RETAIL SHIFT WORKERS:
THE TIMES AND RHYTHMS OF EMOTIONAL LABOUR
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Keywords: times, routinization, emotional labour, gender, alienation

Abstract
The purpose of this research is to analyse the perceptions and feelings of those who work in the shops in the context of two European metropolitan cities, Milan and London. The topic of the study is the emotional work in society which results from mass consumption and the demand of immediate satisfaction from customers. Post-Fordism and the expansion of service sector in the labour market have led to a substantial increase of young people employed in this sector, often in multinational companies of famous brands. Shift work, in holiday, on Sundays, and sometimes at night, up until only a few months ago was synonymous of factory work and blue collar workers. Today this is intertwined with the retail work, characterized by an empathic and emotional interaction between customers and those who work in a condition of immediacy. This change could describe the daily routines and social relationships of these workers outside the workplace. The aim of this study is to understand the workers’ perceptions and feelings about the times and rhythms of work and about their interactions with clients - in relation to their everyday life and free time - in particular from a gendered perspective.

The retail workers must identify with the customers and must empathize with them everyday with timing and pace of work fast and tight. Could this condition of estrangement from themselves be called alienation?

The location of these two case studies has been chosen by the times and rhythms of work and about their interactions with clients - in relation to their everyday life and free time - in particular from a gendered perspective.

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1. Empirical Level: Ethnographic Fieldwork & Qualitative Data Analysis
2. Theoretical Level: Conceptualization of a new social phenomenon

I want to observe the contraction of social times and rhythms in the shopping areas of the metropolitan cities. As well as we study the socio-economic phenomenon of the globalization, as social scientists I think that we have to study also what I called the phenomenon of “immediatization” - a process of transformation of the social times, from a long-term basis in immediacy - and the consequences of this process in the social life. This radical change could even generate in future different and riskier phenomena: the de-structuration and de-routinization of social life itself (see routinization and structuration theory in Giddens 1979 and 1984).

Research Questions
1. Do the retail shift workers perceive this kind of alienation working with customers?
2. Can they explain this phenomenon? How?
3. Do they perceive that this phenomenon is linked to the contraction of times and rhythms?
4. Can they explain this? How?
5. Do they carry out new practices of resistance or resilience to face these phenomena? How?
6. Are there gender differences in the perceptions and feelings of the retail shift workers about these phenomena? Which?
7. Which are the differences or similarities between the two different case studies, shopping streets in London and Milan?

Qualitative Methods:
3 YEARS of PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION as a shift worker in C.so B. Aires, Milan – Ethnography
+ SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS & FOCUS GROUPS
with retail shift workers in phone & clothing stores in C.so B. Aires, Milan + Oxford Street, London
-- Comparative Case Studies

References
(1990) The consequences of modernity, Stanford University Press, Stanford
Marcu, K. (1849) Lohnarbeit und Kapital, in Neue Rheinische Zeitung 5-11/04/1849
Mead, G.H. (1934) Mind, self and society from the standpoint of a social behavorist, University of Chicago Press, Chicago
Nordic Summer University Press, Stockholm

Participant Observation 2011-2014
1. Work tool!
2. Me at work on Sunday morning, 8.30 a.m.
3. Me with a customer’s doggy
4. Lunch break? Street Festival? No...Sales! 1 p.m. - Corso Buenos Aires

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