

## Studies in Urban and Social Change

### Published

- Working Bodies: Interactive Service Employment and Workplace Identities*  
Linda McDowell
- Networked Disease: Emerging Infections in the Global City*  
S. Harris Ali and Roger Keil (eds)
- Barriers and Eurocities: Free Movement and Mobility in an Integrating Europe*  
Adrian Ravell
- Urban China in Transition*  
John R. Logan (ed.)
- Getting Into Local Power: The Politics of Ethnic Minorities in British and French Cities*  
Romain Garbaye
- Cities of Europe*  
Yuri Kazepov (ed.)
- Cities, War, and Terrorism*  
Stephen Graham (ed.)
- Cities and Visitors: Regulating Tourists, Markets, and City Space*  
Lily M. Hoffman, Susan S. Fainstein, and Dennis R. Judd (eds)
- Understanding the City: Contemporary and Future Perspectives*  
John Rade and Christopher Mele (eds)
- The New Chinese City: Globalization and Market Reform*  
John R. Logan (ed.)
- Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*  
Mark Siesel and Tony Fitzmaurice (eds)
- The Social Control of Cities? A Comparative Perspective*  
Sophie Body-Gendrot
- Globalizing Cities: A New Spatial Order?*  
Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen (eds)
- Contemporary Urban Japan: A Sociology of Consumption*  
John Giammer
- Capital Culture: Gender at Work in the City*  
Linda McDowell
- Cities After Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*

\* Out of print

Gregory Andrusz, Michael Harloe, and Ivan Szelenyi (eds)

*The People's Home? Social Rental Housing in Europe and America*

Michael Harloe

*Post-Fordism*

Ash Amin (ed.)

*The Resources of Poverty: Women and Survival in a Mexican City\**

Mercedes Gonzalez de la Rocha

*Free Markets and Food Riots*

John Walton and David Seddon

*Fragmented Societies\**

Enzo Mingione

*Urban Poverty and the Underclass: A Reader\**

Enzo Mingione

### Forthcoming

*Place, Exclusion, and Mortgage Markets*

Manuel B. Aalbers

*Cities and Regions in a Global Era*

Alan Harding (ed.)

*Urban Social Movements and the State*

Margit Mayer

*Locating Neoliberalism in East Asia: Neoliberalizing Spaces in Developmental States*

Bae-Gyoon Park, Richard Child Hill, and Asato Sato (eds)

*Working Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*

Ananya Roy and Ahwa Ong (eds)

*Fighting Gentrification*

Tom Slater

*Confronting Suburbanization: Urban Decentralization in Post-Socialist Central and Eastern Europe*

Kiril Stanilov and Luděk Šykora (eds)

*Social Capital Formation in Immigrant Neighborhoods*

Min Zhou

# WORKING BODIES

INTERACTIVE SERVICE EMPLOYMENT  
AND WORKPLACE IDENTITIES

Linda McDowell

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

# Service Employment and the Commoditization of the Body

It is illiberal and servile to get the living with hand and sweat of the body.

William Alley, *The Poor Man's Library*, 1571

Work is no less valuable for the opportunity it and the human relations connected with it provide for a very considerable discharge of libidinal component impulses, narcissistic, aggressive and even erotic, than because it is indispensable for subsistence and justifies existence in a society.

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930

## Introduction: Narratives of Change

This is a book about bodies at work. It is about who does what sort of waged work in the contemporary service economies that dominate the western world. Its aim is to explore who does what, where, with whom, for whom and to whom, and with what consequences for the financial rewards and social status that accrue to different workers. Its focus is on the social division of labour, on the ways in which class, gender and ethnicity, as well as age, looks and weight, are key attributes in explaining who is employed in what sorts of work in the first decades of the new millennium. The types of work discussed are those where both the worker and the consumer are present and, in the main, where the service provided is used up at the time of the exchange. Through the lens of the workplace, the emphasis is on the sorts of embodied interactions that take place in everyday exchanges between the three sets of actors involved in these exchanges: workers, managers and clients/customers. As a consequence, the book is about a smaller and more local spatial scale than geographers are used to. Traditionally, economic geographers' scale of analysis is local or regional labour markets, although there is also a strong geography of the firm. Sociologists are more typically analysts of workplace interactions, yet they too often ignore the significance of the local, neglecting to ask what is specific and

different about the places they study. The aim here is to bring a geographical and sociological perspective together. Although the focus is the workplace – be it an individual home, the street, a shop or a hospital – through this lens, the changing national and international spatial divisions of labour that produce increasingly diverse workforces in the cities of western economies are also revealed. The examples are drawn in the main from UK workplaces, as well as from the USA, but the workers whose identities are at the heart of the book are extremely varied in their national origins.

In the new millennium in the economies of the western world, it may seem as if we have entered a new era or at least have been passing through a period of significant change since ‘around 1973’: the date that David Harvey (1989) identified as the start of the transformation from the old Fordist model of economic organization to a new condition of postmodernity. Since then, growing numbers of individuals have become part of the social relations of waged work, and many seem to be working in new types of work under different conditions compared to workers in a former era, especially those in manufacturing industries. Change is the key motif of contemporary discussions of waged work. In both the popular and academic literatures about waged work and the labour market titles that indicate a radical change with the past are common. The ‘new capitalism’ (Sennett 2006), the rise of ‘post-Fordism’ (Amin 1994), in a period of ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman 2000) are all part of the titles of books purporting to describe the changes that are evident in what some have identified as a ‘new’ economy (Carnoy 2000; Jensen and Westenholz 2004). ‘One of the most striking things about much of contemporary theorizing about work and identity is the epochalist terms in which it is framed’, in which the ‘logic of dichotomization establishes the available terms in advance’ (Du Gay 2004: 147).

The statistical picture of labour market change seems to confirm these claims about transformation: from the Fordist manufacturing economy of the past, to a post-Fordist, post-modern or post-industrial service economy of the present. There has been a remarkable shift in the types of work most people in the UK perform (and in the USA, France, Germany and other western economies), as well as in the types of people who fill the expanding jobs. The most significant change has been the growing dominance of service employment: almost three quarters of all employees in the UK currently work in services. Half-way through the twentieth century, more than half of all workers were employed in the manufacture of goods; half a century later, the sons and daughters of these workers do quite different types of work. Less than 15 per cent of British workers are now employed in manufacturing. This shift has been captured in terms such as ‘deindustrialization’ (Gregory and Urry 1986), the ‘end of manufacturing’, even, for some commentators, ‘farewell to the working class’ (Gorz 1982), as it seemed to these analysts almost inconceivable that working in shops or cafés, providing massages, cleaning houses and teaching children was ‘work’ in

the old sense of producing material products through the application of brute strength and heroic effort, typically by men. Other commentators have seen the rise of service employment in more optimistic terms, welcoming the introduction of less stressful or dangerous working conditions, improved pay and opportunities for social mobility for a better-educated population (Wright Mills 1953; Bell 1973; Gartner and Reissman 1974). By the new millennium the optimistic scenario had shifted into a different register as it became clear that the service sector includes poorly paid, as well as well paid, jobs and that for many the anticipated social mobility would never materialize. To narratives of loss and nostalgia for the golden age of manufacturing – a period from about the end of the Second World War until the 1970s – a new narrative of precarious and insecure work was added (Sennett 1998, 2006).

Associated with this apparent transformation of the labour market and adding to the claim of many that older forms of working-class solidarity are dead, there has been a marked feminization of the labour force in Western Europe and the USA. Rising numbers of women have entered the social relations of waged work over the last fifty years, many of them in the service sector and many on different terms and conditions than those that typified masculine forms of attachment to the labour market. Many women are employed on a part-time basis, especially in the UK, and tend to work in different sorts of workplaces than the factories, shipyards and car plants that typified male work in the Fordist era. Women are more likely, for example, to work in other people’s homes or in small, often unorganized, workplaces. And as well as growing numbers of women, economic migrants – people born outside the nation-state where they labour – are filling a growing number of jobs in service economies. Thus, labour forces are becoming increasingly diverse in their social characteristics.

At the same time as waged work is changing, and often becoming more precarious, it has become a more central part of more and more people’s everyday lives in almost all countries in the global economy, apart from the former communist countries where participation rates fell in the 1990s. Participation rates in the UK labour market, for example, are higher than at any previous period. In 2008, 75 per cent of all people of working age in the UK were employed: one of the highest participation rates in Europe. Two decades earlier, British sociologist Ray Pahl (1988) argued that employment – the nature, distribution and rewards for waged work – was one of the most significant and urgent issues for social scientists to address. He suggested then that a range of questions about work remained unresolved as ‘confusion and ambiguities about its meaning, nature and purpose in our lives are widespread’ (p. 1). His argument is even more relevant now, despite a huge expansion of academic analyses of waged work. As the economist Francis Green (2006: 1) argued, ‘almost everyone gets to do it. Work itself is a major and defining part of most people’s lives. It takes up a large proportion

of their time on this earth and profoundly moulds their life experiences.' Developing an understanding of how labour markets work, how people are divided between and segmented into particular jobs, and what this means for their self-identity and standard of living, is an even more significant task as the new millennium advances and the place of waged work in most people's lives continues to expand.

Over the last two decades the expansion of employment has also become a central part of the reforming agenda of central and local governments. The British state, under New Labour governments since 1997, has endeavoured to increase the proportion of the national population that is economically active. In common with other western governments, albeit to different degrees, the adoption of a series of neoliberal employment policies has resulted in cuts in state provision and benefits for the workless and a correspondingly greater emphasis on the responsibilities of individuals to provide for themselves rather than rely on state support (Herrod 2000; McDowell 2004; Peck 2000). Growing numbers of citizens in these countries – and in countries where systems of state support for the workless have never been well developed – are now expected to provide for themselves through labour market participation and are doing so by entering into the social relations of waged work in unprecedented numbers. The UK and the US are among the most 'liberal' economies, where the dependence on deregulated markets and welfare policies distinguish them from mainland Western European economies and from the Scandinavian countries (Esping Andersen 1990, 1999; Perrons et al. 2006), which provide greater protection for the majority of workers. In the UK and the USA 'workfare' programmes have replaced parts of older forms of welfare provision (Peck 2000; Sunley, Martin and Nativel 2001) which time-limit access to benefits as well as enrol the workless onto 'job ready' programmes. In the UK there is also a move to reduce the eligibility for benefits of long-term sick and incapacitated claimants: an issue that is particularly important in parts of the country where men previously worked in heavy primary or manufacturing occupations (Fothergill and Wilson 2007). Young unskilled men and women, not only in these regions but across the UK economy, are also 'encouraged' into work through schemes designed for their age group. Single parents – the majority of whom are women – are a further target group for raising participation rates which currently are well below those of other women workers.

For the more affluent and highly skilled groups in the population, apart from men over 50 whose participation rates are falling, employment participation rates have continued to rise in the last two decades. As they do, time becomes more precious for waged workers, exacerbating the transfer into the market of many of the services previously provided within the home. This is one of the most significant changes in the way in which consumer services are provided in advanced capitalist economies. Rather than

the rise of a self-service economy, identified by Gershuny (1978), in which households serviced their own needs in the home through the purchase of consumer durables, more and more services have become part of the market. As well as rising attendances at cinemas and in other leisure spaces, dual-income middle-class families, for example, increasingly buy childcare, house cleaning, dog walking and a whole gamut of other services that enable their complex lives to function more smoothly. The demand for these low-waged jobs in turn draws less affluent individuals – typically, women – into the labour market (Sassen 2001), often re-cutting class and gender relations, as I shall illustrate in the case-study chapters. Working-class employees in these low-wage 'servicing' jobs increasingly work in intimate contact with the bodies of the middle class in ways that are more reminiscent of earlier periods of industrial history than the immediate Fordist past (Panitch and Leys 2000).

The initial response by labour economists, geographers and sociologists to manufacturing decline in the 1970s and 1980s was to focus on the causes and consequences of deindustrialization, rather than analyses of the causes and consequences of this growing commoditization of services. A range of studies addressing, for example, questions about declining wage rates and the loss of the middle of the income distribution (Bluestone and Harrison 1982), diminishing union membership (Martin, Sunley and Wills 1994, 1996), male job loss and regional inequalities (Gregory and Urry 1986; Massey 1984; Massey and Meegan 1982) dominated the agenda of labour market studies. Some argued that the decline of manufacturing heralded the 'end of work' (Rifkin 1995), whereas others suggested that the rise of a consumer economy was leading to a reduction of the significance of employment in the social construction of identity, as people increasingly constructed their sense of self-worth primarily through consumption rather than through work (Bauman 1998): perhaps surprising claims as governments pushed through workfare programmes.

More recent studies of economic change and its labour market correlates, however, have focused explicitly on service sector employment growth and its meaning for workplace identities as well as for national economic growth. The dominant emphasis in this literature has tended to be an optimistic one: a 'new' knowledge economy (Carnoy 2000; Rodrigues 2005) was identified based on the production of 'weightless' goods and services such as financial commodities, legal expertise and new forms of scientific innovations in an economy that is 'living on air' (Coyle 1997; Leadbetter 1999). In this weightless economy, an increasingly specialist and well-educated workforce, employed in new clean environments, facilitates successful competition with newly industrializing countries in a globalized world, permanently connected by the internet (Castells 2001). National economies are linked into a global 'space of flows' connected by new technologies that facilitate the flows of

information and capital (Castells 1996). But there is also another narrative of change that has not caught the attention of theorists or the media to the same extent. This story emphasizes the less successful and less glamorous side of service sector growth, recognizing the steady expansion of poorly paid, low-wage jobs, increasingly undertaken by women or by economic migrants but also by less-well educated or low-skilled men, especially young men. These are the workers who stepped into the gap to provide daily services to keep the households of work-rich but time-poor households running smoothly, as well as to care for the elderly and service the growing leisure demands of the majority. Here too a story of regret is evident, as commentators (Sennett 1998) mourned the loss of permanent, well-paid work for men, replaced by new forms of more precarious attachment (Vosko 2001) to the labour market in which employers have little loyalty to their workforce, which is both disposable and replaceable.

What unites these three narratives – of deindustrialization, the ‘new’ knowledge economy and the rise of precarious work – is the rhetoric of radical change or transformation. Western economies seemed to be being significantly restructured as new ways of working in new forms of employment replace the older certainties of full-time waged work, often for a single employer over a lifetime. I argue in the next chapter of this book, however, that the rise of service employment is neither new nor a significant transformation, or rather not a transformation that can be explained solely by studying the economy in isolation. Instead, I want to argue that what we are witnessing is the commodification of many of the types of work that were previously undertaken mainly in private homes and for ‘love’ – in the sense of not for wages. Because participants in these activities – the care of children, sexual relations, caring for elderly bodies, meeting leisure needs – were not financially recompensed, they were not recognized as work and so excluded from economic analyses. If they had been included, then not only would the definition of work have been widened but the attributes of both work and workers would have been different. Women performing caring labour in the home would have been included in this wider definition of work and so the apparently radical change captured in the dominant narratives would have seemed less remarkable. Here, instead of a narrative of transformation, I want to emphasize continuity. In part, I do this through the use of quotations at each chapter head from earlier eras in British labour market history which remain entirely relevant today. In this way the connections between the types of work and employment that dominated what are now regarded as past eras are connected to the continuing changes in the post-millennium labour market. Servicing the bodily needs of others has always taken up the time of large numbers of workers and typically it has been regarded as low-status work, and constructed as particularly suitable for women.

### **Servicing Work as Waged Employment**

While I shall argue that continuity is the key defining characteristic of all those forms of service sector work that involve caring for the bodily needs of others, there undoubtedly has been a significant shift in the nature and location of these types of work. In the long decades of the postwar years of economic growth and relative prosperity, notwithstanding manufacturing decline, these forms of embodied work have moved from the private into the public arena (provided both by the market and the state) and into the cash nexus. The rise in women’s labour market participation rates and their increasing inability, or unwillingness, to provide the range of services in the home that other family members once took for granted has exacerbated this shift. In affluent societies, an increasing array of activities, including sex, food, healthcare, advice, exercise, childcare and music making, that was provided for ‘love’ (in the sense of financially unrewarded) within the family or local community, has become part of market exchange.

The movement of these services into the cash economy and women’s greater involvement in the social relations of employment, has had a significant impact on women’s sense of self-identity, as well as on the location of their key social relationships. For all workers, the workplace is an arena of social relations, a place in which peers, superiors, subordinates, managers and bosses interact. These sets of relations are not merely the rational exchange of labour power for wages, as economists argue, but also provide an outlet for emotions and the development of social relationships: aspects of the employment relation more typically analysed by sociologists and psychologists. People experience anger and frustration at work, as well as satisfaction in a job well done. People make friends at work, sometimes fall in love, and provide and receive emotional support, as the quotation from Freud at the head of this chapter makes clear. Work is about sociability. But what has changed in the twenty-first century is the growing significance of social relations in the workplace in women’s lives. Two generations ago, for most women, socializing took place in the home, among family, kin and neighbours, and in the local community, perhaps through participation in voluntary work or through membership of clubs and groups based on mutual interests. As the traditional saying made clear, ‘a woman’s place is in the home’. In 2008 the majority of women are in waged employment and so are able to construct an alternative set of social networks. Indeed, as the US sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1997) found in her study of a large Midwest workplace, women employees not only valued their workplace relationships but regarded them as more significant than their home lives for friendship and emotional support. As the subtitle of her study – when ‘work becomes home and home becomes work’ – indicates, for these women

life had changed as emotional satisfaction was sought and found in the workplace rather than or as well as at home. This change affects others too, not only at home, but in communal and voluntary patterns of participation. As Robert Putnam (2000) noted, many Americans are now condemned to go 'bowling alone'.

As well as social and emotional relationships with other workers, increasingly, participation in waged work in Britain, the USA and in other service-dominated economies involves the establishment of social relationships, albeit typically transitory, with customers. The most common forms of waged work now undertaken in the UK involve a service exchange between employees and customers – what Robin Leidner (1993) termed 'interactive work'. In the service sector, the production of consumer services typically depends on the co-presence of workers and purchasers – waiters serve restaurant customers, the hairdresser is only able to cut and style hair when the client is there, teachers need an audience for their classes, doctors a body to practise on. Further, the service is used up at the moment of exchange: a meal is over when customers leave, a haircut completed, a lecture finished, an operation over.

The recognition that service employment involves social interactions in spaces where the service provider and service purchaser are *co-present* is connected to a second shift in the last half-century: that is the huge expansion in the range and patterns of consumption in modern economies as an increasingly wide range of goods and services are for sale. As well as the typical goods of an expanding consumer economy – cars, fridges, clothes, an ever-wider range of electronic gadgets – there has been a remarkable expansion in consumer services, from eating out, through travel, to all sorts of care for the body and the soul, from massage to counselling. The economy as a whole has become one in which the provision and sale of services is the key motor of development as well as one in which a great deal of that emotional solace as well as bodily care that was previously provided in the private arena is now for sale. In these consumer-driven, service-dominated economies, individuals' bodies – as the producer and objects of exchange – have become absolutely central in a way that differs from the embodied labour power driving manufacturing industries. The physical attributes of the body providing a service are part of the exchange that occurs at the point of sale. A well-groomed, preferably slim body, produced through exercise, adornment and self-improvement, whether temporary through the application of cosmetics or more permanently through radical interventions such as surgery, is seen as an essential requirement of many, if not most, forms of employment. While this is not a new phenomenon – all types of work depend on a range of embodied attributes and visceral emotions ranging from physical strength through distaste and disgust to empathy and affection – it is significant in the extent to which it draws in ever-greater numbers of workers, including

men, into forms of employment that depend on visible, interactive and embodied exchanges in which the physical shape of bodies, their adornment and workers' emotions matter in workplace performances.

This sort of work is more personal, centred within a set of direct contacts and social relations between providers and purchasers, than work in the manufacturing sector, where workers – the producers of goods – rarely have any contact with the eventual purchasers of what they make. In the service sector, the personal embodied attributes of workers enter into the exchange process in a direct way. When we ask for a waiter's advice about what to choose to eat, or consult a stylist about what might suit us, we evaluate their advice not just on the basis of the technical information that they might give us but also on the basis of what we think about them: whether we find them sympathetic or trustworthy, whether they are personable, friendly, standoffish, even aggressive, whether we admire or resent their youthful good looks or their facial piercings and fashionable dress. And so transactions in the service sector depend not only on a cash exchange but also on a personal interaction in which the embodied attributes of both provider and clients enter into the relationship, however momentary or transitory it might be. The embodied attributes of workers are part of the service – their height, weight, looks, attitudes are part of the exchange, as well as part of the reason why some workers get hired and others do not for particular sorts of interactive work. The exchange is also an emotional one in which the tastes, predilections and attitudes of both parties to the exchange are part of what is going on in the workplace, which is more likely to be a shop or a café, a nursing home or a childminder's house than a factory, shipyard or machine shop. These two concepts – embodiment and emotions – are central to understanding service employment.

Many of these expanding forms of interactive employment, for both women and men, increasingly involve working *on* the body. They involve servicing the bodies of consumers, clients and patients – in healthcare, in gyms, massage parlours and hair salons. As I have already noted, they also demand that employees work on their own bodies in self-improvement programmes to produce an idealized version of a slender, toned, deodorized, youthful-looking (and white) body – the type of body that is most highly valued in the new consumer-based economies of western cities. Images of these idealized bodies are ubiquitous. Where once representations of toned, white, often semi-clothed women were the typical images used to sell a range of products, in the twenty-first century there is greater gender equality in advertising. Men's bodies are also now used to sell products. Images of muscled men have escaped the covers of men's health and sports magazines, for example, and joined the more waif-like figures of the young men used to sell fashion. The male body is now an object of admiration, to be looked at and admired not only by straight women and gay men but also by heterosexual

men (Simpson 1994) and so the male body has become a mainstream consumer icon, using to sell a wide range of good and services. Thus, bodies sell objects and services as well as perform services. And the bodies of those selling services are also expected to conform to these idealized images of masculinity and femininity that feature in advertisements. Men, as well as women, have to pay greater attention to issues about style and bodily presentation, to looking appropriate for work, to dressing for success and to maintaining the body. The ambiguity of the book's title is deliberate – 'working bodies' refers both to workers themselves going about their daily tasks in the labour market and to the work that they do on their own and others' bodies as part of the labour process.

The significance of embodiment is not new. All work depends on embodiment: a fleshy person has to turn up every day, whether to a coal face or an office. But the new emphasis on interactive embodiment is also restructuring class and status distinctions, as well as gender divisions of labour. There has long been a set of class distinctions in Britain based on the mind-body dichotomy and a belief that manual labour, embodied physical labour demanding brute strength, was a less valued way of earning a living than the application of thought. The shift from 'brawn' to 'brain' jobs, for example, is celebrated in the contemporary vision of a knowledge-based economy, where the trivial daily tasks of servicing the population are ignored. This 'mind-body': non-manual-manual distinction also maps – or used to – in large part on to gender divisions, although both brawn and brain typically are associated with a dichotomized version of masculinity. The apparently entirely cerebral demands of white collar or scientific work have long been associated with masculine attributes such as the capacity for logical thought and rational behaviour and, of course, this type of work positions the labourer in the middle class, dividing this worker from lower-status workers who rely on their bodily strength. But as feminists have argued, the disembodied rational middle-class male worker with no emotional needs or dependencies, who apparently epitomized the Protestant ethic that initially ensured the industrial revolution and its bureaucratic management was an Anglo-Saxon affair, is more akin to an angel than a living man. Christine di Stefano (1990) once memorably commented that this idealized masculine being should be brought down to earth and given a pair of pants. All forms of employment, even the apparently least physical in terms of the energy expended, depend on an embodied, gendered worker applying effort in exchange for income. The types of hard manual labour that were dominant for so many centuries have, however, all but disappeared and far more people in the UK are now employed as care workers than as miners. Yet, paradoxically, as I demonstrate throughout this book, the significance of embodiment – of working by hand and sweat of the body – has increased. What has changed is the association of bodily labour with masculinity.

At the bottom end of the labour market, 'feminine' attributes of care and empathy are now constructed as ideal job attributes in interactive embodied work and it is men who may find that their embodied attributes are a disadvantage.

### **Theorizing Embodied Work**

As the significance of service work has increased, there have been noticeable changes in the ways in which work and employment are theorized. It is abundantly clear in service occupations that labour is unlike other commodities: men and women enter their place of work as a set of living beings, opinionated, awkward, obstinate or deferential, embedded in sets of social relationships of kin and friendship. These characteristics as well as their age, ethnicity and gender, affect the ways in which they go about earning their living. At the same time, social exchanges and interactions with customers and clients affect as well as are affected by the attributes and identities of workers, influencing the ways in which people and the types of jobs that they do are differentially ranked and rewarded in the labour market. As a consequence, new ideas about the social construction of identity at work and workplace performances have become a part of theoretical debates about the changing nature of work.

Challenging Pahl's insistence on employment and the division of labour as the key issue for sociological analysis at the end of the twentieth century, Bryan Turner (1996), also a sociologist, made a counterclaim. He suggested that the body or embodiment was the crucial issue for sociologists as the new millennium approached. He argued that the body had become the key issue in social theory as contemporary consumer societies emphasize 'pleasure, desire, difference and playfulness' (p. 2). Like Bauman, Turner suggested that consumption rather than production was not only the new motor of the economy but also the critical site for the social construction of self-identity. But until relatively recently, sociologists of the body and sexuality ignored the labour market as a site of embodied performance, concentrating instead on leisure spaces and other sites of consumption in contemporary societies. However, they noted that in these locations work *on* the body became a central part both of self-production and maintenance. Desirable body shapes were achievable not only through self-improvement (dieting and exercising in the main) but also through new forms of surgical intervention as bodies are trimmed, tucked, reshaped and remade. Indeed, such is the ability to alter and transform the materiality of the body that Giddens (1991), Shilling (1993) and others have argued that it has become a significant site of uncertainty in the postmodern world, raising anxieties about the connection between embodiment and

identity, as bodies become both mutable and, increasingly, virtual. I return to the significance of virtual bodies in the concluding chapter.

In feminist theory, the body and bodily emotions have also become a more central focus of scholarship in the last fifteen years or so. Indeed, as Fonow and Cook (2005: 2012) argued:

Today it is hard to imagine a time when we did not know that bodies and their location mattered or that rationalities were gendered.... From the beginning, feminists challenged the artificial separation of reason (mind) and emotion (body), and they have come to view emotion as both a legitimate source of knowledge and a product of culture that is as open to analysis as any other culturally inscribed phenomenon. The significance and legitimacy of emotions as a topic of inquiry, as a source of theoretical insight, and as a signal of rupture in social relations is now well established in feminist circles.

The huge growth of work on embodiment was not anticipated, in part because feminists tended to resent the fleshy body, fearful of making it a central part of their theorizing in case it seemed as if biology was destiny. Instead, the initial aim of feminist scholarship was to decentre the significance of the material body, decoupling sex from gender and arguing that gender was a social construct rather than a reflection of biology. As Fonow and Cook (2005: 2012) note, 'it did not occur to us to view the physical itself as a social construct'. Theorizing the body as a social construct has, however, become central to more recent work, in which the body is seen not only as an object of analysis but also as a social category of inquiry. Feminists now talk about disciplining the body, sexing the body, writing the body as bodies are theorized as sites of culturally inscribed and disputed meanings, expert-ences and feelings that are both the source of theoretical insights and subjects of analysis. The body – at work, as an object of work and the role of emotions as a central element of work – has become a key part of feminist analyses of labour market change in service economies. Thus, in feminist analyses of employment, claims about the significance of employment change and about the importance of the body have been brought together to provide new understandings of work and employment.

If sociologists of sexuality and the body forgot, or at best under-emphasized, the social relations of employment, then theorists of work and employment tended to forget the labouring body and its sexual desires and fantasies. Apart from work by feminist economists, sociologists and geographers about embodiment, bodies, especially female bodies, were ignored by mainstream labour market theorists or at best relegated to the borders of their respective disciplines on the grounds that it was 'about women'. However, for more than two decades, feminist theorists have addressed questions about the significance of emotions at work and latterly questions more directly concerned

with bodily performances and their relationship to emotions and affective relations in the workplace. In her book *Bodies at Work* (2006), which provides an excellent review of some of the recent sociological work about embodiment, Carol Wolkowitz showed how by crossing conventional boundaries between the sociology of work and the sociology of the body, a richer understanding of the nature of contemporary labour market change is possible. Wolkowitz built on decades of feminist theorizing that has challenged conventional analysts who ignored embodied differences between workers. Arlie Hochschild's *The Managed Heart* (1983) is now a classic text for all studies of how emotions are part of a commercial exchange and since then there have been numerous other excellent studies of emotional labour and embodied work – the two are not always coterminous, as I shall show in the case studies that follow – in sites ranging from massage parlours to the operating theatre, from call centres to university seminar rooms.

One of the most significant early developments in feminist theory that drew attention to the ways in which the associations between emotions/femininity and rationality/masculinity structured waged, as well as unwaged, labour in the home, was the concept of the gender or gendered division of labour. This concept allowed a forceful critique of the masculinist bias in both employment itself and in theoretical explanations of its nature and consequences that, as I indicated above, influenced the ways in which deindustrialization and the expansion of service employment were analysed. Feminist scholars pointed out that the gendered attributes of workers were a key part of understanding whether and how people became waged labourers and what rewards accrued to them once they did so. Through theoretical innovation and careful empirical work, the ways in which men and women are unequal in their access to and rewards from waged work were investigated. The gendered nature of the public and private spheres was documented, showing how a set of ideological beliefs about women's place in the home and domestic sphere resulted both in their exclusion from the labour market or/and their segregation into suitably female/feminine positions. Work fit for women was then regarded as less significant than either waged work undertaken by men or than women's unpaid labour within the family. Male breadwinners were expected to provide for their dependents through waged work and women through their unpaid labours in the home. If women did enter the labour market, they were regarded as less skilled and so paid a lower wage than men. As women workers self-evidently were seen to rely on their 'natural' talents (variously defined as dexterity, empathy, a caring heart) at work, then it was clear that they should not expect equivalent rewards to men, whose skills had been honed by experience or training. Thus women have laboured for most of the last hundred years or so in explicitly 'female sectors' of the labour market for lower pay than men (Bradley 1989). Even in 2008 in the UK, when women are more than half



the university intake and are making inroads on many of the professions, a gender pay gap between men and women working on a full-time basis still exists: women earn just under 88 pence for every £1 that a man earns and the gap is far wider for women who work on a less than full-time basis.

Feminist scholars have also shown how the sets of social attributes that are mapped onto gendered bodies become crucial in constructing divisions of labour and hierarchical evaluations of worth. Embodied characteristics such as skin colour, weight or height, accent and stance map onto gender to produce a finely graded set of evaluations that position workers as more or less suitable to perform different types of work and different sets of tasks. The production of this hierarchy of suitability is a key part of the case-study chapters and I expand on its theoretical significance in chapter 3.

### **Place Matters**

As well as gender divisions of labour, there is a visible spatial division of labour. The social characteristics of workers and the types of work they do vary across geographic space at different scales of analysis. There is now a small but growing literature about the geographies of labour (Herod 2001; Walls and Waterman 2001; Hale and Walls 2005) and the spaces and places in which work takes place (Peck 1996; Castree et al. 2004), as well as commentaries addressed to other disciplines about why space matters (Castree 2007; Herod et al. 2007; Ward 2007). In sociology, workplace-based studies have always been more common than in other social science disciplines and there is a long tradition of ethnographies and case studies of particular types of jobs and occupations. Most of these studies, however, neglect the specificity of place and tend to ignore questions about how workers are assembled, why they differ from workers in other places doing the same sorts of work. Indeed, sometimes (often for reasons of confidentiality) sociologists change the name of their workplaces or move them to different cities (Cavendish 1982; Glucksmann, 2009), and so the specificities of local variations in the supply and demand for labour and the difference it makes if a factory or hospital is located in say Birmingham rather than in London cannot be addressed. In the case-study chapters I include questions about the significance of place: are workers from the immediate locality? If not, why not and where are they from? What difference does place make to workplace practices? Although interactive embodied work is by definition the most local of all sorts of work – the provider and client must be co-present in the exchange – it is not necessarily provided by local workers.

Clearly, however, because of co-presence, the very local scale matters in service economies. All service exchanges take place somewhere – in the home where wives and mothers provide for love the same sorts of services that nannies, cooks and cleaners provide for remuneration in affluent or

time-pressed households, and in numerous specialist locations, including shops, factories, banks, universities and schools, parks, playgrounds, gyms and gardens. Work for wages now also takes place in cars, on trains, in parks and cafés, as new forms of technology enable workers to free themselves from the fixed boundaries of their workplace. But paradoxically these same technologies are mechanisms of social control as they enable employers to increase their surveillance of employees and intrude into the spaces once solely associated with leisure or with social relations based on affection and mutual obligation rather than the cash nexus. Nannies working in the 'private' spaces of the home, for example, may be subject to covert forms of electronic surveillance; call centre workers and data processors may have key strokes counted and in all sorts of workplaces CCTV cameras increasingly monitor workers' movements as well as deter or record potential intruders. The scale of the immediate workplace is the focus here, but even this most local of foci demands the analysis of processes at a larger spatial scale: the city as a whole, the region and the nation-state, as well as the analysis of the changing pattern of connections between these different scales, whether measured by flows of capital, goods, information or labour. As I show in later chapters, workers in many of the most intimate forms of embodied work are assembled across a broad spatial canvas, sometimes on a global scale, although in ways that particular systems of national and local regulation influence, so constructing new hierarchies of eligibility. The intersection of spatial processes at different scales produces in local labour markets the specificities of particular types of work and workplaces.

Location at this wider scale – within and between regions and within and between nation-states – clearly affects what types of work people do, as not only are there geographical differences in the distribution of particular types of employment but also in the numbers of jobs available in particular parts of the country, in different sized settlements or different countries. Individuals searching for work in cities rather than in small towns or in the countryside tend to have more options to consider, although correspondingly competition might be fiercer. And within local labour markets – whether defined as a city, a rural hinterland or a region – there are distinct submarkets, open to people with particular characteristics or skills. As geographer Ron Martin (2001: 461) argued, a local labour market is:

A complex assemblage of segmented submarkets, each having its own geographies, its own employment and wage processes [subject to national regulation and the minimum wage in the UK] ... an assemblage of non-competing submarkets which, nevertheless, are linked together to varying extents via direct and indirect webs of local economic dependency.

These segmented submarkets are defined not only by the intersection of the demand for workers with particular skill levels and the availability of different

types of job, but also by the ability or willingness of potential employees to travel to work. As the study of a declining labour market in Massachusetts by Susan Hanson and Geraldine Pratt (1995) showed, women are less likely than men to travel considerable distances to work as it makes the combination of employment and domestic responsibilities difficult. But this decision to search for work locally restricts women's options and deepens gender segmentation.

The geography of employment – the spatial distribution of different forms of work – affects people's life chances as well as influencing the form of social relations that develop in that area. This emphasis on the local nature of labour markets is one of the distinctive contributions that geographers have made to the analysis of work and employment. Here US geographers Michael Storper and Dick Walker (1989: 47) explain the significance of the local focus:

Local labour markets deserve special emphasis because of labour's relative day-by-day immobility which gives an irreducible role to place-bound homes and communities.... It takes time and spatial propinquity for the central institutions of daily life – family, church, clubs, schools, sports teams, union locals, etc. – to take shape.... Once established, these outlive individual participants to benefit, and be sustained by, generations of workers. The result is a fabric of distinctive, lasting local communities and cultures woven into the landscape of labour.

This sense of place, based in a deep rootedness in the locality in which customs and local institutions are structured by the dominant form of work, has been a key feature of twentieth-century economic development in many industrial nations. In recent years, however, the significance of distinctive place-based local labour markets has declined, as new forms of work and the rise of mobile workers, as well as new connections across space as globalized supply chains and transnational corporations become significant, have affected the spatial scale at which workers are assembled. Its decline also reflects the rise of the service economy. Compared to manufacturing economies, regional and local differences in labour market participation rates, as well as in types of jobs, are less significant in service-dominated economies such as the UK, as Walby (1986) recognized more than twenty years ago. In Britain, women's participation rates, as well as the sorts of jobs they undertake, are regionally less distinctive than patterns of male employment participation during the Fordist period. In service-based economies, in which a high percentage of women are employed, the distribution of employment, especially those consumer service jobs catering for immediate demands, tends to be related to the distribution of the population. Thus, in most British towns and cities there is a similar range of employment opportunities in private consumer services such as hospitality, the retail sector, and leisure

industries and in public services – in the health service, education and in local government: their size is related to the size of the local population. Well-paid and high-status producer service occupations in, for example, high-tech industries and in finance, business and legal services are more unevenly distributed. In these latter occupations, the southeast of England, especially Greater London, accounts for a high proportion of the jobs in these sectors (Allen 1992). This pattern is reflected in geographical variations in income and wealth (Dorling et al. 2007). At the scale of the region, the southeast is the most affluent, reflecting the dominance of the City of London in the British economy (Hamnett 2003; Massey 2007). Those regions that were previously reliant on older manufacturing industries, in the north of England, Wales and Scotland, are among the least affluent. In the recession that began at the end of 2008, however, in which the financial sector was deeply implicated, the southeast region found itself hit hard by rising unemployment.

The immediate locality, the residential neighbourhood, also has an impact on everyday lives, living standards and employment opportunities. Many services, such as schooling, are locally provided, with clear neighbourhood differences in standards and levels of achievement that affect children's aspirations and values as well as future labour market opportunities. As Bauder (2001, 2002) has argued, neighbourhood institutions play a powerful role in inculcating sets of cultural values. In British cities there are marked spatial variations in levels of income and wealth. Even in the most affluent British cities, in inner areas and outer local authority estates, there are concentrations of poor households. Parts of inner London, for example, especially in the east, include some of the poorest districts in the country as a whole; households there are increasingly reliant on poorly paid 'high-touch' jobs (Wills 2004; May et al. 2007) and are among the rising numbers of the 'working poor'. Elsewhere in the city, in Kensington and Chelsea and in Westminster, for example, some of the richest households in the UK live largely separate lives. Where their lives do come into contact, however, is in leisure spaces, where the working poor wait on the rich, and increasingly frequently in the home as the children of the rich are cared for and dirt is vanquished by the labours of the poor. One of the contradictions of the rise of service employment, explored in more detail in chapter 4, is that despite increasing spatial separation between the rich and the poor in many arenas of daily life and in residential segregation (Dorling et al. 2007), in growing numbers of homes they live/work in close contact.

Thus, as more and more people are drawn into waged labour, their connections to each other, to the organizations in which they labour, to the locality and to class segregation are changing. Employment, which was once a local affair in which people tended to be employed in the immediate vicinity in which they lived, often in locally owned firms, now links people across

increasingly extended spaces, regions and nations, sometimes involving physical movement across space of both labour and capital, but also linking workers in particular locations into new networks of ownership. Changes to British tax laws and a relatively unregulated labour market have made the UK an attractive place for foreign investment, as well as a country where the penalties for making workers redundant or for disinvesting are less onerous than in many parts of the western world. The working class in the UK as well as the new global working class is, therefore, increasingly complex and diverse (Panitch and Leys 2000; Mason 2007). In the UK as a whole, about 10 per cent of the population was born elsewhere. In London this figure rises to 26 per cent of the population and to 30 per cent of all employed people: migrants are younger and so more likely to be employed than British-born inhabitants (Spence 2005). The countries from which these migrant workers have arrived have become increasingly diverse over the last two decades (Vertovec 2006), leading to enormous variations in, for example, skin colour, skills, national attitudes and family relations which are the basis for the establishment of hierarchies of eligibility within the potential labour force. As embodied attributes become a more significant factor in employment relations, this diversity and the consequent paradox of an increasingly globalized labour force performing place-tied servicing work is a key part of the explanation of how segregated labour markets work.

These flows of capital and labour across an expanding spatial scale have altered the links between waged work, nationality and locality, refiguring the spatial division of labour, and increasingly bringing workers born in one nation-state into physical contact with those born elsewhere through new migration patterns, as well as connecting growing numbers of workers through ownership patterns. Labour, as well as capital, has become more mobile. Thus, in the core economies of the 'old' industrial west, there is a growing reliance on migrant labour from the third world to run key urban services and provide for all those tasks once undertaken in the home (Anderson 2001; Sassen 2001; May et al. 2007) as women enter the labour market in growing numbers. Migrants also work in sweated conditions in what remains of basic manufacturing industries such as textiles, clothing and electronics in first world cities. Parts of these same industries, however, have relocated to the border regions in third world economies, to export-processing zones in Southeast Asia or the maquiladoras of the US/Mexico border, for example, where labour costs are lower (Ong 1987; Oishi 2005; Wright 2006). Thus, what might be termed the old working class of the first world and the new working class of the third world increasingly are spatially contiguous in western metropolises, but also spatially differentiated by the dispersal of workers in a particular sector, or as employees of a single multinational company, across the spaces of national economies, raising new questions for managers and for labour organizers.

I explore these new spatial divisions of labour in a range of different forms of embodied interactive work in many of the case-study chapters, showing how, for example, sex work (chapter 5) and care work (chapters 4 and 7) in a global city such as London now employ workers from a wide range of countries outside the UK. In Chicago – the location for an exploration of the world of boxing (chapter 6) – new patterns of migration into the USA are changing the association between men of African origins with boxing. I also show how the geographic reach of contemporary capitalist organizations as well as the national origins of service workers has expanded. In all sorts of jobs, even the most mundane tasks of keeping the bodies of children and the elderly clean and safe, managers, workers and organizers have to cope with cultural and linguistic diversity, whether in negotiating agreement and compliance, or in organizing or defusing resistance. Significant social, local and national differences in customs, beliefs and cultures among a workforce that is increasingly diverse, as women, children, rural-to-urban migrants, ethnic minorities, refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants enter labour markets previously dominated, in the west at least, by men means that 'cultural' understanding and connections have a growing salience in 'economic' organization (McDowell 1997; Du Gay and Pryke 2002; Jones 2008). Divisions of labour now cross, or are negotiated over, diverse and multiple cultural and linguistic spaces as well as geographic space or distance and so new ways of drawing in and constructing co-workers and of managing cultural differences among them are important in multinational spaces. Thus, 'globalization' is both affecting and is affected by social and cultural processes, producing both new forms of waged work and new senses of self-identity.

### **Structure of the Book**

Theorizing the effects of this growing complexity is a significant challenge for labour market analysts. In chapter 3 I look at some ways to think about complexity as well as providing a guide to theoretical debates about corporeality, embodiment, emotion and affect, and sexuality and desire at work, with the aim of bringing together debates about different forms of labour market differentiation. While the work on embodiment provides an important way of thinking about service sector employment change, distinctions based on categorical and group differences – class, ethnicity and gender – remain a key part of understanding who works where in service economies. Before turning to these theoretical debates about difference, however, in chapter 2 I look in more detail at the current division of labour in the UK, addressing the growth of interactive embodied forms of work, as well as the social and spatial division of labour and the ways in which deepening

patterns of inequality are emerging in a service economy. I also provide some statistical information on the current structure of the UK labour force. The emphasis is on the UK, but as an exemplar of trends that are emerging more widely in economies once dominated by manufacturing production but now increasingly reliant on services: economies that, as US lawyer Katherine Stone (2004) notes, have shifted from 'wagejobs to digests'. A pattern of deepening income inequality, as well as the rise of work that is insecure, precarious and impermanent, is evident in, for example, the USA and Canada, as well as in the UK and other European countries (Vosko 2001; McGovern, Smeaton and Hill 2004; Green 2006).

The rest of the book – chapters 4 to 8 – is about different forms of work and working lives, looking at who does what type of work, where it takes place and what tasks are involved in different sorts of jobs. In these chapters, I draw not only on my own previous empirical research in and about bars, cafés, hospitals and hotels, but also on numerous other fascinating studies that document social relations in different types of workplaces. There is now an enormous range of work that explores the ways in which the sex typing of occupations has been established and maintained over time (Bradley 1989) and the ways in which feminized jobs depend on the manipulation of stereotypical gendered attributes, especially women's bodies, emotions and their sexuality (Adkins 1995; Gherardi 1995). These arguments have been explored in case studies of, among others, air stewards (Hochschild 1983; Tyler and Abbott 1998), bankers (Halford, Savage and Witz 1997; McDowell 1997), beauty therapists (Sharma and Black 2001; Ahmed 2004), doctors (Pringle 1998; Moreira 2004), hairdressers (Gimblin 1996; Furman 1997), nurses and carers (James 1989; Diamond 1992; Lopez 2006; Daisi and Richards 2007), secretaries (Pringle 1988), sex workers (Chapkis 1997; Brewis and Linstead 2000a, 2000b, 2000c), shop assistants (du Gay 1996) and waiters and waitresses (Hall 1993b; Crang 1994; Fine 1998) in which men, as well as women, feature both as clients and as service providers, as owners, workers and employees. These studies reveal the multiple ways in which the commodification of gendered, racialized and classed bodies is produced and reproduced through workplace interactions and cultures in particular ways at different times and in different locations, establishing a new hierarchical structure of inequality in which embodied interactive work typically is poorly valued, underpaid and low status. These sorts of employment are the focus here, even though many types of high-status employment also involve 'body work' – by doctors, for example, on the bodies of others or by the investment bankers I have written about elsewhere (McDowell 1997) on their own bodies to produce a pleasing appearance that chimes with clients' views of an educated and skilled provider of technical financial advice.

In these chapters I have tried wherever possible to include the voices of the workers themselves, talking about their occupations and what the job

means to them. I have also where it seems appropriate asked questions about how the research was undertaken, although I have not done this in every case as it would become too repetitive. In one of the chapters on masculinity at work (chapter 6) the methodological issues involved in undertaking workplace ethnographies are a central part of the argument. Reading about the different ways in which work is organized has been a great pleasure over the years. Most of us have a rather limited experience of different forms of work – we might know something about the jobs that our parents and other relatives do; we may have worked as students on a casual basis in some of the jobs that appear in these chapters – in a bar, as a room attendant in a hotel or a domestic assistant in a care home – but most of us know relatively little about the huge variety of service sector jobs and occupations that currently make up the division of labour in Britain. I hope that this book will partially correct this lack of knowledge, but better still that it will encourage you to undertake your own research into working lives in the service sector.