downtown Montréal Second Cup café, a separate employee would be exclusively charged with each of the areas of service: taking orders and relaying these to the barista, serving food directly to the clientele, cashiering, blending (mixing and serving cold drinks), plus the barista who prepares coffee-based drinks on the espresso machine and serves them to the customer, who has already ordered, received any food and paid the cashier.

In order to “use” the café, a customer moves along the line of the counter, receiving the services of each staff member in turn. So in any location of a chain, a given customer might order from one worker, receive food from the next, then pay a cashier before proceeding down the line of the counter’s available products picking up first filtered coffees, then teas, then cold drinks, finishing the trip at the espresso machine which is always situated at the counter’s end. The line of the coffee bar resembles an

assembly line, only what is being “assembled” is a customer’s experience. The machines themselves are divided into discrete productive functions, such as coffee brewers dedicated to regular and flavoured coffees, espresso machines for “European” beverages, blenders for cold drinks, and so on. One staff member mans each machine, and the situation of the machines in the slender space behind the counter dictates the distribution of the staff members who would use them. Ultimately, each of the products is processed and served by a different employee, so that each worker repeats the same preparation process on the same machine, sometimes for the duration of a whole shift, others while alternating between the machine and side tasks such as cleaning and maintaining the storefront, restocking supplies, and so on.

The performance of these tasks is subjected to rigorously administered standards. For example, a Second Cup Barista is expected to produce any “European” drink—lattes, espressos, cappuccinos or any of the manifold flavoured variations thereof—in under 90 seconds, and a Primo Barista must be capable of making at least five of these in under three minutes.<sup>42</sup> The performance of each task according to company guidelines is assured by management, silent auditors and by the customers themselves, who can complain if a product takes longer to receive or tastes differently than normal. The barista position, considered to be the most skilled and stressful in the operation, consists of only a few basic skills in combination: heating and frothing milk; grinding and “tamping” coffee grounds; making espresso shots according to company guidelines for water pressure and volume, timing and temperature; and adding flavoured syrups to drinks along recipe guidelines provided and focus-grouped by the company.

However, even these skills are in the process of being phased out, since baristas at Starbucks began to complain of wrist pains induced by the repeated action of tightening espresso filters into the machines. Repetitive stress injuries such as tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome were creating a drain on the company and taxing its scheduling system, so they introduced new automated machines that automatically tamp and pour espresso shots at the press of a button into all of their stores. The baristas' labour is then reduced to grinding coffee, frothing milk and pressing a button that automatically releases the coffee shot in pre-set amounts.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the remaining skills and knowledge are delegated to machinery, which serves not only to reduce the injury rates of employees but also to ensure product uniformity. By programming company regulations into machinery, the organization assures the imposition of its guidelines by delegating these to automated technologies.<sup>44</sup>

Ritzer argues that it is the very rationality of the assembly line system that allows workers to be replaced by technology, in this case to their physical best interests.<sup>45</sup> Because the line itself is automated and rationalized, a human agent can be plucked from a given motion in the process and replaced by a technology that will do that work for her without disrupting the overall flow of the system itself. In this example, the system has been automated to exclude the liabilities introduced by human frailty.

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<sup>42</sup> The Second Cup Coffee Co., *Manuel de Conseiller en Café*, p. 38.

<sup>43</sup> Eli Saunders "A Champ In the City Of Coffees" in *The New York Times*, April 16 2005, A8.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Bruno Latour's discussion of hotel key weights as the delegation of a social form to material conditions of the technology. He argues that such weights constitute a "load" of technology, and that with each level of resistance to an imperative additional loads are added until the technology's audience runs out of resistance and complies with the statement these loads impose. Bruno Latour, "Technology is Society Made Durable" pp. 103-31 in John Law (ed.) *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination* (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>45</sup> George Ritzer, *The McDonalidization of Society*, 34.

## Enlightened Employers and Unionization

The coffee shops appear to have inherited one of the greatest liabilities of Fordist labour: that of keeping the human pieces of machinery in order and the maintenance and attachment of those parts of the assemblage with the power and the will to leave. The Starbucks Coffee Company, considered a paragon of conscientious industry, has been acclaimed for offering employees comprehensive benefits packages, broad discounts and freebies, flexible scheduling and stock options.<sup>46</sup> Most remarkable among the offered benefits is the latter, an internal share purchasing program known as Bean Stock. Employees must meet a number of criteria including duration of employment, continuing engagement and a minimum number of hours worked in order to qualify for the Bean Stock program. The number of options granted is based on a given employee's annual base wage, the company's overall profitability and a pre-determined grant price. The employees are not actually granted shares; rather, they are given the option to buy a set number of shares at set price.<sup>47</sup>

This offering is an extension of Ford's five-dollar day, however the stock and benefits plan works slightly differently. As in Ford's plant, the plan works to reduce costs by lowering employee turnover; further, offering benefits in the form of stock options, an idea pirated from the dot com boom of the 1990s, actually costs much less than paying employees more. Additionally, as Andrew Ross remarks of these dot coms, "stock

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<sup>46</sup> Jim Jamieson "Coffee with a Conscience," A.31; Bollier, "Howard Schultz and The Starbucks Coffee Company"; Schultz & Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 128-35.

<sup>47</sup> David Bollier "Howard Schultz and The Starbucks Coffee Company," 216-219. This parallels a general trend in the labour market, which as Reich remarks is characterized by an increase in "'soft money,' in the sense that [workers'] earnings vary with contracts, grants, or sales from one period to the next." Robert Reich, *The Future of Success: Working and Living in the New Economy* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 98.

options were a heady attraction not just financially but because they offered a sense of ownership in the workplace as a whole.”<sup>48</sup> In the case of the benefits, Schultz admits that it costs \$1,500 per year to offer employees benefits, while the training of a new employee requires the outlay of \$3,000.<sup>49</sup>

The cafés have historically had an annual staff turnover rate of less than sixty percent, compared to the hospitality industry average of between 150 to 300 percent.<sup>50</sup> The cost of the benefit package, as in the case of the Ford Motor Company’s payment reforms, is much lower than that of having a high turnover rate.<sup>51</sup> However, in spite of their benefit packages and public image as an employee-friendly corporation, Starbucks and similar companies have not been without staff complaints. Chain cafés, namely Starbucks and The Second Cup, have been one of the first segments of the food service industry to have substantial and successful union drives, the other sectors being similarly industrial production-oriented fast-food outlets such as McDonalds and Burger King.

Starbucks employees have staged intense unionization battles in Vancouver, Seattle and New York, while The Second Cup has witnessed the certification of one Montreal outlet. After the controversial Vancouver unionization drive, there were allegations that Starbucks closed down one of its pastry distribution plants as a threat to other store employees, while the company took out a full-page advertisement in *The*

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<sup>48</sup> Andrew Ross, *No Collar*, 10.

<sup>49</sup> Schultz & Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 127.

<sup>50</sup> Bollier, “Employees as Partners in Growth,” 219. These figures are from 1996, and I was unable to find more updated statistics for Starbucks for this paper. The Second Cup where I worked had turnover rates well over 300 per cent.

<sup>51</sup> Bollier, “Employees as Partners in Growth,” 220.

*Vancouver Sun* describing how “Starbucks’ unique work environment precludes any for a standard union contract [*sic*].”<sup>52</sup>

The Vancouver strike’s leaders claimed the motivation for the union drive was based on the perceived need of substantial reforms in two domains: first, the overall quality of the work experience, which the employees felt was declining, and secondly, to make the orchestration of the café less mechanical. Particularly contentious was a newly introduced computerized scheduling system, the Star Labour System (SLS) in 1996. With the SLS, employees would fill out their hours of availability, and the system sends this data to a central calculating system at the chain’s headquarters. The SLS then tracks a given location’s cash transactions in fifteen minute intervals and calculates its precise staffing and inventory needs to the minute. Employees have complained that this system prefers new hires, who are paid about a dollar less per hour and receive no benefits, and that experienced staff have had their hours cut and receive oddly timed, short and staggered shifts.<sup>53</sup>

With regard to the quality of work, there appears to be a direct correlation between the ever-mounting submission of the labour process to techno-logics and the increase of the personnel’s boredom, dissociation and discontent. As numerous critics have said of the production assembly line, the monotony of tasks and lack of creativity

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<sup>52</sup> Ian Bailey, “Union alleges intimidation as Starbucks shuts down unionized centre” *Canadian Press NewsWire* (Toronto: April 7, 1997); Shawn Blore, “De-caffeinated: How coffee giant Starbucks, poster company for the ‘new age’ of employee relations, got itself ground, roasted—and certified—by the Canadian Auto Workers Union” in *BC Business* (Vancouver: July 1, 1997. Vol. 25, Iss. 7), 18; Robin Finn, “Rebel Barista With a Cause (Make That a Venti)” in *The New York Times* New York: June 11, 2004, B4.  
<sup>53</sup> Blore, “De-caffeinated,” 21; Rebecca Murdock “Organizing the service sector: The fight for 40 at Starbucks” in *Canadian Dimension* (Winnipeg: Nov 1997, Vol. 31, Iss. 6), 9; “Baristas of the world unite!” in *Labour/Le Travail* (Fall 1998, Iss. 42), 335-7.

reduce workers' experience of their labour to repetitious activity without meaning, dictated by the logic of the system that flattens and empties work time.<sup>54</sup>

The point of change at Starbucks seems to have been when the chain expanded.

The central union organizer Laurie Banong describes the impetus to unionize, saying:

We're just a little store of ten people and we had all been working there forever. So there was a strong... close-knit group and everyone in my store had been with the company, if not at this store, at least with Starbucks for three, four, five years. And so they had seen the changes that Starbucks had gone through, so they knew that something was really, really, wrong with the company.... Everyone agreed that when it was a little company it was great, great to work for, everyone loved it.<sup>55</sup>

For Banong and the other organizers, the factor that turned the tide against Starbucks was the company's growth and the renewed subjection of its employees to technologies that accompanied it. The automated scheduling system aggravated tensions between the employees' identification with the company and their need to feel like human participants in the business, as yet another aspect of their labour organization was dispatched to an office in another city to be regulated by distant and anonymous administrators.

There seems to be a glaring paradox between the need to fully automate the productive workplace to make employees disposable, while trying to introduce incentives for employees to remain with the firm and develop stronger organizational attachments. Although the regulation of tasks makes individual employees less valuable, it is still more economically efficient to keep the existing ones. Thus, for maximum productivity and cost-effectiveness, the best system is that which allows the company, where possible, to keep trained and functional personnel while maintaining flexible technologies and workplace structures so that workers who do leave are easily replaced. Additionally, we

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<sup>54</sup> Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, 6.

are reminded of Reich's distinguishing detail between the routine production and the in-person services: the smile. What is at stake is not only that the staff are able to perform their function within the machinery of the café, but that they can do so fluidly, comfortably and can appear friendly and at-ease with the clientele. When he discusses the introduction of stock options, Schultz cites this factor as the central motivation in offering Starbucks' employees better benefits packages. Put simply, "If the fate of your business is in the hands of a twenty-year-old part-time worker who goes to college or pursues acting on the side, can you afford to treat him or her as expendable?"<sup>56</sup>

While offering comprehensive packages presents a positive image to the client base, this fails to resolve larger issues at stake with regard to many workers' dissatisfaction, namely the feeling that they are merely seen by the organization which employs them to be parts of a machine and not as people. While monetary compensation slows the rate of employee turnover, it cannot entirely quell the resistance of personnel to their subjection to the machine logic of the organization.

The common point between the three histories briefly related herein is the implementation of rationalized and automated systems at the point of expansion, as is necessitated by the need to produce a large number of uniform goods. Mass production, be it of an ugly car or of a consumer experience, submits labourers to the rigours of the automation of consistency, rather than acknowledging the fundamental inconsistency, variability and idiosyncrasy of all human endeavors, an operation that seems inevitably to produce bitterness and alienation.

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<sup>55</sup> "Baristas of the world unite!", 336.

<sup>56</sup> Schultz & Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 125.

## Chapter Three: Training, Spatial Organization and Conduct

Victor Fuchs has argued that service productivity “is dependent in part on the knowledge, expertise, and motivation of the consumer.”<sup>1</sup> So, in order to maintain standardized service speeds, businesses and services must teach their clientele how to use them. This trend is not isolated to the present example. When restaurants, for example, began to open as distinct entities targeted toward local audiences rather than catering to travelers staying at the inns to which they were attached, they had to train potential customers how to appreciate the benefits of the service provided. Delmonico’s, the first recorded autonomous restaurant in North America, opened its doors in 1827, and passers-by did not understand its function: “People didn’t know quite what to do at first; they wandered in, read the menu, and wandered out again.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, when the McDonald brothers inaugurated their streamlined Speedee Service system at the first McDonald’s in San Bernardino, “Customers pulled up to the restaurant and honked their horns, wondering what had happened to the carhops, still expecting to be served. People were not yet accustomed to waiting in line and getting their own food. Within a few weeks, however, the new system gained acceptance.”<sup>3</sup>

When businesses introduce new systems of production and service, the clientele as well as the employees must be trained how to maneuver new spatial logics such as line forms, linguistic cues including menu options and lingo (Big Mac, Grande half-caf no-fat latte, Oreo Blizzard), and the unspoken rules of social interaction such as how to use the

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Fuchs quoted in Carl Gersuny and William R. Rosengren, *The Service Society* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1973), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with a Delmonico’s waitress quoted in Alison Owings, *Hey Waitress!: The USA From the Other Side of the Tray* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 9.

space and interact with others in it. The luxury chain cafés, while in many respects operating like fast food and donut shops because of the Fordist format of production and linear forms of customer service, have integrated novel post-Fordist structures that require new behaviours and skills from staff and customers. Starbucks has been the primary innovator of these techniques, but similar spatial layouts, linguistic systems, tastes and social etiquettes are used by all of the chains.

The last chapter focused on the distinctly Fordist elements of cafés' organization of labour, which are already familiar to many consumers due to their wide scale use elsewhere. This chapter introduces a few additional strictly Fordist elements that are unique to the cafés, such as the strict supervision of work processes and some of the functions of the store's layout and consumption. However, specialty cafés also make use of numerous distinctly post-Fordist elements. Most remarkably, they are based on a radical market segmentation, dependent upon strictly South to North raw material flows, and, as Ritzer has noted, they deviate from the majority of chains in their proclaimed attention to a single niche product, coffee.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the chains' patently global expansion agendas, role as "finishers" or marketers rather than producers of products and their novel promotional techniques mark the chains as pointedly post-Fordist.

### **Training Coffee Connoisseurship**

Coffee is persistently foregrounded in specialty cafés. Schultz relates that one of Starbucks' objectives has been to educate and expand customers' knowledge and

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<sup>3</sup> Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, 208.

appreciation of higher quality coffee:

you don't just give customers what they ask for. If you offer them something they're not accustomed to, something so far superior that it takes a while to develop their palates, you can create a sense of discovery and excitement and loyalty that will bond them to you. It may take longer, but if you have a great product, you can educate your customers to like it rather than kowtowing to mass-market appeal.<sup>5</sup>

Successive generations of consumers have always been instructed in the appreciation of various products as they have been ushered onto the market. When the first coffee houses were introduced into London society in the late seventeenth century,

the coffee-men worked hard to shape their customers' expectations of the experience. In the 1660s and 1670s, all those involved in producing the coffee-house experience (coffee-house keepers, coffee suppliers, news vendors and, increasingly, coffee-house customers) co-ordinated a campaign to secure the cultural positioning of the coffee-house. Central to this process was building the brand, not just of coffee, but of the English coffee-house experience.<sup>6</sup>

Coffee was a new experience, a new beverage that had to be made palatable as a social and aleatory phenomenon to the public. The specialty coffee producers and café owners faced a similar task in the late 1960s, as they created a market first for the coffees themselves, then for the new kinds of café experience that served them.

The paradigmatic specialty coffee shop was the Berkeley, California store of Dutch immigrant Alfred Peet, which began to sell high quality home-roasted beans in 1966.<sup>7</sup> He introduced a small six stool bar where he could converse with customers and explain the virtues of stronger, darker coffee to them. He later reminisced that, "I had an educational battle on my hands...If you are used to drinking Hills Brothers coffee and then try Peet's, roasted darker and brewed strong, you wouldn't say it was terrific. It was written all over their faces. 'My God, is he trying to poison me?'" He began to train a

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<sup>5</sup> Schultz & Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 35.

<sup>6</sup> Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 106.

handful of employees and customers to “cup” or smell and evaluate a roast’s aroma, acidity, flavour and body, explaining that “It takes a long time to understand the language the bean uses to talk to you.”<sup>8</sup> The first Starbucks was based on and inspired by Peet’s and also featured whole beans and a small seating area for customers.

The specialty cafés emphasize the qualities of coffee in corporate literature, employee training and in the packaging and marketing of its products, and it does so at the expense of the baked goods, teas, fruit drinks and chocolate that they also sell. In addition, there is almost no mention of the large quantities of milk and sugar that predominate the composition of their coffee drinks. Ellis points out that while the cafés’ “consumption of milk is vast, almost no mention of its origins, suppliers, chemistry, preparation or flavour is made in any of the corporate literature.” Furthermore, these cafés use much more milk and sugar in their products than at any time in the history of coffee consumption. A Starbucks Grande or Venti cappuccino or latte, for example, can have as much as seven to eight times more milk than coffee, making the beverages not so much “coffee drinks flavoured with hot milk, but hot milk drinks flavoured with coffee.” By contrast, the standard Italian latte or cappuccino is at most a one to one ratio of coffee to milk. Ellis posits that product marketing concentrates on the coffee component of beverages because this ties the chains in with the long and distinguished history of coffee houses in order to position the cafés as “aspirational, urbane and sophisticated.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 246-7; Allen, *The Devil’s Cup*, 224.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted from an interview with Alfred Peet in Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 292-3; The Second Cup, *Manuel du conseiller en café*, 21.

<sup>9</sup> Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 252-4.

Specialty café chains' employees still receive training in the origins, preparation, history and brand-specific products served in their cafés in order to assist in the training of café clientele. Starbucks employees begin work with twenty-four hours of training in customer service, coffee and product knowledge from the company, and Second Cup trainees are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the franchise's products and policies at home. Upon commencing, new Second Cup staff is issued CD-ROMs or thick manuals containing information about specific product lines, drink recipes, company policy and coffee cultivation in general to be read and learned on the employee's own time. The ingestion of this information is tested (this, on paid time) through the administration of a standardized examination that is used across the entire chain. Passage of the examination signals the end a trainee's trial period, whereas failure results in dismissal.<sup>10</sup> The emphasis upon product knowledge and employee training is necessary so that employees can train customers to appreciate specialty coffee, but it accrues numerous other benefits for the corporate organization as well.

Organizational psychologists, in studies looking at employee attachment to their corporate employers, note that there is a marked tendency for workers to dedicate more energy to the organization they work for when there has been a significant investment by that organization into the employees. Schein (1983) remarks that by endowing individuals with more training resources, a company can stimulate greater employee loyalty, which is, according to Schein, a loyalty that is motivated principally by guilt and

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<sup>10</sup> Schultz & Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 125; The Second Cup, personal communication.

a feeling of obligation to repay a debt.<sup>11</sup> Since the majority of productive skills have been reduced to memorizing the codified preparation guidelines from the company, product knowledge now constitutes the bulk of worker training. While making good financial sense from a corporate perspective that recognizes the benefits of low employee turnover rates, investing training time in product knowledge also serves to better secure the next generation of coffee shop customers: the employees and their peers. The average age of a Starbucks employee is twenty-six, and many of the workers balance this job with full-time college or university studies.<sup>12</sup> Café staffs will, for the most part, mature to join precisely those classes to which luxury cafés are marketed. Starbucks partners are given a free pound of coffee each week, and employees at all of the chains receive product discounts and free drinks at work, and these programs serve to habituate young workers to drinking rich coffee beverages and to generate an enthusiasm for these drinks when this training is passed on to clients.<sup>13</sup> Training employees in the virtues of specialty coffees secures a solid middle-class market for the future, when former employees take their disdain for retail coffees with them to the fields of their professional employment.

The primary goal of training employees in coffee knowledge is to help them to initiate customers into the practice of drinking specialty coffee. One of the most immediately apparent systems of training for new customers is linguistic. Luxury cafés have imported, along with the barista title and many of the drinks themselves, a litany of Italian idioms for the products that are served. A striking example is the standard

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<sup>11</sup> Edgar H. Schein, "Organizational socialization and the profession of management" pp. 191-201 in Barry M. Straw (ed.) *Psychological Foundations of Organizational Behavior* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Glenview: Scott, Foresman, 1983), 195.

<sup>12</sup> Bollier, "Employees as Partners in Growth," 219.

renaming of cup sizes: at Starbucks, the available serving sizes for beverages are Mezzo, Grande and Venti; at the The Second Cup, these are called Mezzo, Alto and Jumbo. An anthropology student named Michael St. Germain recounts the story of his first order as part of his own training process upon commencing his field observations:

I proceeded with my request for a large hot chocolate. The cashier then informed me that what I wanted was actually a 'venti' hot chocolate (venti is the term used by The Coffee Shack to describe a large sized beverage). Of course, unsure of what exactly a 'venti' consisted, I requested that the staff explain further what specifically I was ordering. She explained to me that a 'venti' was through a visual demonstration, that is, she held up a 'venti' cup and allowed me to examine it. It was from that point on, I could comfortably say that I had begun to learn some of the language specific to 'The Coffee Shack.'<sup>14</sup>

St. Germain's satisfaction with his learning curve is a significant factor in coffee shops' customer return rate. As Elliott notes, "Starbucks seeks to create a level of audience competence—a specialized audience that will appreciate the finer details of the coffee "experience" and consequently return to experience it again and again." In Elliott's analysis, customers can perform their mastery of the linguistic system and are "encouraged to display their expertise."<sup>15</sup>

For Katherine Fry (2000), the display of coffee knowledge, be it the simple ability to successfully order and receive a product at Starbucks or the more complex practice of cupping, constitutes a marker of social class. She applies Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital to show how specialty coffee has grown to become one of those "everyday items and practices [that] are removed from practical use, sometimes raised to

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>14</sup> St. Germain, *Sociability and the Coffee Shack*, 21. St. Germain, an anthropology and sociology student, uses the pseudonym "The Coffee Shack" throughout his thesis "for reasons of subject confidentiality" (3). However, he cites Starbucks training materials and Chairman Schultz's autobiography throughout his research project, so it is clear that the subject of his study is in fact Starbucks.

the level of 'art.' That is, they are often divorced from their function, with emphasis placed on their form."<sup>16</sup> Consumers' dexterity in handling the forms of the café thus illustrates their social class as it stands relative to the markers of connoisseurship outlined by the companies themselves. By inviting consumers to participate in this arrangement of class markers, the cafés effectively secure their participation in this scheme of social value and assure their continuing patronage for so long as the customers themselves recognize the validity of this form of connoisseurship.

The linguistic display of coffee terminology works somewhat differently for the employees, who learn the language of this level of cultural capital without actually having the financial wherewithal to do so as consumers. Any café employee can speak knowledgeably and at length about the relative virtues of a macchiato versus an allongé con panna, but both of these products cost about half of his or her hourly wage and are thus mostly outside of workers' means.

Charlene Elliott's (2002) look at Starbucks focuses on bean-producing countries in order to elucidate what kinds of "education" Starbucks coffee drinkers are receiving. She attends in some detail to the marketing of origin in Starbucks discourses, noting that "Coffee beans, physically removed from their place of origin, have been conceptually repackaged, and the resulting discourse operating both through and about coffee targets a particular audience interested in a cosmopolitan, sophisticated, and distinctive

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<sup>15</sup> Charlene Elliott, "Sipping Starbucks: (Re)Considering Communicative Media" pp. 107-119 in *Mediascapes: New Patterns in Canadian Communications* eds. P. Attallah and L. Regan Shade (Scarborough: Nelson, 2002), 112-13, emphasis in the original.

<sup>16</sup> Katherine G. Fry, "Starbucks Coffee: Cultivating and Selling the Postmodern Brew" pp. 173-185 in Robin Anderson and Lance Strate (eds.) *Critical Studies in Media Communications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 176.

consumption experience.”<sup>17</sup> However, this practice is by no means isolated to specialty coffees or cafés alone. The first coffee houses marketed coffee by flaunting its exotic Ottoman preparatory methods (see Chapter Four), while some of the earliest beans imported from the west were named for their ports of departure, such as Java or the Yemeni port of Mocha.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the best-known example of marketing coffee by its origins was produced by the National Federation of Coffee Growers of Columbia in 1960, who banded together to pool their resources for advertising in America, their product’s primary market. The highly successful campaign featured the now-iconic mythical Juan Valdez and helped to link “quality” coffee with its Colombian growth, effectively establishing a habit of grading coffee by its source and precipitating the contemporary foregrounding of coffee’s origins over other qualities.<sup>19</sup>

Elliott argues that coffee is fetishized in specialty cafés and that the geographies that are named in its products are strictly fictional ones. She says that, “the audience is targeted with *reference* to representations that, while global in part, are predominantly local.”<sup>20</sup> She notes, for example, that some Starbucks’ coffees would seem to have emerged from a “geographically vague Arabia,” while the Indonesian coffee is grown in Yemen, the Yukon Blend spliced from a mix of Indonesian and Latin American beans, as is Caffè Verona. Further, she finds a distinctly Orientalist discourse in the conflation of a given coffee’s assigned place and its nature, pointing out that Starbucks personalized coffee profiles will suggest blends such as Arabian Mocha Java, Colombian Narino

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<sup>17</sup> Elliott, “Sipping Starbucks,” 109.

<sup>18</sup> Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 285-7; Dicum & Luttinger, *The Coffee Book*, 76-7.

<sup>20</sup> Elliott, “Sipping Starbucks,” 107.

Supremo and so on for consumers who identify themselves as “daring” or “wild,” while recommending tamer, anglicized titles such as Starbucks House Blend or French Roast for more conservative consumers. Essentially, Elliott argues, Starbucks marketing can best be understood in terms of Marxist notions of commodity fetishism, where the process of production is erased from the commodity produced.<sup>21</sup>

Elliott’s invocation of fetishism might seem at first blush to be paradoxical, considering the great concentration in coffee corporation literature upon baristi’s productive activities (see Chapter Four), and given the attention paid—however flawed it may be—to coffee’s origins. However, the focus in corporate pamphlets, advertisements and in-store displays on the productive work of the visible interactive service workers constitutes a sort of bait-and-switch, a sleight of hand that creates a distinction between “our employees” and “our producers” to whom the harvesting of coffee is necessarily outsourced. This kind of division is a hallmark of post-Fordist enterprise, where Northern corporations concentrate primarily on marketing and packaging products rather than on producing them, leaving such unpalatable positions to the South. “Our employees,” the tangible faces that make up the body of interactive service workers who interface with the cafés’ clientele, are given marginally better working conditions and benefits than at other outfits, which allows the company to proclaim itself a humanitarian business model while deflecting public attention from the miserable working conditions of the producers who harvest the coffee beans. While the productive labour that takes place in view of the consumers is made a productive spectacle of milk steam and shiny espresso filters, the primary productive labour remains invisible to the vast majority of consumers.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 110-116.

Coffee is a fetishized commodity, both in the traditional Marxian sense where “the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves,” and as the term has been taken up in post-colonial social critiques which speak of a commodity whose social life has been effaced.<sup>22</sup> As Elliott notes, after a study by Leiss, Kline and Jhally, commodities display their ability to satisfy a need and show some aspects of their production, however the globalized production economy does not lend itself well to consumers who would trace a product back to its actual origins, so that “only the most astute shoppers realize the components of things and who made them.”<sup>23</sup> So, aside from those occasions when consumer activist groups have drawn attention to the poor working conditions of producers, the role of the coffee harvesters goes unexplored, an elision that will unfortunately be perpetuated here due to the nature and scope of this investigation.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 164-5.

<sup>23</sup> Elliott, “Sipping Starbucks,” 110. This trend is exaggerated by the ways in which the beans are traded. In general, independent farmers sell their beans to packagers or to larger nationalized groups who then trade the beans to larger aggregations before exportation to consuming countries, making the actual *fazenda* (coffee plantations) that produces the bean difficult to trace. See Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*.

<sup>24</sup> Coffee farmers, particularly in South America, grow most of the world’s coffee on small *fazendas* of less than ten acres, many of them selling their products at less than the price of production. The coffee trade has also been implicated in numerous brutally oppressive African and South and Central American dictatorships, including in El Salvador, Columbia and Guatemala. While fair trade coffee is widely available from numerous agencies, few of the specialty chains offer more than one or two kinds. The Second Cup offered one Costa Rican fair trade, La Minita, and Starbucks similarly offers one brand. All of the cafés were extremely hesitant to introduce fair trade coffees at all, because marketing one out of thirty-some kinds of coffee as “fair trade” begs the question, ‘what kind of trade are the others?’ Starbucks has also drafted a Code of Conduct for its suppliers, but has yet to implement this and refuses to disclose the locations of its producers to independent monitors “for competitive reasons.” See Deborah James, “Justice and Java: Coffee and a fair trade market,” pp. 11-15 in *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Vol. 34, Iss. 2 (New York: Sep/Oct 2000); Dicum & Luttinger, *The Coffee Book*, 72-114; Sutti Ortiz, *Harvesting Coffee, Bargaining Wages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999). The role played by café organizations themselves in perpetuating these imbalances is significant—for a pound of coffee where the producer is paid about three cents, the distribution of coffee mark-ups goes more or less as follows: “Let us say [a specialty roaster] pays \$1.30 a pound for Columbian Supremo green beans (and remember that this price can fluctuate wildly). Add 11 cents for freight-in, storage, and handling, then factor in another 31 cents for the 18 percent weight loss during roasting, 12 cents a pound for the fuel for roasting, 25 cents to hand-pack

## Spatial Practices and Sociability

The layout of the café counter dictates the fashion in which it is to be used. The spatial distribution of machinery behind the counter accords the employee who operates each machine a discrete productive function (blending cold drinks, brewing filtered coffee, making espresso, charging money), so a café customer must start at one end of the line and progress down its length being served by each machine-operator in their turn, a distinctly Fordist procedural organization. On entering the café, a customer must be taught at which end of the line to begin, which staff members he or she may order from and to progress down the line of service and receive any desired commodities from the appropriate staff member. While this may seem like an entirely self-evident practice, it is not; new customers frequently wait at tables to be served or loiter around the barista counter with those who have already ordered and are waiting to receive their lattes. Further, customers must be trained to move down the line without holding up the smooth flow of service and to take their orders away from the counter and find themselves seats. St. Germain recounts his initial inability to conform to the café's spatial order:

I proceeded to the counter to order a hot chocolate from where I thought was the proper place to make such a request. I felt I was safe in this assumption as there was a lone staff member standing behind the counter preparing a beverage for another customer. I approached the counter, made eye contact with the staff member, and requested my hot chocolate. In a very friendly manner she directed me to the other end of the counter

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in 5-pound valve bags for wholesale shipments, and 30 cents for shipping costs. That brings the total to \$2.39. Add \$2.15 to cover overhead for the roaster and distributor (overhead includes everything from mortgages and machinery loans to sales commissions, repairs, and rubbish removal). Then tack on 24 cents profit (about 5 percent), and it costs \$4.78 to deliver roasted coffee to a specialty retailer. Depending on the retailer's size, rent, and other overhead costs, he or she must then charge between \$8 and \$10 a pound to make a reasonable profit. Taking the beans one step further, to a coffeehouse outlet, the proprietor converts the \$4.78 per pound beans into regular coffee at \$1 or cappuccino or latte for \$2 or more. If the proprietor gets 40 cups to the pound, that translates to an outrageous \$40 to \$80 a pound for coffee in beverage form, minus the cost of the milk, stirrer, and sweetener." Anonymous specialty café operator quoted in Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 404.

where the “cash” was and suggested to me that all drink orders were to be placed at that point in the service line.”<sup>25</sup>

While in this case the neophyte was told how to use the café by an employee, there are numerous spatial cues deployed to orient customer behaviour as well as the examples set by other clients. Many outfits have “Place Order Here” signs suspended from the ceiling at the start of the ordering line, while others have counters oriented such that the area where ordering takes place greets customers as they enter the establishment. This, in linear style, is the only legitimate point of entry into the café’s ordering system.

Once a customer’s order has been placed, the order is called out by the counter worker to the barista. This call-out system is standard in specialty coffee bars with espresso machines, and it bifurcates the work flows of baristas who prepare the drinks and counter workers who take and process orders at the cash register. Gregor, a pattern analyst, took apart the ordering process in a Starbucks, noting that,

Starbucks, like most other business is primarily interested in maximizing throughput of orders. More orders equals more revenue. As a result they use asynchronous processing. When you place your order the cashier marks a coffee cup with your order and places it into the queue. The queue is quite literally a queue of coffee cups lined up on the top of the espresso machine. This queue decouples cashier and barista and allows the cashier to keep taking orders even if the barista is backed up for a moment.<sup>26</sup>

This same asynchronous system is used in all of the Montréal chains, and it works well for them because, as Gregor notes, it “decouples cashier and barista” so that one’s productive speed is not determined by the other’s. A barista can be backed up when there are more drink orders being taken and called out by counter staff than the barista has time to make. As each individual order is called out, the barista places a cup on top of the

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<sup>25</sup> St. Germain, *Sociability and the Coffee Shack*, 20-21.

espresso machine and marks it to show what kind of drink it will be, then makes each beverage in its turn while continuing to add more cups to the queue as additional orders are received. When the barista receives too many orders to make each one individually, then milk can be heated in larger quantities in order to make batches of drinks to reduce production time, and these drinks can be served in the order that they are completed rather than that in which they were called out. Gregor calls this system a “conversation” information management pattern, where “interaction between two parties (customer and coffee shop) consists of a short synchronous interaction (ordering and paying) and a longer, asynchronous interaction (making and receiving the drink).”<sup>27</sup>

This decoupling signals one of the departures of specialty café forms from the strictly Fordist, linear structures manifest in fast food. Bryan S. Turner (2003) argues that the Fordist structures of fast food are characteristically linear, saying that “the key component of McDonaldization as a form of modernization is the simple principle of linearity. The production and consumption processes of McDonald’s are linear with food products coming off a production line, where individual consumers standing in regular queues make choices from a limited range of items.”<sup>28</sup> Café chains, however, apply some of the aspects of linearity in the structuring of customer participation, while the employees process orders individually, with each machine-operator interacting with only

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<sup>26</sup> Gregor, “Starbucks Does Not Use Two-Phase Commit” on *Enterprise Integration Patterns* (online: November 19, 2004). Available at [http://www.eaipatterns.com/ramblings/18\\_starbucks.html](http://www.eaipatterns.com/ramblings/18_starbucks.html) Accessed Jan 13 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Bryan S. Turner, “McDonaldization: Linearity and Liquidity in Consumer Cultures” pp. 137-53 in *American Behavioral Scientist* Vol. 47, No. 2 (October 2003), 144. Turner’s primary concern revolves around the “glocalization” of Ritzer’s McDonaldization thesis, which argues that globalizing, homogenizing Fordist structures including chains like McDonald’s and Starbucks embody a rationalization of society akin to Weber’s notion of the “iron cage” of rationalism.

those customers who require the products from his or her machine. So while customers experience the rigidly Fordist procession of the linear coffee bar along which they must move and assemble a collection of desired products, for the employees the service is asynchronous and culminates in a scattered, post-Fordist conversational flow.

The specialization of tasks increases the speed of transactions and limits the duration of any one employee's interaction with the clientele. When a given customer orders and receives food from one employee, commands a drink from another, pays and accepts change from yet another and finally receives the coffee from someone else, then the services rendered are irrevocably linked to the organization and not to any one individual who renders them. While each of these workers serves customers with a smile and a friendly demeanor, this system effectively precludes or limits any lengthy exchange between the clientele and staff, so that the organization itself is a constant intermediary in every transaction, interjecting its presence in every detail from the uniforms worn by the staff to the refinement of consistent speech patterns imposed on personnel by management. So, while baristas are highlighted in corporate discourse, they are foregrounded as an abstract category and not as specific individuals, just as coffee's origins are foregrounded without reference to specific places.

The system of café service emerged as a hybrid of the fast food format used in donut shops, traditional coffee houses and the Italian stand-up espresso bars that the cafés in many ways emulate and aspire to. In his autobiography, Schultz recounts trying to introduce the format of the Italian stand-up model wholesale to Seattle consumers with his own café, *Il Giornale*, saying that "we were determined to re-create a true Italian-style

coffee bar. Our primary mission was to be authentic. We didn't want to do anything to dilute the integrity of the espresso and the Italian coffee bar experience...The baristas wore white shirts and bow ties. All service was stand-up, with no seating."<sup>29</sup> Here, customers' actual practices intervened with the intentions of the enterprise. At Il Giornale, Schultz learned that some customers were willing to drink quickly and leave, but many wanted a place to stay and enjoy their beverages, a cultural tendency that likely has a great deal to do with tastes for the actual drinks being consumed. Whereas Italians usually take an espresso, which can quickly be gulped back on the run, North Americans are more likely to have a milk-heavy cappuccino, latte or brewed coffee, which takes longer to consume. So, while the bar format of Italian espresso bars was maintained, the cafés also generally include some seating for the clientele.

The spatial ordering of customer behaviours is not confined to designating the appropriate systems of ordering and paying for food. Additionally, there are systems in place to structure the conduct of customers for the duration of their stay on the premises. For example, customers are unknowingly put to work, as in fast food restaurants, by being required to bus and clear their own tables as well as by "dressing" their own coffee, a service that was provided by counter staff in the donut shops.<sup>30</sup>

Further, the spatial organization of cafés structures how they can be used and how customers should interact in these spaces. St. Germain's central preoccupation in his study is the sociability of Starbucks, which Schultz has proclaimed to be a "Third Place." He argues that while Starbucks' discourse positions the café as a relaxed space of

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<sup>29</sup> Schultz & Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 87.

community sociability, the chain in fact makes use of material aspects that organize the space in a way that guarantees a shorter stay by its patrons, ensuring a higher turnover of clients. Citing numerous anthropological studies to demonstrate that restaurant chains are consciously styled to limit the duration of customers' stay, he argues that Starbucks makes use of latent and manifest design cues that in fact promote different behaviours in the clientele.<sup>31</sup> The manifest design aspects include comfortable couches and intimate tables, fireplaces, natural light from large and numerous windows and a soft colour palette, and these elements encourage a longer and relaxed stay. However, St. Germain finds that there are also many latent design elements, ones not intended to be noticed by the clientele, that quietly "make customers feel uncomfortable and encourage them to leave."<sup>32</sup> The up-tempo jazz music "subtly encourages patrons to remove themselves from the premises as quickly as possible," and is distracting enough to discourage lengthy conversations. The antiseptic tiles that cover the majority of the flooring create a cold, antisocial space with a great deal of reverberation and make the café an uncomfortable place in which to sit.<sup>33</sup>

He also notes that, while there is a small percentage of seating in what he calls the "oasis" section of the café, where there is carpet, a few plush chairs and sometimes a fireplace, the remainder of the seating in Starbucks is distinctly uncomfortable, and

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<sup>30</sup> Leidner, "Rethinking Questions of Control," 37; Reiter, *Making Fast Food*, 86; St-Germain, *Sociability and the Coffee Shack*, 102-3.

<sup>31</sup> St. Germain, *Sociability and the Coffee Shack*, 54-55. The latent/manifest distinction is from Robert K. Merton (1968), who argues that all social situations make use of manifest aspects, those social patterns that are recognized and understood to operate in a certain specific way, and latent aspects, those patterns that are generally not understood to be at work in organizing social behaviours. In Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 105.

<sup>32</sup> St. Germain, *Sociability and 'The Coffee Shack'*, 57.

arranged in such a way as to prevent social interaction. St. Germain remarks that the wooden chairs at tables are “small, short-backed and very stiff,” and he argues, after Ritzer, that such uncomfortable seats are deliberately designed for franchised chains so that patrons will quickly feel uncomfortable and leave, creating more space for incoming customers.<sup>34</sup> Café tables at Starbucks and other franchises are almost without exception arranged in straight rows, and are generally placed very close to one another in order to maximize on available space. While such proximity would ostensibly encourage sociability, their linear arrangement quietly discourages amicable contact with other customers. St. Germain cites a study by Mehrabian, in which it was concluded that a “scatter” pattern is more conducive to sociability in public spaces because this formation, for example, forces a person walking through the establishment to weave around the tables, a less efficient trajectory of movement that encourages eye contact and interaction with others sharing the social space. Ultimately, St. Germain concludes that there are manifold latent elements that undermine the sociable atmosphere that Starbucks claims to be creating, and he suggests that many of the design elements have been put in place with the conscious intention to limit customer sociability and the duration of patrons’ stay.<sup>35</sup>

While Schultz positions the chain as a contemporary example of Oldenburg’s Third Place, “a comfortable, sociable gathering spot away from home or work, like an extension of the front porch,”<sup>36</sup> St. Germain concludes that the customer sociability of Starbucks is more in line with Erving Goffman’s (1963) concept of civil inattention. Civil

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 66-69; Mark Schapiro and Robert Gerloff. “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” pp. 66-67 in *Utne Reader* Iss. 66 (Nov/Dec 1994), 66-67.

<sup>34</sup> This can be read as another example of Latour’s technological “loading” of objects to enforce objectives.

<sup>35</sup> St. Germain, *Sociability and ‘The Coffee Shack’*, 70-71.

inattention is a social tactic where strangers in public pretend not to notice one another in order to avoid participating with others in physical proximity and to receive reciprocal inattention from them.<sup>37</sup> A paradigmatic example is the office building elevator, where strangers are crowded into a close physical space but avoid eye contact or recognition of one another. During his ethnography, St. Germain observed that the sociability of Starbucks was what he calls B.Y.O.F. (Bring Your Own Friend), where customers would engage sociably with those they already knew and would ignore other strangers doing the same.<sup>38</sup> However, perhaps of greater interest for this study, St. Germain posits that the same rules of civil inattention do not apply to workers.

### **Social Positioning of Employees and the Role of Management**

Interactive service workers are excluded from the rules of sociability that govern café clientele, which begs the question of what kinds of rules regulate employees' at-work sociability. St. Germain observes that the rules of civil inattention apply to other patrons but are suspended for employees of the franchise. This is necessarily so in the case of the interactive service workers, with whom some communication is mandatory, but St. Germain argues that this etiquette is similarly interrupted for delivery and cleaning workers. He remarks with some surprise that children's caregivers would almost without exception be ignored by nearby customers as they struggled to get children and strollers

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<sup>36</sup> Schultz & Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 5;

<sup>37</sup> Erving Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places* (New York: Free Press, 1963), 84-7.

<sup>38</sup> St. Germain, *Sociability and 'The Coffee Shack'*, 5. Of course, this idea of being 'alone, together' is for many customers the principal attraction of coffee shops. For example, Leah Hager Cohen outlines the meditative pleasures she derives from being alone in public in a coffee shop in some detail in *Glass, Paper, Beans: Revelations on the Nature and Value of Ordinary Things* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), xiii-xvi.

through the doors, but patrons would willingly step forward to assist a delivery man trying to do the same, breaking the code of civil inattention in so doing.<sup>39</sup> This example reinforces the proposition that the code of sociability for service workers is much different than that for guests.

While the cafés demand warm interaction with clientele from their employees, the workers' self-motivated sociability works somewhat differently. Employee warmth is mandatory in a purely service-related capacity, but sociability between employees or extended interaction with customers who have already purchased their goods and seek conversation with personnel is discouraged. The line of the coffee bar is an actual border for the staff, who are effectively ghettoized in their obligation to remain behind the line of the service counter and to conduct all at-work sociability—even with the clientele—while remaining behind that line.

That the staff remains in the ghettoized work zones is enforced by numerous layers of surveillance. One of these layers is policed by cafés' patrons themselves in the form of consumer feedback channels.<sup>40</sup> The next is the work floor supervision by management, which was conducted in two ways at The Second Cup. First, during most shifts there was a manager who would serve alongside the staff and listen to employee-customer transactions, correct the staff's turns of speech, food management practices and efficiency, as well as generally overseeing and directly reprimanding workers. The floor manager is the face of authority for the staff, the body to whom employees must account for failures and miscommunications, the organizer of the staff schedule and principal

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<sup>39</sup> St. Germain, *Sociability and 'The Coffee Shack,'* 91.

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter Four for a detailed discussion of the role of consumer feedback in specialty cafés.

disciplinary agent. This manager operates under the aegis of the franchise owner; both are in turn accountable to external regulations and constraints, such as cost management, state intervention including health regulations, labour laws and such, as well as to the imperatives of the franchise itself, which carefully manages the homogeneity of uniforms, worker appearance, music, decor and so on.

Numerous critics have argued that the primary role of on-site management is to monitor and coordinate the activities of employees, or, as Barbara Ehrenreich has said, to “exact obeisance.”<sup>41</sup> The fundamental social role of managers is to guarantee the reproduction of the conditions of production, which, in this case means ensuring that café employees conform to company mandates and do not challenge their role in the organizational hierarchy. As David Harvey has argued, “Commodity production under conditions of wage labour...locates much of the knowledge, decisions as to technique, as well as disciplinary apparatus, outside the control of the person who actually does the work.”<sup>42</sup> In order for chain corporations to operate on the monolithic scale that they do,

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<sup>41</sup> Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dime*, 212. From the perspective of class analysis, management and franchisees in specialty cafés play an ambiguous role. They do not quite fit into that nebulous class of administrators and professionals, what the Ehrenreichs have called the Professional-Managerial Class (PMC) and Renner calls the Service Class, yet they have a great deal more authority than the interactive service workers who, for at least as long as they work in the service industry, are strictly engaged in routine labour. Renner’s invocation of the term “service,” it should be noted, has nothing to do with the service industry per se. The title is intended above all to create a distinction between those technical and managerial intellectuals who do not own the means of production, yet provide a service to those who do by marshalling the labour efforts of the proletariat. The Ehrenreichs situate the PMC within a three-way polarization of interests between the proletariat, capitalists and the PMC itself. See Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, 267; Graeme Salaman, “Managing the Frontier of Control” pp. 46-62 in Anthony Giddens & Gavin Mackenzie (Eds.) *Social Class and the Division of Labour: Essays in Honour of Ilya Neustadt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 46-9; John Goldthorpe, “On the service class, its formation and future,” pp. 162-85 in Anthony Giddens and Gavin Mackenzie (eds.) *Social Class and the Division of Labour: Essays in Honour of Ilya Neustadt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 167-71. The PMC is outlined in Barbara and John Ehrenreich, “The Professional-Managerial Class,” pp. 5-45 in Pat Walker (ed.) *Between Labor and Capital* (Boston: South End Press, 1979), 12-16.

<sup>42</sup> See Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 121-23.

some responsibility must be delegated to management, who are in turn scrutinized by the next echelon of authority in the company's managerial hierarchy.

In essence, while café management for the most part performs work of a very similar nature to the employees, partners, coffee advisors and baristas, they also control these workers because of the corporation's delegation of monitory authority.

Management's focus is upon coordinating and regulating employee activities along organizational guidelines. Bradach has said that the primary role of management is to secure the uniformity of the enterprise, and this is a responsibility of grave importance for the chain itself. As Robin Leidner argues, "The company could not have removed decision-making authority from its crew workers' jobs so thoroughly were it not for the constant presence of managers whose capacity for decision-making it could trust."<sup>43</sup>

The next internal layer of surveillance operates more or less along the lines described in Foucault's reading of the panopticon, where subjects are compelled to self-regulate behaviour under the panopticon's (potentially) all-seeing eye.<sup>44</sup> "Visible and unverifiable," there are several closed-circuit cameras situated throughout the café, each focused upon a ghetto of staff activity unused by the clientele, such as behind cash registers, at the coffee counters or facing supply closets. At the McGill College Second Cup, even when there is a manager physically present on the café floor, there is often another engaged in administrative work in the office upstairs, which also serves as the café's stock room and employee lounge. The communally-used management desk has a large black and white television screen divided into four panels showing a few areas of

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<sup>43</sup> Leidner, "Rethinking Questions of Control," 35; Bradach, *Franchise Organizations*, 91.

the café. The monitored spaces are the only ones that employees can legitimately occupy without having to account for their absence, so that any time a worker is not visually present in one of these areas, he or she must account for the absence. This ensures not only the constant industry of the workers, but also limits the spaces and instances of their interactions with the clientele. As with other panopticon-oriented models of surveillance, nobody working on the floor can ever be sure whether or not he or she is being watched, nor, indeed, whether there is anyone in the office supervising at all. Further, the shared use of the office space containing the monitory apparatus as a staff common room ensures that employees are aware that they *could* be watched at any time, so that staff behaviour generally proceeds so as to placate the efficiency-concerned management at all times.

So, with the exception of brief forays onto the floor to clean up rubbish or restock supplies, the counter also serves as a more or less strictly regulated border for employee and customer transactions. Patrons are not allowed behind the service counter, and except for a few isolated reasons, the staff is not permitted to circulate freely in the customers' seating area. While the employees are certainly required to provide warm, courteous service, they are not encouraged to develop strong, long-lasting ties with the clientele—at least, not during work hours. There is a strictly-maintained clientele-worker distinction in place. Such spatial zonings instantiate a more profound process in the service industry that establishes marks and codes in order to better fortify the separation of the server from the served as a facet of the service experience itself.

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<sup>44</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

In one study directed toward how waitresses, specifically, are allowed to interact with customers, Paules argues that many of the regulations regarding service protocol are in fact leftover indications of the relative class positions of the server and the served. This, she argues, is in a sense all the more necessary in a service climate where each member of the exchange's relative class position may not be as disparate as all that:

The superiority of customer to waitress is limited temporally to the duration of the encounter and spatially to the boundaries of the restaurant. Rigidly defined dress codes, which eliminate all clues of the server's nonwork status, may serve to put the customer at ease in issuing orders to one whose subordination is so narrowly defined.<sup>45</sup>

Paules argues that the conventions of the service industry carry many of the markers of class distinction used in past ages, in particular those conventions relating to nineteenth century interactions between household servants and their employers. These customs include the maintenance of the customers' unilateral power to address a server by first name and the "prohibition against engaging in such physically necessary acts as eating, drinking, and resting in the customer's presence functions to limit contact between server and served and fortify status lines."<sup>46</sup> Similarly, service industry workers' routes of ingress and exit are often concealed, and workers must often enter through the rear or in civilian clothes. Further, the continuing prevalence of uniforms enforces a visual distinction between server and served.

Uniforms are mandatory in the luxury chain cafés. The style is generally sporty-casual, mostly supplied by popular clothing chains, and employees are prohibited from having visible tattoos, piercings or other perceptible markings that would detract from the

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<sup>45</sup> Greta Foff Paules, "Resisting the Symbolism of Service among Waitresses" pp. 264-90 in Cameron Lynne Macdonald and Carmen Sirianni (eds.) *Working in the Service Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 267.

companies' wholesome brand images.<sup>47</sup> Many cafés' employees wear aprons over more casual clothing as part of the uniform, which quickly identifies the workers as such even from a distance. For example, the distinctive green aprons at Starbucks and the brown caps at The Second Cup and Van Houtte mark workers so that they are quickly recognizable even in crowded customer areas. While, as Paules notes, the sartorial uniformity of the staff serves to underline the separation between server and served that maintains class distinctions between the two groups—for so long as the worker's shift lasts—uniforms perform the additional function of making all of the workers look alike. According to Reiter, the purpose of the uniform is primarily to make the employees indistinguishable; this means not only that employees are marked as such for customers' clear identification, but also that the employees themselves are incorporated into the company's image. Reiter argues that,

if workers are to be as replaceable as possible, they must be taught not only to perform their jobs in the same way, but also to resemble each other in attitudes, disposition and appearance. Thus, workers are taught not only to perform according to company rules, but are also drilled on personal hygiene, dress, coiffure and personality.<sup>48</sup>

Sartorial theorists castigate the practice of imposing uniforms on employees because of the role that dress plays in communicating personal identity. Because clothing is rife with semiotic markers, an outfit instantaneously conveys a wealth of information about its wearer. As one fashion critic puts it, "Self-decoration is part of self-constitution,

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 266. See also Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 32.

<sup>47</sup> Second Cup T-shirts are supplied by Roots (owned by the same parent company) and paired with dark pants and shoes belonging to the employee but subject to the franchisee's approval. See Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 252.

<sup>48</sup> Reiter, "Life in a Fast Food Factory," 320.

body image, and identity formation.”<sup>49</sup> William Keenan argues that the political stake of making employees wear uniforms goes beyond the simple regulation of workers’ appearance; he says that the question of sartorial self-determination is “one of legal ownership, entitlements and control of the human body; and where the line is drawn between personal body self-possession, on the one side, and external—state or corporate—intervention, regulation and discipline on the other side.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, uniforms mark another technique of bodily regulation and the administration of employees’ at-work identities.

Braverman’s analysis of the service industry concludes that while the services provide the illusion that the interactive service workers are engaged in indulging the needs of their clientele, in reality the work is sold at a set rate to the entrepreneur, who in turn resells that labour on the open market.<sup>51</sup> The imposition of a uniform reminds consumers that the service being rendered is one made available by the company and not by any one worker. When a customer receives warm and courteous service, it is the company itself that receives the credit and benefit. Thus, while interactive personnel work with the external world, their at-work interactions are, as Howard Schwartz posits, largely “experienced as an internal process within the organization—an exchange between the organization and its employees.”<sup>52</sup> This dimension directs critical attention to the ways in which café employees are marketed as part of the customer service.

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<sup>49</sup> Vincent B. Leitch, “Costly Compensations: Postmodern Fashion, Politics, Identity,” pp. 111-28 in *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* Vol. 42, Iss. 1 (West Lafayette: Spring 1996), 113.

<sup>50</sup> William J.F. Keenan, “Dress Freedom: The Personal and the Political” pp. 179-192 in William J.F. Keenan (ed.) *Dressed to Impress: Looking the Part* (New York: Oxford, 2001), 186.

<sup>51</sup> Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 360.

<sup>52</sup> Howard S. Schwartz, “Anti-Social Actions of Committed Organizational Participants: An Existential Psychoanalytic Perspective” in *Organizational Studies* 8:4 (1987), 328.

## Chapter Four: Organizing and Marketing Warmth

The last fifty or so years have evinced a veritable explosion in personal services, which Harry Braverman attributes to a number of factors, including a drastic attenuation in the numbers of in-house “servant” staff, the dislocation of women from middle-class households into the realm of paid labour, longer working hours for professionals, and capitalism’s fulfillment of its appropriation of commodities and ensuing interest in services.<sup>1</sup> Marx describes these services as “nothing other than the useful effect of use-value,” which means that, as Braverman has argued, the labourers’ work itself becomes the commodity.<sup>2</sup> The services constitute the fastest growing employment sector in North America and Europe, yet many of the gestures that make up this expanding economy are not in fact new. They had for millennia been performed for free as the responsibilities of slaves, household staffs and housewives and other family members. Such ministrations were thus provided either after an initial investment of money in the case of the indentured servant, for free by family members, or by wage or stipend labourers who required a continual outlay of funds. The latter, as Braverman notes, functioned in a purely facilitative manner for the capitalist, who loses financial principal in the outlay of wages and gains only the material comfort of services provided without any return on his investment. It is only when workers are hired to “do services as a part of profitable activity” that these became financially productive enterprises and are enfolded into the market of monopoly capitalism. Thus, the service industry begins

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<sup>1</sup> Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 359.

<sup>2</sup> Marx, *Capital I*, 299; Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 360.

with the appropriation as commodities of all “the activity of humankind including what had heretofore been the many things that people did for themselves or for each other.”<sup>3</sup>

The service worker whose activity is integrated into the capitalist sphere of value does not, as it may appear, sell his or her labour to the customer who uses the service. It is first of all sold to and paid for by the capitalist, who then remarkets and sells this work on the commodity market.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, this means that there are essentially two bosses in the service exchange: the capitalist who buys the labour and to whom the worker must directly answer, and the client who buys this service from the capitalist and receives its benefits.

Thus, this efflorescence of new services available on the market does not indicate new needs, even when they feature new products; rather, it indexes a broader appropriation of free actions into monopoly capital’s scheme of profit. In the peculiar case of the service and hospitality industry, this is characterized by a capitalization on many of the jobs that women in particular have traditionally performed for free, generating what feminist critics call a “self-fulfilling cycle in which the entrance of more women into the work force has led to greater demand for those consumer services once provided gratis by housewives (cleaning, cooking, child care, etc.), which in turn has provided more service jobs that are predominantly filled by women.”<sup>5</sup> So, the increased participation of women in the extra-domestic workforce has created something of a vicious circle, where more women leave the home to work, creating greater demand and higher familial income to pay others to do those

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<sup>3</sup> Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 362-3. See also Gersuny and Rosengren, *The Service Society*, which focuses on the rhetorical construction of healthcare and social services as they are contracted out of homes to for-profit institutions.

<sup>4</sup> Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 260. See also Talwar, *Fast Food, Fast Track*, 91.

<sup>5</sup> Cameron Lynne Macdonald and Carmen Sirianni, “The Service Society and the Changing Experience of Work” in *Working in the Service Society* eds. Cameron Lynne Macdonald and Carmen Sirianni (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 2.

tasks they once performed for free; next, the labourers themselves often have to hire services such as house cleaning, child care, or meal preparation in order to make time for their own employment. The majority of service jobs and particularly those positions requiring interaction with clientele are performed by women, some seventy-five per cent of whom are engaged in labour that carries some emotive responsibilities. Women tend to be charged with more emotive work because of culturalized perceptions that women are innately much better at emotional management tasks such as nurturing, soothing and putting forth a gracious demeanor in the face of adversity.<sup>6</sup>

The services are the site of intense competition and expansion and, as such, are some of the most hotly contested grounds in marketing. While they are still advertised using relative schemes of value such as price, product quality, speed and convenience, corporate promotional energies are increasingly dedicated to the quality of customer experience, particularly since consumers often can't discern any difference between many of the service "products" on the market. The chain cafés are an exemplary instance of the marketing of experience. As one Starbucks pamphlet promises,

Starbucks greatest strength is also our biggest challenge—providing a consistent Starbucks experience and high-quality products everywhere Starbucks is served and sold around the globe. Our customers expect every Starbucks experience to be the same quality that they receive in their 'home store'...At all times, we are focused on being and offering the best, and empowering our partners so they can provide each customer with a personalized, uplifting and consistent Starbucks experience.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Arlie Russel Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 163; Amy Wharton, "Service with a Smile: Understanding the Consequences of Emotional Labor" pp. 91-112 in Cameron Lynne Macdonald and Carmen Sirianni (eds.) *Working in the Service Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 101; Reich, *The Work of Nations*, 177; Talwar, *Fast Food, Fast Track*, 90-91. Of course, many feminists have long campaigned for an introduction of household work to be factored into economic statistics in order to secure greater cultural recognition for the labour of homemakers.

<sup>7</sup> Starbucks Coffee Company, *Living Our Values*, 40.

One of the ways that cafés create a distinctive brand experience is through the atmosphere of the café, by molding a space marked by a homogenous aesthetic, the diffusion of smells and a generic sound that establishes the boundaries of the café to create a consistent sensual experience. The jazz that is invariably played at Starbucks outlines a clear acoustic demarcation of an autonomous space and sets the rhythms for the store, ultimately becoming an integral part of the store's character. As Jonathan Sterne has remarked, the "music becomes a form of architecture. Rather than simply filling up an empty space, the music becomes a part of the consistency of that space."<sup>8</sup> Smell performs a similar function because the distinctive odour of roasted beans pervades every corner and great pains are taken to avoid its adulteration by other smells. At Starbucks, smoking is banned in all locations and employees are not allowed to wear perfumes or strong deodorants that might interfere with the coffee odour.<sup>9</sup> The tendency to border off the space of a franchise is characteristic of McDonaldized businesses, and Starbucks is an excellent example of this trend. As one popular account relates,

With its carefully conceived mix of colors and textures, aromas and music, Starbucks is more indicative of our era than the iMac. It is to the age of aesthetics what McDonald's was to the age of convenience or Ford was to the age of mass production—the touchstone success story, the exemplar of all that is good and bad about the aesthetic imperative. Hotels, shopping malls, libraries, even churches seek to emulate Starbucks. Curmudgeons may grouse about the price of its coffee, but Starbucks isn't just selling beverages. It's delivering a multisensory aesthetic experience, for which customers are willing to pay several times what coffee costs at a purely functional Formica-and-linoleum coffee shop.<sup>10</sup>

By marketing themselves as brand-specific aesthetic spaces, the chain cafés establish themselves as distinctive experiences. Faith Popcorn has famously characterized specialty

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Sterne, "Sounds Like the Mall of America: Programmed Music and the Architectonics of Commercial Space" in *Ethnomusicology* Vol. 41, No. 1 (Winter 1997), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 251-2.

<sup>10</sup> Virginia Postrel, *The Substance of Style* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 20.

café drinks as “Small Indulgences;” by positioning the drinks thusly, a four-dollar latte becomes not an “absurdly overpriced glass of hot milk” but a short vacation from the real world of work and worry, available at numerous conveniently located outlets.<sup>11</sup>

One of the central components of this experience is “good service,” an abstract concept manifest only in the actual behaviours of service industry workers. It is this legion of smiling personnel who, in their conduct and self-presentation “shape and even constitute the abstract service that is bought and sold.”<sup>12</sup> While workers are discouraged from socializing with customers, their friendly service is marketed as part of this experience—one need only think of advertising campaigns for evidence of corporations that promote the good spirits of their employees: McDonald’s where smiles are free; Starbucks where the baristas make the magic; PSA Airlines where smiles aren’t just painted on, and so on. As MacDonald and Sirianni note, “When production efficiency and quality are maximized, the critical variable in the struggle for economic dominance is the quality of interactions with customers.”<sup>13</sup> In franchised and chain cafés, service quality thus becomes a premise for distinguishing between comparable products, so that employee interaction with customers is subjected to organizational supervision, training and control.

The systems outlined in the previous sections detail how organizations have attempted to quicken the pace of services through automation, standardization and employee training, and this section will outline the affective responsibilities of service industry workers. My analysis in this section will include a general history of labour in the preparation

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Dicum & Luttinger, *The Coffee Book*, 154.

<sup>12</sup> Talwar, *Fast Food Fast Track*, 99. See also Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 20; MacDonald & Sirianni, “The Service Society,” 3.

<sup>13</sup> MacDonald & Sirianni, “The Service Society,” 3.

and service of coffee, discussion of the dimensions and consequences of what Hochschild calls “emotional labour,” attention to the techniques deployed by organizations in managing employees’ demeanors, and the introduction of other possible factors that affect the affectivity of work in luxury chain cafés.

### **Emotional Labour, Authenticity and the Management of Affect**

Hochschild’s research, which was conducted specifically on airline stewardesses, addresses the psychological and political consequences of workers’ engagement in “emotional labour,” meaning that which requires the regimentation of affect as a term of employment. She defines emotional labour as,

the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display... this labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others – in this case, the sense of being cared for in a safe and congenial place.”<sup>14</sup>

While human emotion is always submitted to layered regimes of performance and social obligation, she finds that one of the key components in the production of experience in the personal services is the organizational management of affect.

Hochschild’s primary concern is with the effects of this appropriation of emotional performance into the capitalist scheme of value, and she worries that, “when emotional labor is put into the public marketplace, it behaves like a commodity.”<sup>15</sup> For example, she argues that many service industry workers retreat into “deep acting” and other dramatic techniques in order to fulfill their obligation to supply appropriate emotional responses in interactions with customers. This, she posits, can lead them to

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<sup>14</sup> Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 7.

develop an incapacity to emote genuinely in at-work and interpersonal exchanges.<sup>16</sup> Of greater interest to the current study, though, is the influence that this deep-acting and enforced emotive display exerts on the ways in which affective experiences are marketed by corporations and perceived by their clientele and audiences.

A surfeit of marketed affable experiences leads to a greater cultural emphasis upon authenticity. As Hochschild remarks, since “advertisements, training, notions of professionalism, and dollar bills have intervened between the smiler and the smiled upon, it takes an extra effort to imagine that spontaneous warmth can exist in uniform—because companies now advertise spontaneous warmth, too.”<sup>17</sup> In this context, the obligatory warmth of the “emotional proletariat” is rejected, as customers “subtract the commercial motive and collect the personal remainders matter-of-factly, almost automatically” in order to “ferret out the remaining gestures of a private gift exchange.”<sup>18</sup> The irony here is that while service industry workers are working harder to provide more friendly displays of affectivity, they are also monitored to prevent their wasting time by socializing with customers. Further, the increased advertising and marketing on this one point foregrounds the constructedness of warm service, reminding consumers that each of these displays are repeatedly produced for every customer that walks through the door and are not, of course, genuine acts inspired by his or her own resplendent person.

Furthermore, this obligatory warmth is one-sided. While it is, of course, much more polite and more usual for customers to reciprocate the real or affected warmth of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 192.

servers, it is entirely his or her unilateral prerogative not to. Paules, in a study on dining waitresses in particular, notes that,

Virtually every rule of etiquette is violated by customers in their interaction with the waitress: the waitress can be interrupted; she can be addressed with the mouth full; she can be ignored and stared at; and she can be subjected to unrestrained anger. Lacking the status of a person she, like the servant, is refused the most basic considerations of polite interaction.<sup>19</sup>

To even engage in service labour means accepting one's subordination, and these uneven responsibilities of emotional performance, as Hochschild reminds, are supposed to be evened out by the workers' being paid a wage.<sup>20</sup>

The marketing of authentic emotional warmth means that employee affectivity becomes a productive factor that must be managed and controlled in order to effectively "produce" a consistent commodity experience. As Leidner notes, "because the quality of the interaction is frequently part of the service being delivered, there are no clear boundaries between the worker, the work process, and the product in interactive service work."<sup>21</sup> Where affect is a term of employment, workers' facial expressions, turns of speech and mood become subject to organizational regimentation.

Affect, however, is more difficult for organizational administrations to control than other aspects of employee work performance because of the role of the customer, who is both a determinant of and factor in the kinds of interaction that can take place. Managers can never fully anticipate and regulate responses to any situation that might arise, nor can they overtly monitor and correct employees through interjection in front of

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<sup>19</sup> Paules, "Resisting the Symbolism of Service among Waitresses," 269.

<sup>20</sup> Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 86; Elaine J. Hall, "Smiling, Deferring, and Flirting: Doing Gender by Giving 'Good Service'" in *Work and Occupations* Vol. 20, No. 4 (November 1993), 456; Gerald Mars and Michael Nicod, *The World of Waiters* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 92-100.

<sup>21</sup> Leidner, "Rethinking Questions of Control," 30.

the customers, because this would ultimately ruin the final product being sold: the service experience and the illusion of autonomous and authentic warmth. Managers, then, must “attempt to determine these interactions in advance, combining methods of both technical and bureaucratic control with varying degrees of routinization and indoctrination.”<sup>22</sup>

Ultimately, in interactive service work, the principles of routinization can be applied, but control has to be extended in several ways: “in scope, by subjecting customers to standardization; in depth, by subjecting more aspects of workers’ selves to regulation; and in intensity, by using multiple forms of constraint and supervision to standardize every detail of the work.”<sup>23</sup>

Unlike the automated processes of the kitchen, in service work the customers are factors in every transaction, and they cannot be subjected to the same disciplinary and monitory controls as can the employees. Thus, employee interaction with customers cannot be entirely codified and subjected entirely to procedural guidelines. Many systems have been innovated to minimize the autonomy of interactive service workers, such as scripting conversations, training the clientele to interact with the staff in a set pattern and even the introduction of key codes into cash register systems to account for any possible substitution. McDonald’s, for example, has automated scripts for employee banter by programming cues into cash registers to remind workers what to say in each transaction and including possibilities for upselling.<sup>24</sup> As MacDonald & Sirianni point out, this

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<sup>22</sup> MacDonald & Sirianni, “The Service Society,” 6.

<sup>23</sup> Leidner, “Rethinking Questions of Control,” 31.

<sup>24</sup> Leidner, “Rethinking Questions of Control,” 40; Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, 91-3. While I am concentrating on the technological substitutions of formal scripts here, numerous scholars have attended to the more prevalent form of scripting which generates patterns of speech and expressions through constant repetition of the same and similar interactive scenarios at work. See Hall, “Doing Gender,” 457.

practice constitutes a “‘substitution of technology for motivation,’ replacing spontaneous interaction with predetermined scripts, and supplanting worker decision-making with management design.”<sup>25</sup> However, the institution can never account for every contingency in an ordering system where the customers cannot be wholly subjected to managerial control, and the customer is always right.

One of the systems that has emerged to control the behaviours of interactive service workers has been using customers as monitory agents, both of employees on behalf of an individual outlet’s management, and of the management of a given outlet on behalf of the organization. Customers who deal with interactive service workers are delegated and empowered with the responsibility of supervising the workers in numerous ways, ranging from feedback cards to consumer-instigated comments to corporate at-home polling. When consumers offer commentary, they are given a sense of power and control. The systems for customer feedback are couched in a discourse of protecting one’s rights and demanding fair treatment, when they in fact have much more to do with assisting the company to better exert its own power.<sup>26</sup> As Fuller and Smith conclude in their study of customer feedback,

Because the customer/worker interaction is used as the primary measure of workplace performance, the power to control workers and mid-level managers may appear to be removed from upper management’s hands and redistributed to a company’s clients, customers, passengers, patients, etc. In fact, however, feedback from consumers strengthens employers’ hold over the workplace by providing them with an additional source of data they can use for control, evaluation and discipline.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> MacDonald & Sirianni, “The Service Society,” 6.

<sup>26</sup> Also, there is, of course, no comparable venue for the employee’s to complain of miscarriages of authority on the part of the customer—apart from backroom chat with coworkers—and this, again, is supposedly evened out by a wage.

<sup>27</sup> Linda Fuller and Vicki Smith “Consumers’ Reports: Management by Customers in a Changing Economy” pp. 74-90 in *Working in the Service Society* eds. Cameron Lynne Macdonald and Carmen Sirianni (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 84.

Under the pretext of consumer empowerment, greater control is in fact accorded to the organization, providing them with data on poor performances, statistical information on which points in the process seem to have gaps or lags, and detailing what locations need to be strengthened or more regulated in order to better assert control over the chain as a whole. It is because, as Braverman has noted, the worker does not work for the consumer but for the capitalist, that it is in fact the organization that is given the discretionary power and assistance that consumer reports offer, not the employee. Fuller and Smith conclude that, “In sum, we understand customer control as a management response to an old, but somewhat altered imperative: to simultaneously exclude workers from exerting genuine control yet secure their participation in the process of production.”<sup>28</sup>

The real task of restaurant managers within a chain is to maintain uniformity alongside the company’s detailed guidelines. However, as Bradach notes, the retention of total control in order to simplify tasks so that the system can run autonomously creates something of a management paradox, wherein “the easier it is to break the task into component pieces and the more specific and fine-grained the performance-evaluation mechanisms, the more likely it is for that task to move through rotations of control—making, in the end, a relatively simple task difficult to accomplish.”<sup>29</sup> By perpetually creating systems wherein every detail is accounted for, every process is systematized and made independent of any particular worker’s skill set, franchise logic subsumes all of the control and knowledge into its administrative and management core. The irony is that this system of management, which seeks to automate every process and transaction, is

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 77.

actually counterproductive because it hinders the very affect that it seeks to market as experience in the exertion of total control. The goal behind this regulation, as mentioned, is the imposition of absolute uniformity between nodes in the chain; however, as Leidner argues, “Whereas routinization is intended in part to insure that outputs of uniform quality are produced, the goal of uniformity is itself problematic in interactive work. Since good service is often equated with ‘personal service,’ standardization may necessarily undercut quality in human interactions.”<sup>30</sup>

### **A Genealogy of Café Labour**

Having engaged in a brief discussion of the role of affect in service transactions, it is now useful to conduct a brief genealogy of café and barista labour in order to see the emergence of affect as a marketable aspect of coffee service. This short history of those who have prepared our coffee will outline what aspects of the café experience have been foregrounded in the numerous forms that coffee shops have taken in order to better illustrate how and why the present example is derived and distinct from these past forms and to highlight the consequences of the organizational promotion of affective transfers.

The earliest restaurants were attached to hotels and catered to travelers who had literally nowhere else to go for a meal. The service therein was rudimentary at best—in many the clientele was charged with the preparation of their own meals, while in others “innkeepers, men or women, often simply put punch bowl or platter on a table and let people

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<sup>29</sup> Bradach, *Franchise Organizations*, 96.

<sup>30</sup> Leidner, “Rethinking Questions of Control,” 32.

help themselves.”<sup>31</sup> The majority of “servers” in these establishments were the proprietors, their families and slaves, and the introduction of wage labour in hospitality, as in other industries, made a much later entrance.<sup>32</sup> Early coffee houses were similarly operated by proprietors and their families, and in England they were assisted by formal apprentices. The late seventeenth century “penny university” employed “drawers,” white-aproned apprentices who served coffee, trained in its preparation and performed other miscellaneous services such as running errands and messages for the clientele. The “drawers” worked as formal apprentices to the trade and were bound both to their employers and to their guild. By the golden era of the British coffee house, the guild system was rapidly deteriorating, and for many of the drawers the work “was often no more than a form of badly paid labour with long working hours.”<sup>33</sup> As a rather interesting aside, the drawers at British coffee houses produced one of the distinguishing features of contemporary hospitality labour: the gratuity. Drawers often performed various small tasks for customers, and for this the custom was established of hanging a small brass box in the coffee house branded “To Insure Promptness” (TIP), in which the clientele could deposit a few coins for prompt and courteous service.<sup>34</sup>

While the patronage of early British coffee houses was limited to men, women were often employed and, in many cases, were in fact their proprietors.<sup>35</sup> Increasingly, proprietors’ daughters were engaged as bar tenders, according more strenuous and skilled work to the drawers. As the only women allowed in the establishment, these girls were often considered

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<sup>31</sup> Owings, *Hey Waitress!*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> See Reich, *The Future of Success*, 91-5.

<sup>33</sup> Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 113.

<sup>34</sup> Dicum & Luttinger, *The Coffee Book*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Several of the first coffee houses in North America were maintained by widows (Allen, *The Devil’s Cup*, 203-4), as were many of their British contemporaries (Ellis, *The Penny Universities*, 176-180).

to be its social highlights; however, like early bar tenders at inns and taverns, young women who worked in coffee houses were considered to be morally tainted, and the profession was considered not much above that of prostitution. While such characterizations were in most cases unwarranted, there were some coffee houses that were used as rendezvous points for prostitutes. For example, a London widow named Moll King took over the operation of her erstwhile husband's coffee shop, which she operated as a brothel and gambling den.<sup>36</sup> The link between prostitution and female hospitality workers is a recurrent one, also associated with server professions even in twentieth century America. Owings (2002) suggests that this has much to do with the practice of tipping, which is often a reward given for friendly or overtly flirtatious behaviour. For example, a report on waitressing and morality by the Juvenile Protection Agency in 1912 warns against the slippery slope of young women accepting money from the men they serve:

A young girl who under any other circumstances would not dream of accepting money from a man will accept it in the guise of a tip. In the hands of a vicious man this tip establishes between him and the girl a relation of subserviency and patronage which may easily be made the beginning of improper attentions. The most conscientious girl, dependent upon tips to eke out her slender wage, finds it difficult to determine just where the line of propriety is crossed.<sup>37</sup>

Tipping was innovated in seventeenth century coffee houses, but its financial import for café employees today is significantly less than in other hospitality services. In restaurants, gratuities often compose the majority of service revenue, while tips in chain cafés are non-obligatory, usually tossed into a bowl left by the cash register. In the chains, at least—versus smaller independents that often have table service and printed reminders that tips are welcome—there is no notice reminding the clientele to tip, nor are the employees allowed to

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<sup>36</sup> Ellis, *The Penny Universities*, 179; Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 110-112.

encourage tipping. All money thereby earned is distributed evenly between everyone working during a given shift. At the McGill College Second Cup, the average customer would tip approximately twenty cents, with about half of the patrons leaving no tip at all and a few as much as two or three dollars. The tips, which vary widely between shifts, are distributed between anywhere between two and six co-workers and, generally work out to an augmentation of about a dollar per hour worked, on average. Tipping still accrues greater income for the workers than those engaged in fast food service or at doughnut shops, who generally receive no tips at all. At Tim Horton's coffee shops, employees are allowed to receive tips but not to acknowledge them, for example by leaving out the standard tip bowl used by the baristi, so the fact that tipping is encouraged by leaving out a cappuccino bowl by the counter suggests a difference between luxury cafés and fast food.

As to the actual preparation of coffee, most establishments roasted their beans on the premises until the early twentieth century, and the subsequent preparation of the coffee itself was a delicate matter of institutional pride.<sup>37</sup> In many cafés, the proprietors published broadsheets outlining the methods used to prepare coffee, outlining the virtues of coffee consumption, its medicinal properties and describing the traditional Ottoman methods of its preparation. These broadsheets were largely modeled after or directly copied from one created for the first coffee house by proprietor Pasqua Rosée and his patron Daniel Edwards.<sup>38</sup> Thus, it was at the very first coffee house that the tradition of foregrounding the ethnic identity of coffee's origination as a marketing practice began. In Paris, for example, coffee was introduced by a Turkish ambassador, Aga Soliman, whose opulent coffee sittings

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Owings, *Hey Waitress!*, 14-15.

<sup>38</sup> Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 119-120

outdid even the plush affairs of his contemporary, King Louis XIV. The posh parties of Aga Soliman created a fetish for all things Turkish—fabrics, aesthetic flourishes, and of course, coffee itself—in late seventeenth-century Paris. Thus, it seems that at its very earliest presentations into Western society, coffee was fetishized for its being grown abroad and closely associated with the cultural signifiers of its country of origin.<sup>40</sup>

When coffee was served in homes, the beans were generally roasted, prepared and served by women. In nineteenth-century America, coffee beans were mostly bought green at the general store, then roasted and ground at home before being boiled in preparation for service.<sup>41</sup> Mass-producing roasters were innovated in the mid-nineteenth century, and by the 1930s in America most coffee was roasted and distributed by a handful of companies for sale in grocery stores, while Europeans continued to prepare their beans at home until well into the 1950s.<sup>42</sup> Because of the monopoly on roasting facilities and procedural knowledge, this process, which had initially been an artisanal craft that distinguished the institution that served the bean, disintegrated into an industry dominated by cost-cutting and product adulteration. The four American roasters and processors who controlled 75% of the coffee trade “raced to the bottom” by substituting cheaper beans, under-roasting to retain water weight and introducing other cost-cutting measures in order to reap the greatest profits from their production.<sup>43</sup> It was the large producers’ inattention to quality over the bottom line that

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>40</sup> Allen, *The Devil’s Cup*, 145

<sup>41</sup> Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Dicum & Luttinger, *The Coffee Book*, 122; Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 51, 268. Pendergrast recounts a definitive history of the evolution of the American coffee trade, detailing the inter-corporate competitions for market share that led to the eventual domination of Arbuckle’s, Folger’s, Maxwell House and the handful of brands that still command the lion’s share of grocery store shelves. In particular, he attends to the packaging and marketing maneuvers that established these brands as such.

<sup>43</sup> Dicum & Luttinger, *The Coffee Book*, 123-32; Fry “Starbucks Coffee,” 179.

precipitated the emergence of “specialty” coffees in the late 1960s, as consumers demanded better quality and a market emerged for slightly higher-priced, independently produced connoisseur commodities.<sup>44</sup>

While there have long been dedicated coffee houses in Europe and North America, coffee by the turn of the twentieth century was standard menu fare in restaurants, roadside stops and even taverns. The restaurant industry experienced an exponential growth in patronage in the 1950s, as people increasingly found themselves away from home at mealtimes, and this expansion included the rapid proliferation of fast food outlets, including a cadre of coffee and pastry shops that provided more or less decent coffee at reasonable prices.<sup>45</sup> The Open Kettle, later changed to Dunkin’ Donuts, opened in 1948 and was one of the first chains of any kind to begin franchising, but there were manifold others: Googie’s, Coffee Dan’s, Herbert’s, CoffeeTime, Tim Horton’s and so on.<sup>46</sup> The chain coffee shops, like their fast food contemporaries, catered—and continue to cater—to a primarily working class clientele, and they lined North American roadways with “brash, plastic-and-chrome, neon-and-glass outlets [that] served the car culture and possessed distinctly un-Italian names.” While for the most part the coffees served therein were found “in a paper cup and diluted to the tastes of the time,” according to Pendergrast, the most successful among them, Dunkin’

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<sup>44</sup> For example, this era also saw the emergence of numerous North American microbreweries and beer connoisseurship, as well as the introduction of vegetarian and ethnic specialty foods. See Allen, *The Devil’s Cup*, 224.

<sup>45</sup> Reiter, *Making Fast Food*, 21; Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, 13-30.

<sup>46</sup> Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 271; Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, 95.

Donuts, was remarkable for its being among the first brands of whole-bean *Arabica* coffee made available on a large scale to middle-class American consumers.<sup>47</sup>

Generally known as coffee or “donut” [*sic*] shops, these stores are spatially organized in a manner akin to their fast food relatives, with a counter for ordering and paying and a large seating area where customers can carry and consume their food and drinks. As is the case in fast food restaurants, customers are charged with much of the maintenance of this seating area, and large garbage bins are clearly laid out to indicate that they must dispose of their waste before leaving.<sup>48</sup> The interactive service staffs in donut shops work behind the counter except to make cleaning forays into the eating area, and their responsibilities include brewing coffee, serving food and other beverages, charging payment at the cash register and generally maintaining the store. In short, this is precisely the same as fast food interactive service workers.<sup>49</sup> Baked goods are either prepared in a separate kitchen behind the counter, or, as is increasingly the case, shipped to smaller franchises from a central kitchen at the local flagship outlet.<sup>50</sup> Like fast food, the baked goods served in donut shops are standardized through procedural regulations, with set recipes and preparation guidelines that occlude the need for highly skilled employees. The donut shop uses a heavily divided system of labour, with front and back personnel engaging in very different work flows.

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<sup>47</sup> Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 471. At the time, the majority of grocery store coffee was using *Robusta* beans, a cheaper and more easily produced species that produces a lighter, bitterer cup and is generally considered by connoisseurs to be inferior to the *Arabica* blends.

<sup>48</sup> Leidner, “Rethinking Questions of Control,” 37; Reiter, *Making Fast Food*, 86; Michael St-Germain, *Sociability and The Coffee Shack: Testing Oldenburg’s Concept of the Third Place*. (M.A. Thesis) (Ottawa: Carleton University, 2001), 102-3.

<sup>49</sup> See Reiter, *Making Fast Food*, 75-111.

<sup>50</sup> Starbucks, Timothy’s and the Second Cup all buy baked goods from regional independent suppliers so that the goods are consistent in any given city but change across the chain. Tim Horton’s baked goods are made in one flagship location then shipped out to smaller franchises, while Krispy Kreme at present creates

While it is the front-of-house counter workers who deal directly with customers and supply the service-industry warmth, the donut chains have consistently foregrounded the back of house, the baking kitchen, in their marketing. Dunkin' Donuts, by far the largest American chain, ran advertising campaigns for over forty years featuring their spokesman Fred the Baker repeating his tagline, "Time to make donuts" and has dubbed itself "America's finest donut shop" even though much of its revenue is derived from coffee sales.<sup>51</sup> Krispy Kreme, a large chain that has spread north from the Carolinas since the late 1930s began as a single outlet "which sold doughnuts through a hole in the wall," and this chain has taken the present-day foregrounding of the baking kitchen a step further. Krispy Kreme has installed glass walls between the kitchen and storefront which face the baking area, so customers can watch machinery blend, knead, form, bake and glaze doughnuts while they wait, and coffee is pushed entirely into the background.<sup>52</sup> Incidentally, the donut shops, those Dunkin' Donuts, Tim Hortons, CoffeeTimes, and Krispy Kremes scattered across North America, still sell more coffee than the specialty roaster chains such as Starbucks, Van Houttes and the Second Cup.<sup>53</sup>

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all of its baked goods on-site in the retail space but has discussed switching over to the more streamlined Tim Horton's-style distribution model.

<sup>51</sup> Theresa Howard, "Dunkin' etcetera" in *Brandweek*. New York: Jan 11 1999. Vol. 40, Iss. 2, p. 16; William C. Symonds, "Dunkin' Donuts Is on a Coffee Rush; The chain offers a dose of Starbucks style, and sales soar" in *Business Week* New York: March 16 1998, Iss. 3569, p. 107; Karen Benezra, "Looking beyond donuts" in *Brandweek* New York: Jan 13 1997. Vol. 38, Iss. 2; p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> Karen Bartlett, "Rise and fall of a doughnut" in *New Statesman* Vol. 17, 837 (London: Dec 13 2004), 51.

<sup>53</sup> Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 423. Following the monolithic success of Starbucks and growth in the market for specialty coffees, brands such as Dunkin' Donuts and Tim Hortons saw their sales stagnating and began to foreground the front-of house, or service counters. They also began changing their décor and creating hot and cold espresso-based drinks created by barista-free automated machines. See Kate Bonamici, "Face Off" in *Fortune*. New York: March 22 2004. Vol. 149, Iss. 6: p. 50; William C. Symonds, David Kiley and Stanley Holmes "A Java Jolt for Dunkin' Donuts" in *Business Week* Iss. 3913 (New York: Dec 20, 2004), 61.

The specialty coffee shops provide the same basic service—selling coffee, pastries and a few minutes of repose—but these subscribe to an entirely different ethos. The specialty chains are more often found in high-traffic pedestrian areas, such as downtown cores, malls, and nestled within other businesses such as bookstores and galleries.<sup>54</sup> Where Starbucks and crew seek to provide an “affordable luxury” for those who can afford to pay between two and five dollars for a beverage, donut shops are explicitly geared to middle- and working-class audiences, with beverages hovering between half and three quarters of that price. However, the most imposing difference between the specialty coffee chains and donut shops is their orientation toward labour. Most of the café jobs are by and large experientially the same as those in fast food and donut shops, with the exception of one new position: the barista. The terms of barista labour demand affective interaction with café patrons; as a training manual from *The Second Cup* reminds,

Le service est le domaine où le Conseiller en café peut vraiment se démarquer. Les Conseillers en café sont ceux qui proposent le service rapide et chaleureux auxquels s’attendent les gens qui fréquentent un café Second Cup. In n’en tient qu’à eux de sourire et de s’amuser, tout en s’efforçant de satisfaire, voire même de dépasser les attentes des clients. C’est là la base de l’engagement de Second Cup envers ses clients. Et vous seul pouvez concrétiser cet engagement. Il est donc bon de se glisser dans le peau d’un client pour mieux comprendre ce qu’est le service.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 248. These areas had also traditionally been the main venues for smaller independent cafés. Starbucks has frequently been accused of poaching the clientele of existing independent cafés (not to mention of cannibalizing its own outlets), for example by buying their leases out from under them or by setting up shop in close proximity to existing popular cafés. See, for example, Klein, *No Logo*, 136; Hal Niedzviecki and Darren Wershler-Henry, *The Original Canadian City Dweller’s Almanac: Facts, rants, anecdotes and unsupported assertions for urban residents* (Toronto: Viking Canada), 45-6.

<sup>55</sup> Second Cup, *Manuel de Conseiller en café*, 4: “Service is the domain where Coffee Agents can really distinguish themselves. Coffee Agents are the ones who supply the fast and warm service that Second Cup customers expect. They need to do no more than smile and to have fun, to try hard to please, in order to surpass clients’ expectations. It’s the basis of Second Cup’s commitment to customer service. And only you can make this commitment real. It is good, then, to slide into the customers’ skin to better understand what service is.” (my translation)

In the luxury café, service gravitates around the barista; as Starbucks chairman Howard Schultz explains, “The tone is set by our *baristas*, who custom-make each espresso drink and explain the origins of different coffees. Some of them come to Starbucks with no more skills than my father had, yet they’re the ones who create the magic.”<sup>56</sup> By giving attention to staff training in product knowledge, displaying the productive work of the baristas to the public, and frequently addressing the place of “partners” in company literature, Starbucks and its imitators foreground the barista as the centerpiece of café labour.

The term “barista,” is of Italian origin, imported alongside much of the cafés’ exoticised European culture, but the job itself is very different than that of its continental kissing-cousin. In Europe, this title is given after years of training and official certification, and the work is still considered an artisanal craft that for most is a career, rather than a transitional position. The average age of an Italian barista is thirty-eight, for example, while at Starbucks it is twenty-six.<sup>57</sup> The artistry of the vocation is illustrated by the practice of staging international barista competitions where contestants are tested on speed, quality, originality of designs (insignias created on the foam topping an espresso) and the taste of “signature drinks,” made from recipes innovated by the baristas themselves.<sup>58</sup> The timed and regulated movements of the chains, of course, leave no room for such innovations.

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<sup>56</sup> Schultz and Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 5-6.

<sup>57</sup> Morgan Ian Adams, “Art of the espresso,” in *Enterprise-Bulletin* (Collingwood: Feb 25 2005), A1; Judith Blake, “Barista brews her way to the top” in *Knight Ridder Tribune Business News* (Washington: March 14 2005), p.2; Bollier, “Employees as Partners in Growth,” 219.

<sup>58</sup> Blake, “Barista brews her way to the top,” p.1; Saunders, “A Champ in the City of Coffees,” A8; Debbie L. Sklar, “Trained coffee makers, barisiti, take pride in their caffeinated careers,” in *Knight Ridder Tribune Business News* (Washington: July 12 2004), p. 1.

Italian barista culture heavily influenced the formation of Starbucks while the chain was in its infancy, particularly after Schultz visited Milan and was impressed by the social role of the Italian baristas, with whom he was fascinated:

Behind the counter, a tall, thin man greeted me cheerfully, “*Buon giorno!*” as he pressed down on a metal bar and a huge hiss of steam escaped. He handed a tiny porcelain demitasse of espresso to one of the three people who were standing elbow-to-elbow at the counter. Next came a handcrafted cappuccino, topped with a head of perfect white foam. The barista moved so gracefully that it looked as though he was grinding coffee beans, pulling shots of espresso, and steaming milk at the same time, all while conversing merrily with his customers. It was great theater.<sup>59</sup>

However, as one critic notes,

Coffee traditionalists take issue with the company’s use of the title, the Italian word for espresso barman. In Italy, career baristas, in crisp white shirts and tuxedos, work for years before earning the designation, and they’re paid \$40,000 to \$60,000 for their skills. Most of their American equivalents start with little training at a McJob wage. Starbucks gives its employees 24 hours of training and pays a little better.<sup>60</sup>

Starbucks alone trains some six thousand baristi each year, and, as the same critic argues, the company “has followed the Italians in creating a hero culture for the barista.”<sup>61</sup> This is a particularly contentious use of the title considering that the barista work performed at the McDonaldized café is de-skilled and repetitive work and can only be done according to the strictly laid-out guidelines of the company. A Starbucks espresso shot must be poured between 18 and 23 seconds and milk heated between 140 and 170 degrees Fahrenheit,<sup>62</sup> and

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<sup>59</sup> Schultz and Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 50. Schultz was not the only coffee entrepreneur to become enchanted by the Italian espresso culture. One of the earliest American chains of cafés was a successful group of six stores opened by Alice Foote MacDougall in New York in the 1920s, which had Italian names and décor that mimicked various famed piazzas, while the espresso bar genre was very trendy with London youth in the 1950s (Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 159-60; Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 225-238).

<sup>60</sup> Natalie MacLean, “There’s a lot to learn, as one writer finds out, in the training of a Starbucks barista. During her training, she ground, tamped, pulled, stamped, dumped, poured, swore, frothed, served and smiled. Getting it right requires not only good deltoids, but also patient craftsmanship” in *CanWest News* (Don Mills: Aug 24 2004), p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> MacLean, “There’s a lot to learn...,” 2.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. At the Second Cup, which uses slightly more automated machines than Starbucks’ old ones, which are currently being phased out in favour of even more automated equipment, baristas have only to

with the introduction of new “automated espresso machines that tamp and pour espresso shots on their own,” even what remaining skills the baristi do have will be completely phased out.<sup>63</sup> The Taylorization of tasks leaves no room for innovation, while automated procedures limit workers’ ability to work creatively, so they have neither the time nor the skills for invention.

The coffee service bars are arranged on a small dais with a low-cut counter, so that the workers engaged behind them are visible to the clientele. By thus exposing the workers’ exertions, the chains create a spectacle out of the productive work itself, a display not that much different than the “great theatre” that Schultz found in Italian baristas or the doughnut machines at Krispy Kreme that entertain customers while they wait. Jettisoning the white shirts and bow-ties of their predecessors, the Starbucks baristas in their polo T-shirts and green aprons have grown to become distinct cultural figures. The way that the barista has been taken up in popular culture demonstrates the success of the chains in culturally establishing the position by foregrounding and fetishizing the barista as a central element of the “Starbucks experience.” *Playboy*, for example, issued a “Women of Starbucks”-themed issue featuring off-work baristas modeling nude or in their distinctive green work aprons, with the bare-breasted mermaid of Starbucks replaced by the hot pink Playboy bunny insignia. Meanwhile, the self-described “Outfitter of Popular Culture” Archie MacPhee manufactures a barista action figure, Nico:

She’s the barista who pulls your morning espresso. No other barista in town makes a latte like Nico. Her beans are always freshly ground, she never tamps the filter basket too tight and her foam is perfect: thick and decadent, like a pillow of edible clouds. Each 5-1/4”

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grind the beans of a specific roast at a set grind, tamp the grounds and press a pre-set button that measures the size of the shot for a given drink size.

<sup>63</sup> Eli Saunders, “A Champ In the City of Coffees,” A8.

tall hard plastic Barista Action Figure has movable arms and legs and comes with two interchangeable heads and two different sized cups (tall and grande) that she can hold in her hand.”<sup>64</sup>

This figure, again, sports the green apron minus the logo, and Nico’s productive role is documented both in the advertising copy and by the various accoutrements of barista work that accompany the doll. In a sense, the barista has been branded by the cafés, which is what makes these cultural references to the work culturally significant. While neither of these artifacts were created or condoned by the Starbucks Corporation, they illustrate the degree to which the specialty café barista has been successfully established as a cultural icon and is able to serve as a metonymic signifier for café chains.

### **Starbucks and the Production of Authentic Warmth**

Gramsci has argued that the motive behind Ford’s offering some of its workers the five dollar day was in fact the desire to govern and rationalize their leisure time and that the amelioration of their lifestyles was a temporary measure intended to create a “new type of man,” one that was bonded to the company through pay incentives and regulated by the additional monitory controls that accompanied them.<sup>65</sup> Gramsci’s theory is relevant in discussions of specialty cafés because Starbucks has similarly introduced a pay increase in order to forge a new kind of bond between workers and the corporate organization that employs them, with the ultimate goal of creating a new kind of worker. Starbucks offers its employees numerous benefits in addition to their base salary, which is marginally higher than

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<sup>64</sup> Barbara Clements, “Starbucks Posts Higher Profits, Laughs Off Playboy Issue Featuring Baristas” in *Knight Ridder Tribune Business News* (Washington: July 25 2003), p. 1. The doll image and description are available at [www.mcphee.com/bigindex/current/10975.html](http://www.mcphee.com/bigindex/current/10975.html).

<sup>65</sup> Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 297.

the pay rates for other chain outlets. These benefits include a free pound of coffee every week, access for some to optional benefits programs and, of course, the stock options.

Starbucks began to offer its employees stock options while the company was still privately held, that is, before it was incorporated as a publicly exchanged stock. The first employees to receive Bean Stock were not granted actual shares, but rather “the option to buy, in the future, a certain number of shares for a price set at the time the options are granted.”<sup>66</sup> When the share options were granted, the internal term for Starbucks interactive personnel was changed from “employees” to “partners.” Shortly thereafter, the company went public. The employees who held stock options made a great deal of money and the corporation even more. However, by putting the company’s stock on the open exchange, the corporation also made itself accountable to the desire of the stockholders—employees or not—to be profitable, ultimately surrendering much of the control over the company’s bottom line to an aggregate group of stockowners rather than an identifiable body of administrative workers employed by the company itself.

Furthermore, the financial benefits accrued by workers through their ownership of stock became a marketable aspect of the company. As authentic warmth and hospitality become central premises for the marketing of services, the genuine well-being of employees also becomes a point that brands can emphasize and promote. To illustrate this point, I will briefly detour through another recent labour enrichment scheme created by an American car manufacturer. In 1983, General Motors publicized its development of a new line of cars that would make use of a novel organizational model, and the first Saturn rolled off the assembly line in 1990. Advertisements for the cars had already been running for several years, the

majority describing the development of the Spring Hill, Tennessee plant and the new model of working contract deployed to circumvent the labour tensions associated with automobile production. The spots announced the innovation of a partnership between the union, workers and manufacturer, made manifest in a shop floor where employees would have a say in everything from automobile designs and productive machinery to what would be served for lunch, and they often prominently featured the union contract in print advertisements. One commentator notes that,

Successful brands these days match up with personal “tastes” connected less to consumers’ age or status than their personal identity. Saturn is GM’s attempt to integrate the new logic of marketing. Its customers aren’t defined by a single age or income bracket, but by a sensibility... They like the fact that Saturn has taken the time to give single workers that most precious of liberal possessions, an individual voice.<sup>67</sup>

The Saturn line was marketed in part to liberal consumers who were concerned about the working conditions of its employees given the long history of alienated labour in automobile production, and it did so by publicizing the job satisfaction of the employees themselves.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Saturn could market its cars based on workers’ happiness whether personnel were satisfied or not, because very few consumers would ever have the chance to interact with them.

Starbucks also highlights the happy working conditions of its employees, or “partners.” The company publishes pamphlets recounting Schultz’s vision that, “there is no

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<sup>66</sup> Bollier, “Employees as Partners in Growth,” 218.

<sup>67</sup> Brishen Rogers, “The New Myth of the Happy Worker” pp. 41-50 in *The Baffler* No. 12 (1999); 49-50.

<sup>68</sup> In fact, the majority of accounts, including the one cited above, have attended to the breakdown and bitter union battles that actually took place at the Spring Hill plant. Many have alleged that new cooperation between the unions and manufacturers actually did away with eighty years of progress eked out by the unions, effectively dodging workplace safety regulations, lowering the workers’ base pay and elected shop floor stewards. See John Bissell, “A sad end for the Saturn experiment?” in *Brandweek*, 41, 45, New York: Nov 20 2000, 26; Lindsay Chappell “Workers worry Saturn isn’t special, after all” in

more precious commodity than the relationship of trust and confidence a company has with its employees. If people believe management is not fairly sharing the rewards, they will feel alienated.”<sup>69</sup> Industry insiders have praised Schultz’s plan, for his having “realized early on that employee motivation and loyalty are critical to maintaining an edge in the competitive retail market;”<sup>70</sup> and that, “Schultz, by empowering his employees, was able to achieve a customer service level that he believes is the force driving success at Starbucks. Employees are willing to work harder, says Schultz. They feel more a part of the organization because they have a direct stake in the outcome of their labours.”<sup>71</sup> Like the GM managers that conceived of Saturn, Schultz acknowledges that the competitive edge has become the genuine happiness of the workers themselves. As Schultz puts it, “If the fate of your business is in the hands of a twenty-year-old part-time worker who goes to college or pursues acting on the side, can you afford to treat him or her as expendable?”<sup>72</sup>

The foregrounding of the barista and frequent commentary on the novelty of Starbucks’ staff management practices seeks to illustrate to consumers that Starbucks is a company that cares. The productive work of the barista is publicized so that these are the only workers whose treatment the companies are accountable for. Workers who have the impression that the company cares for their well-being and who have a direct stake on the corporation’s profitability built into stock options are more likely to identify with the organization, so that they are less likely to leave and more likely to consistently produce an

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*Automotive News* Vol. 72, Iss. 5777 (Detroit: Jul 27 1998), 50; Morgan O. Reynolds, “Unions and Jobs: The U.S. Auto Industry” pp. 103-127 in *Journal of Labour Research* Vol. 7, Iss. 2 (Fairfax: Spring 1986).

<sup>69</sup> Schultz & Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 57.

<sup>70</sup> Bollier, “Employees as Partners in Growth,” 211.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, Schultz & Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 135.

<sup>72</sup> Schultz & Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It*, 125.

affective display worthy of their lofty titles. The company is then able to market their valued employees as genuine examples of the happy, authentically affective worker in order to target a certain kind of consumer, an approach that, as Fry notes, works well with “people who possess not economic capital but a good deal of what Bourdieu refers to as ‘cultural capital.’”<sup>73</sup> So, the company can simultaneously use its human resource policies as advertising fodder and can breed a new kind of worker who are bonded to and identify with the company with whom they are productive “partners.”

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<sup>73</sup> Fry, “Starbucks Coffee,” 181. See also Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

## Conclusion

Café chains are premised upon their consistent reproduction of the same experience in numerous locations, so organizations must put multiple and redundant systems into place in order to ensure their homogeneity across the chain. Foremost among these are Fordism and Taylorism, two systems that emphasize rational, efficient routines of highly segmented tasks, so that each step in the productive process is done the “one best way.” Fordism has the additional benefit of being sufficiently automated and de-skilled that no one worker is indispensable to the smooth functioning of the system as a whole, so that café workers can come and go without disrupting the smooth flow of service.

The assembly line work of Fordism is often dehumanizing and unsatisfying for workers, and even in a highly automated workflow high employee turnover rates are expensive and unproductive. Organizations that employ Fordist techniques have had to innovate systems to bond workers to the company, such as benefits plans, wage increases and stock options. A company can also try to secure a greater commitment from its employees by investing more training in them; in the cafés, this training often takes the form of product knowledge, which serves the additional benefit of preparing café workers to train their customers how to taste and appreciate the products these cafés have to offer.

The training of coffee connoisseurship is only one of many different skills that customers must be taught in order to properly “use” specialty coffee houses, and others include conforming to spatial regulations, procedural practices and social etiquettes that are unique to specialty café settings. While employees are, of course, engaged in these

exchanges, they participate in an entirely different way. For example, while employees are obliged to interact with café patrons in a warm and friendly way, they are not encouraged to engage in lengthy conversations or other sociable exchanges with the clientele, and workers are closely monitored to ensure that this and other at-work prohibitions are obeyed. This restriction is particularly compelling given the focus in service industry work upon employees' genuine warmth and affectivity, from which café personnel are certainly not exempt. In fact, the pleasant demeanors of café workers and particularly baristi are persistently foregrounded in company literature and displayed as productive theatre in stores.

The baristi have essentially been branded by the cafés that employ them. They have been integrated as an abstract body of workers into the corporate image. Further, at Starbucks in particular, the company's attention to the positive and "unique labour environment" that they provide uses these labour relations as marketing material, effectively branding even workers' satisfaction. Baristi and other interactive service workers serve their patrons on behalf of the corporate organization and have been cast as metonymic signifiers of them in popular culture. Additionally, many of the facets of café culture that are highlighted in café promotional materials, including the baristi but also the ways in which isolated aspects of their products are emphasized, serve to highlight the productive exertions of interactive workers in the consuming countries at the expense of manual labourers in producing countries.

Specialty cafés have been subjected to a wide array of critiques, of which some aspects of the present study can be considered a part. Starbucks in particular has been

castigated for allegedly using unfair expansion methods such as “lease-poaching” from successful independent cafés; denounced for its ubiquity and uniformity; criticized for employing exoticizing and racist discourses in product marketing; accused of adulterating its products with sugar and genetically modified and unsafe milk; condemned for offering only a modicum of fair trade and environmentally sound shade-grown and organic coffee; charged with union-busting; upbraided for lowering employee wages at times of record-breaking profitability and forcing staff to work part-time to avoid giving benefits. The chain also has the dubious distinction of having numerous large web sites and chat rooms dedicated specifically to its denigration.<sup>1</sup>

It is easy to read these criticisms as simply examples of bashing the industry leader, a trend evidenced by the countless social critics who attack the Starbucks, Gaps, McDonalds and Coca-Colas of the world not only because they might be bad but above all because they are big. Particularly because the present account was principally motivated by my own disappointment with an entire industry, I have tried to keep in mind Stewart Lee Allen’s assessment of Starbucks when he says, “Sure, they’re a megacorporation destroying hundreds of mom-and-pop cafés. But that’s just something large corporations do.”<sup>2</sup> While my own critiques have necessarily been directed toward the specific organizations that operate specialty cafés, it is clear that many of the means and modes by which they operate are a product of their participation as growing players in the market of monopoly capital. The people who administer these corporate

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<sup>1</sup> See Dicum and Luttinger, *The Coffee Book*, 155; Ellis, *The Coffee House*, 254-5; James, “Justice and java”; Klein, *No Logo*, 135-9; Niedzviecki and Wershler-Henry *The Original Canadian City Dweller’s Almanac*, 45-6; Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 379.

<sup>2</sup> Allen, *The Devil’s Cup*, 224.

organizations are not monsters, merely capitalists, and many of the systems that they have introduced are no doubt genuinely motivated by a desire to ameliorate the working conditions of interactive service employees.

It is in no small part the immensity of these companies and the business strategies that they have used to become such colossal market forces that have engendered many of my own and others' critiques. Even in the smaller chains, such as Café Depot or Timothy's, use the same strategies in order to better position themselves for future expansion. The Fordist and Taylorist streamlining of work processes, for example, standardizes organizational systems with the express intention of neutralizing the idiosyncrasies of human exertions, and broad human resource initiatives regulated by universal corporate regulations have supplanted negotiations with workers as individuals. The work that this rationalization produces is monotonous, abject and exhausting, and all of the conceptual and creative work has been accorded to the organizational administration so that there is no room for employees' creative engagement. Worse, the majority of these companies are publicly incorporated, so that much of the bottom line of the organization is determined by an anonymous aggregate of stockholders, and while the corporate bureaucracy still administers the chain's operation, they are obliged to do so in a way that is profitable and increases these shareholders' investments. Against the immensity and opaqueness of café organizations, employees have little room to dialogue as equals about their working conditions.

Because the principal site of my analysis has been the points of convergence between employees and organizations, much of this discussion has focused upon the

standardization and uniformity of the chains, often at the expense of the many ways in which each node in the chain is somehow distinct. While café chains do provide a cohesive experience across the chain, each outlet is, of course, staffed and operated by individuals, and the clientele who patronize any one location have a great deal to do with the overall character of the place. However, because of my attention to organizational systems, the conclusions that my analysis has produced necessarily exaggerate general or universal truths at the expense of localized particularities. One such omission has been the scanty treatment of managers and franchisees. Management, while exercising an authority that is heavily circumscribed by the mandates and regulations of the organization, still constitute an important factor in the quality of workers' quotidian labour experiences. Because managers man the surveillance and disciplinary apparatus of organizational outlets, the strictness or informality of these functionaries has a profound effect on the quality of work. Likewise, I have not given an ethnographic account of the individual workers themselves, preferring largely to attend to the larger structures.

Furthermore, it seems that the nature of my conclusions and my motivation for writing this study beg some discussion of strategies that café chain workers can use to react to and dissent against the authoritarian dictates of the organizations. One such strategy that I have discussed at some length is unionization, which seems to offer one solution for collective action that has the potential to stand up to the large and powerful chains. While unions today are certainly problematic in and of themselves, they are further complicated in the present example due to the composition of café staffs. The majority of café workers are young, mostly part-time, and they often view their café jobs

as strictly transitional positions to augment their income en route to more permanent professional employment, and this kind of engagement elicits little invitation to engage in the arduous battle that a unionization drive entails.

The next possible solution, which I have also addressed, is simply quitting. In many ways, the industry has systematized itself in no small part in response to this strategy, so that the organizations are sufficiently automated to weather a high turnover of disgruntled employees. Quitting—and forsaking employment income—is not an outlet that is always feasibly available to low income service industry workers, even part-time employees or those with other sources of income. So perhaps a more useful approach to addressing café chain worker strategies would be to look at those that allow the workers to maintain their positions, while also reasserting their individual dignity.

One such strategy is put forward by Robin Leidner, a theorist who is particularly attentive to the consequences of emotional labour in the service industry. She proposes that the routinization of service tasks may in fact provide a form of escape that workers can use to disengage from their affective labour. Leidner posits that, “the routine provided workers with some benefits. It gave them a clear sense of what was required of them, thus limiting the demands that could be placed on them and making them feel confident that they could do their jobs.”<sup>3</sup> This approach is certainly something that many workers—including myself—have done and continue to do, but it is really more a coping strategy than a program for change or dissent. If anything, Leidner’s suggestion would further subject the worker to the authoritarianism of the organization by removing their very attention and humanity from at-work engagement.

A better approach seems to be presented in the notion of a tactic, in the sense of the term as it has been deployed by Michel de Certeau. He calls tactics the “subtle, stubborn, resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations. People have to make do with what they have.”<sup>4</sup> Such tactics, as de Certeau acknowledges, are the maneuvers of the weak and marginal who are unable to change their lot and must find ways to “make do” within existing structures. De Certeau himself suggests one such tactic of interest to the present discussion, which he calls *la perruque*, where,

the worker’s own work [is] disguised as work for his employer. It differs from pilfering in that nothing of material value is stolen. It differs from absenteeism in that the worker is officially on the job. *La perruque* may be as simple a matter as a secretary’s writing a love letter on “company time” or as complex as a cabinetmaker’s “borrowing” a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room....the worker who engages in *la perruque* actually diverts time (not goods, since he uses only scraps) from the factory that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit. In the very place where the machine he must serve reigns supreme, he cunningly takes pleasure....<sup>5</sup>

*La perruque* is a tactic where workers poach at-work time for engagement with their personal interests rather than company agendas, thus making their own meanings of work time. In a café, this could take numerous forms, including socializing with customers and co-workers on paid time, making oneself experimental lattes in preparation for the next international barista competition, or—my personal favourite—sneakily reading Marxist and anti-organizational literature on the job.

Another possible tactic comes from Yiannis Gabriel’s work on organizational attachment. Gabriel suggests that workers can react to normative organizational controls

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<sup>3</sup> Leidner, “Rethinking Questions of Control,” 44.

<sup>4</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

through small acts of resistance to workplace authority. He applauds opposition through details, citing minor uniform infractions and the breaking of petty rules as tactics for expressing dissent. Fineman and Gabriel argue that, “people may be rebelling even as they appear to be conforming. Pupils who wear the regulation uniform may be conforming to the rules, but by leaving the top shirt button undone, they express their resistance to them.”<sup>6</sup> Zizek has castigated these sorts of practices, arguing, for example, that this form of resistance in fact signals a greater attachment to and identification with that which subjects seek to distance themselves. He says that, “an ideological identification exerts a true hold on us precisely when we maintain an awareness that we are not fully identical to it, that there is a rich human person beneath it: ‘not all is ideology, beneath the ideological mask, I am also a human person’ is *the very form of ideology* of its ‘practical efficiency.’”<sup>7</sup>

Zizek’s dismissal of this form of dissent is valid, as these infractions are ultimately incapable of altering the conditions of labour and serve primarily to allow subjects to feel that they are dissenting without actually articulating a distinct polemic. However, something can perhaps be redeemed from Gabriel’s notion of simultaneous cooperation and dissent. For example, one possible tactic which would allow workers to maintain their position and income but to express discord with company policy is a refusal of the class distinctions that are reproduced in customers’ privilege of unilateral politeness and warmth—in other words, by refusing to give ‘good service’ by being rude

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<sup>6</sup> S. Fineman and Gabriel Yiannis, *Experiencing Organizations* (London: Sage, 1996), 87 quoted in Yiannis Gabriel, “Beyond Happy Families: A Critical Reevaluation of the Control-Identity-Resistance Triangle,” in *Human Relations* 52:2 (1999), 193.

<sup>7</sup> Slavoj Zizek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997), 21. Italics in the original.

when the situation demands it. This is not to say that workers can express some oblique polemic by being arbitrarily impolite to customers; rather, I argue that one of the central emotional strains of interactive service workers is the burden of being friendly and polite to patrons who are overtly rude or uncooperative. By refusing to give them the benefit of the perpetual service smile, workers can simultaneously undermine the organizations' claims on workers' personal warmth and can retain their individual dignities by expressing genuine rather than affected feelings in at-work interpersonal exchanges.

Zygmunt Bauman has argued that labour in contemporary society has been made "episodic," creating passing employment situations in which, "virtually all rules concerning the game of promotions and dismissals have been scrapped or tend to be altered well before the game is over, [so that] there is little chance for mutual loyalty and commitment to sprout up and take root."<sup>8</sup> In such workplace situations the assessment of rewards or consequences for positive or negative action are received individually, virtually negating the importance of communal or cooperative action by collective groups. According to Bauman, "there is hardly any stimulus to take acute and serious, let alone critical, interest in the wisdom of the common endeavor and related arrangements which are bound to be transient anyway."<sup>9</sup> Barring collective interaction, lone employees have little power to protest against the behemoth corporations that control their labour interests. The routes available for workplace amelioration, then, become tactical ones intended to improve one's own experiential lot.

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<sup>8</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 148.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

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