Sofia Alexandra Cruz
University of Porto, Portugal

Service Relation and Organizational Context: A Qualitative Research at Shopping Centers

Abstract   Service work has undergone changes related to their managerial practices, which bring new professional and organizational realities to employees. The purpose of this article is to explore the opportunities of a qualitative research strategy combining both semi-structured interviews and participant observations to consider work organization and analyze the existing modes of service work of different types of shops and restaurants within shopping centers. This analysis considers the existence of a complex service relation that incorporates relational and material dimensions.

Keywords   Service Work; Service Relation; Work Organization; Shops; Restaurants; Shopping Centers

Considerable attention has recently been paid to the heterogeneous nature of work in the service sector. Actually, contemporary research on service work has been one of the most vibrant fields in sociology of work in the past 10 years (Macdonald and Sirianni 1996; Korczynski and Kerfoot 2005; Pettinger 2005; 2006; Warhurst and Nickson 2007; Korczynski 2009). Despite the relevance of the nexus of work and organizations (Haveman and Khaire 2006), some empirical research does not start from

Sofia Alexandra Cruz is a sociologist and Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Economics at the University of Porto, Portugal. She works in the field of sociology of work and professional groups. Her main research topics cover service work, organizations and professional groups, and social entrepreneurship.

email address: sacruz@fep.up.pt

examining how a specific organizational context actually shapes service work and particularly service relations. Understanding the particularities of service relations requires attention not only to work activities directly involved in service delivery, but also to their organizational context.

More often than not, researchers focus on either shops or restaurants organizational settings, construing them as distinct subjects of enquiry. Such compartmentalization is supported by evident differences concerning workplaces and employment relations among these typical service work organizations. Shops and restaurants comprise a variety of locations, such as retail, hospital, or industrial sites. Both are also the service activities most commonly found in shopping centers, significant spaces of production, consumption and social reproduction in contemporary society (Falk and Campbell 1997). The shopping center, as a complex or-

ganizational context, mobilizes the potential of the employees for innovation and self-actualization by slackening rigid bureaucratic ways of control and, according to employees, more autonomy. However, this autonomy is predicated (Korczynski 2004) because the employees are in fact constrained by strict regulations (Leidner 1993). The customer is mobilized as a resource to legitimize the standardization of conduct and to reduce direct practices of managerial control.

This article proposes a comprehensive sociology of service relation involving employees and customers in different types of shops and restaurants. It explores the opportunities of a qualitative research strategy that integrates both semi-structured interviews and participant observations to examine the work organization in shops and restaurants at shopping centers and question the existing modes of service work,[1] suggesting the existence of a complex service relation incorporating relational and material dimensions. The analysis focuses specifically on the following five features of service relation: approaching the customer, time and space framework, resources mobilized by employees, sales information support, and skills mobilized by employees.

This methodology of studying service relation provides an interesting insight not only into the comparative analysis of work and organizations in the service sector as a whole, but also into a deeper analysis of each subsector.

Comprehensive Sociology of Service Relation

Service activities in recent decades have attracted widespread and varied reflections about the specific nature of service work and its place in contemporary societies (Gadrey 1994; Rifkin 2000). Part of the debate on the expansion of service activities concerns the issue of service relation. At an abstract level, a service relation is established not only between individuals, but also organizations at the time of a service initiated by individual X, mostly at the initiative of individual Y, concerning a fact or issue requiring the assistance of individual X (Gadrey 1994). Analysis of this relation requires the understanding of conditions and resources that individuals and organizations mobilized. It seems useful to go back to Weber's theories on social relations in order to contextualize the service relation. According to Weber (1971), the social relation corresponds to an action which leads to the action of others. It is characterized by a sense of intention and subjectivity of the actor. Indeed, Weber (1953:243) considers that the "act which is particularly important to comprehensive sociology is, in particular, an attitude that: is in accordance with the subjectively intended meaning of the one who acts; is co-determined in their course by that meaningful reference; and can therefore be explained in an intelligible way based on that sense (subjectively) intended." Moreover, Weber recognizes that social relations are motivated by conflict, hostility, avoiding, breaking, or friendship. This is particularly significant because the service relation analyzed in shops and restaurants includes these situational boundaries that can be determined by

the levels of urgency of each party involved in the social drama of work (Hughes 1981).

Goffman (1961) developed the notion of service relation initially advanced by Hughes in the universe of services, mainly in hospitals (Hughes 1981), focusing on service interactions. It incorporates situations where the work takes place in direct contact with the customer, when the individual providing the service has to adjust his/her work to the particularities of the customer. However, according to this perspective, service relation seems to be unduly limited to a co-direct presence of people involved in it, and overly centered on the relational dimension. Therefore, my focus is on examining the service relation considering both its relational dimensions (Borzeix 2000; Jeantet 2003)—made up of spatial-temporal, institutional, and inter--subjective components—and material dimension (Pettinger 2006).

Regarding the relational dimensions, and particularly the spatial-temporal component, the service relation between employees and customers is not episodic, but recharged in space and time by social relations of loyalty, habit, motivated by particular preferences or absence of choices. Actually, Weber (1959) pointed out this durable and renewable nature of social relations. The institutional component refers to the organizational location of the service relation that is likely to occur at two levels. At the first level, there are shops and restaurants themselves with operating rules associated with brands and professional hierarchies; and at the second level, there is the shopping center as a whole that imposes certain rules of conduct on shops and restaurants. Like the first two components, the inter-subjective component refers to relational dimensions not only with customers, but also with other employees and between employees and superiors. In this context, the professional *ethos* of employees seems to impose both an embodied and non-embodied performance occurring at different times and in different spaces of a working day.

The relational dimensions of this service relation show that this activity takes advantage of the personality and attitude of employees by leading them to the organization's goals. Hochschild's (2003) analysis of emotional labor in the airline industry is paradigmatic on this topic. According to her, emotional work requires that employees induce or eliminate feelings in order to produce the most appropriate state in others (for example, airhostesses should give passengers a safe and friendly atmosphere). Employees undertake their emotional work, while having to master their own feelings, recognizing that in many situations, for example, they have to smile even if they do not feel like it. They must also be able to manage customers' feelings. It is as if service quality should make the customer satisfied and happy. In this context, emotional labor is not a homogeneous universe, as it depends on working conditions, types of jobs, and the cultural orientation of the employee to emotions. However, if expressions of emotions can be overwhelming for employees, we cannot forget that it enables them to exercise some control (Bolton 2006) over others, such as customers. Actually, this emotional labor does not always mean alienation, as it makes the creation of wider purposes possible (Wharton and Erickson 1993). The aim of standardizing emotional labor has to be understood not only as an instrument implemented by brands to achieve sales and profits, and therefore something negative for employees, but also in relation to how employees face the social space of work. Actually, there are positive aspects as it helps employees to better control interactions with customers and with other employees. Furthermore, standardization means that the brand does not always impose its requirements unilaterally. In the case of shops and restaurants, emotional control cannot be analyzed as a linear antagonism between shops, store managers, and operational level. We perceive some ambiguity and openness in the control mechanisms. Both employees and customers can attempt to subvert the interests of management, but also their own interests. The employees can intimidate the customers, but they often experience a feeling of lack of control in the interactions with customers. In this context, if the brand offers standardized strategies that protect them in the interaction with the customer, or enable them to have additional power, there is no reason for employees to reject these standardizations.

Besides attitude, it is crucial for the debate on the relational dimensions of this service relation to also emphasize appearance, image, and physical attributes of employees (Warhurst and Nickson 2007). The attitude of employees can be shaped by emotional labor, and their appearance through aesthetic labor (Warhurst and Nickson 2007). Moreover, it is not possible to neglect the impact of customers on the performance of emotional and aesthetic labor among employees, which involves the incorporation of less tangible skills. It is essential to consider relational skills designated as "soft skills," which include emotional and aesthetic dimensions.

The material dimension of the service relation reveals the material tasks done during a working day. Those employed in shops and restaurants are involved in both creating, as well as selling places (Pettinger 2006). They take care of the ambience, making it conducive to consumption, of the product presentation, stock preparation, tidying, and cleaning. Besides, their self-image and appearance are important and inseparable from the product on sale. To some extent, this is employee commercialization, in the sense of the appropriateness of the employee's image to the brand and shop organization. In the case of shops and restaurants, the use of a brand uniform is quite illustrative. It seems that the role of the material dimension of this service relation, and all that is associated with it, is even more important because it makes it possible to understand the shift of work from employees to customer in some types of shops and restaurants.

Qualitative Methodology

Much of the research about the analysis of service work in shops and restaurants is qualitative, with researchers experiencing some difficulty in accessing employees and their workplaces (Leidner 1991; Reiter 1997). This research did not face such constraints at its beginning, but as it progressed. Actually, the first 15 interviewees were employees

studying at the University of Porto, where I teach. In order to diversify the profile of interviewees, it was necessary to find other employees who were not simultaneously studying and working. Therefore, I decided to directly contact employees and ask them whether they were students or not. I first identified myself as a researcher, stating the objectives of the research, and then asked if they would be available to collaborate in the research by granting an interview scheduled according to their preferences. This way of accessing employees was more complex and there were constraints in this phase as many people approached were unavailable. However, this recruitment process was central "to understanding the 'outcomes' of the research" (Rapley 2007:17). In other words, the methodological misfortunes experienced by the researcher supported the inquiry on the very work organization in shops and restaurants at shopping centers. Moreover, such misfortunes enabled an increased awareness about the effects and limits of the conceptual and technical instruments used.

I have tried wherever possible to diversify the demographic profile of respondents, which required rejecting some contacts collected and looking for others. Despite these constraints, 60 employees were interviewed in 8 shopping centers located in the Porto Metropolitan Area, a number of interviews according to the principle of saturation (Burgess 1984), in other words, a strategy that consists of collecting information until it becomes redundant. The sample included 58% (35) of female interviewees and 42% (25) of male interviewees. The majority of women were working in shops (63%) and 37% in restaurants. With regard to the

men interviewed, approximately 60% were operating in restaurants and 40% in shops. It should be pointed out that there is a sharp contrast in percentages recorded for females and males and for shops and restaurants. These realities highlight how gendered attributes are brought into organizations and work (Leidner 1991; Lowe and Crewe 1996; Pettinger 2005).

According to the premises of qualitative research, the concern was not to select a statistically representative set of individuals, but rather a "socially significant" one. Therefore, respondents were considered not only as single individuals, but also as representatives of their organizational contexts, professions, as well as part of a social group that shares common characteristics (Rapley 2007). During the semi-structured interviews, my strategy—and remember the title of the book by Studs Terkel (2004), *Working. People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*—was to listen to the employees talking about what they do in their daily work and how they feel about it. To be sure, "listening" was informed by an interview script covering questions about the career, work activity, job satisfaction, and personal lives. As should now be obvious for the discussion above, in this article, I seek to cover only the specific theme of the work activity, capturing issues related to work organization and service relation.

When analyzing interviews, I do not "reproduce interviewees' own accounts, glossed over by a few social science categories" (Silverman 2013:48). Rather, the analysis of data is built on the notion of actors being located in specific social contexts,

therefore giving prominence to their creation of meanings. Borrowing from the narrative forms of organization studies, interpretative analysis permits "elucidating along theoretical, non-normative lines a viable way of combining narrative with the logic-scientific mode of reporting" (Czarniawska 1998:14). However, narratives themselves may easily be manipulated as "expressions given" (Gubrium and Holstein 2009), so it is important to look for "expressions given off" (Gubrium and Holstein 2009), as actions and thoughts that are less controlled, and in this way can tell us an actor's motives and true selves in the organizational context of shops and restaurants within shopping centers. Therefore, to capture these second kinds of expression, participant observation took an important role in order to observe shops and restaurants' employees and customers throughout all times of the working day (morning, afternoon, night during week, and weekend), and capture the work activity itself. Planning to systematically observe whenever possible the following sites for two months was vital: the entrance area of the shops and the restaurants, where I registered the movements of employees and customers; and the internal area of shops and restaurants, chosen for its relevance in framing the nature of the work activity under analysis. The idea was to look at how these two settings as contexts are used and produced by actors themselves. I approached these contexts from the "bottom" as I focused on chains of actions and events (Holstein and Gubrium 2007). As these two field sites are public spaces, accessing them was a process of hanging out and observing meticulously in order to produce a thick description of these two settings and the employees and customers in it. This description is based

on detailed field notes that I did after being in these two observational sites. Indeed, it was outside the field that I wrote the most careful notes about what I observed, otherwise the anonymity requirement would have been lost.

Both semi-structured interviews and participant observations showed the benefits of being there (Hodson et al. 2009), as they allowed a rich narrative about work organization, space configurations in shops and restaurants, and an understanding of service relation based on the following key features: approaching the customer, time and space framework, resources mobilized by employees, sales information support, and skills mobilized by employees.

Work Organization and Space Configurations in Shops

Prior to characterizing the work organization in the customized service and self-service shops, it is important to identify the existing professional categories according to work contracts. In customized service shops, professional categories are the following: first class cashier, second class cashier, third class cashier, assistant manager, and store manager. In self-service shops, positions are as follows: cashier, third class supervisor, second class supervisor, and supervisor. Both shops organize internal categories for employees who do not have direct equivalence with the provisions laid down in work contracts. Such categories compromise not only salary hierarchy, but also symbolic positions in shops. In the case of self-service shops, the supervisor plays an important role as this position

guarantees the front-line brand image. The supervisor talks to the shop management team about the customer's reactions to products on show and new guidelines. Promotion is an informal process in both types of shop, without explicit underlying criteria.

Shops are spaces designed for circulation of articles likely to be handled (Du Gay 1996) and for people hanging around. All shops are concerned with several issues: the shop window, the inner area, and location of articles. The window is the first image of the shop. The organization of the inner area is planned to the smallest details since it receives on a regular basis new products that have to be displayed in the best place to respond to customers' needs, which are the focus of organizational and marketing activities (Fuller and Smith 1991). Regarding large chain stores, there is a principle of uniformity for all shops within the same brand achieved through photographs showing how the areas should be organized. The marketing services associated to those of merchandising play an important role in the construction of such a consumer universe. Furthermore, the strategy to expand franchises adapted to the socio-demographic characteristics of customers increases their tendency to buy products (Abell 1991).

In what concerns a work organization, among self-service shops there are two working places: the shop itself and the restricted working area. Employees are in various places in the shop, at the checkout, receiving articles and payments, or at the shelves and small tables scattered around the shop, organizing, folding, or replacing articles. They are also

guarding the fitting rooms, receiving articles that customers try on. Finally, some employees organize articles near the entrance of the shop, so that they are able to control situations in which alarms not removed or disabled from the clothing are activated.

As customized service shops are often smaller, they have fewer employees and, at the same time, less customer flow, so it is not necessary to deploy a worker permanently at a shop entrance, as this can be done by any employee. The checkout is where articles and payments are registered. Shop floor employees welcome customers and fetch what they request. There are employees at the shelves and tables, organizing articles and putting them away when required. Finally, in the stockroom, their task is to organize the articles received and to decide on the location of such articles in the shop. Both types of shops are fitted with adequate storage rooms for the articles, sometimes on an upper floor or on the same floor as the shop.

Service Relation in Shops: A Qualitative Approach

The service work in shops can be analyzed according to five features: approaching the customer, time and space framework, resources mobilized by employees, sales information support, and skills mobilized by employees.

In the case of self-service shops, employees do not determine when and how the customer is approached, and the duration of service relation varies according to customer types and their motivations (Fuller and Smith 1991; Korczynski 2004). Custom-

ers tend to wander around the existing shop areas in order to see different articles, which do not necessarily result in an article being sold. Therefore, it is important to take into account the following three types of customers suggested by employees during the semi-structured interviews carried out: the shop-loyal customers, who repeat their visits following previous contacts, and who buy articles; transient customers, who visit the shop and can buy one article or two; and passers-by, who simply visit the shop with no intention of buying. In the first case, it is important to mention that loyalty does not mean exclusivity because it is possible to be loyal to more than one shop.

When there is interaction between customers and employees, the latter can guide the customer by suggestive selling techniques (Mills 1986). Thus, employees can prompt the customer into buying by setting up a favorable business atmosphere for the sale to take place (Pettinger 2006). There are specific areas within the shop to support sales, as the location of products and their layouts are carefully planned by the brands, as noted earlier. Furthermore, the effect of the shop window itself is very powerful. Finally, during the service relation, employees make use of many relational skills allowing them to fully become part of the interactional moment. Furthermore, organizational skills are also widespread as employees have formal and informal training about the organizational structure of shops.

In the case of customized service shops, employees determine when and how the customer should be approached. Interaction duration varies, and is less structured than in the previous case, so it allows

employees to manage their availability to the customer in a way that stimulates discovery of products by the customer. However, employees must always adapt to the flows of interactions with the customer and other activities that they have to undertake. It facilitates the suggestive selling, but in these types of shops employees have more time to present articles in detail. Regarding sales information support, self-service and customized service shops are alike in terms of physical spaces, location and product layout, and collection catalogues. Also important are the suggestions offered by employees to customers, by means of a set of relational and technical skills. Actually, organizational skills are not so evident, as in the self-service shops, as the technical skills which point the deep knowledge that employees have about the articles they present to customers.

Body and non-body language (Leidner 1993; Reiter 1997) are designed to achieve a certain tone and a certain end. Service relation is not only the framing structure of work, it is the work, and often the product of work, its result. This type of work immediately turns into a social action (Weber 1971), as I already noted, an action not only steered to others, where language and communication contribute to shape the final product offered (in this case, a service), but also steered to the product itself. Language is crucial during the working day of these employees. On this issue, a glossary containing the main expressions identified throughout participant observations and semi-structured interviews with these employees is proposed. It shows different dimensions of service work, such as relational and material.

Table 1. Glossary on service activity at shops.

Beating the record of sales	To exceed the amount of sales of the same day in the previous year
COSC	Control of orders, sales, and costs
Regular customers	Customers entering the shop every day or every second day
Coordination	Changing the layout of articles in the shop
Morning meeting	Morning meeting to inform employees about the amount invoiced the previous day, whether the objective was achieved, and comment on the weakest points
Minimum assistance paid to the customer	Observation of rules to assist customers
Unload truck	Receiving goods from Spain, separating and counting goods in the restricted work area, and then placing them in the shop
Cash takings	Account for end-of-day cash takings
HACCP	Hazard analysis and control critical points
Inter-note	To register the number of items going to another shop of the same brand
Shop's user manual	Document containing all operational rules
Nipoe	Week-end meeting on the current sales of the shop during the previous week, week balance-sheet, sometimes people present publicly the experiences that did not go as planned during the week
Tips for care shown to customers	Amount in cash that full-time shop employees receive for special care shown to a customer
Tidy the clothes	Separate the clothes
Fold the clothes	Special folding method according to each department (women's, men's, children, baby)
Suggestive selling	Suggest articles to the customers
Twenty-four	Return to the storage area every hour to replace the articles sold in the shop

Source: Self-elaboration.

There are two key issues. Firstly, is the "fold clothes" as it reveals the material dimension of this working activity. Indeed, one of the employees interviewed described himself professionally as "clothes folder." Thus, inside the shops we cannot forget about a significant number of activities involving material tasks, which means that interactive service work contains not only a relational dimension, but also a material one.

Secondly, is the issue of "suggestive selling," also included in the glossary of the restaurants, that makes it clear how shops interfere in the organization of the customer experience (Lowe and Crewe 1996), for example, according to the type of physical layout offered to the customer. The shop also determines how employees present themselves to customers. After receiving scripted instructions from shop management, employees manage their body and verbal language when suggesting any additional article to the customer, as I pointed out during observations. Looking the customer in the eye, being friendly and smiling, knowing how to wait for the customer's reactions and to respect their space imply verbal and non-verbal language that must express an image associated to the brand (Leidner 1993). Service relation is largely standardized, not only are employees involved in this, but also customers (Pettinger 2004; 2005; 2006).

Thus, from this perspective, there is clearly a characteristic type of language and communication used, built and structured throughout the daily activities of these employees, which represent essential resources in service activity. Some perspectives consider that the brand and the organization

as a whole control and manipulate the employee's body and soul (Leidner 1993). However, at the same time, standardization and routines are an opportunity for employees (Bolton 2005; 2006). As noted earlier, they consider it important in their working day as it indicates how to act in particular situations with customers, colleagues, and superiors.

Work Organization and Space Configurations in Restaurants

Before analyzing work organization in the three types of restaurants (fast food, hybrid, and classical), it is important to identify the existing professional categories. In the case of fast food restaurants, an operational career consists of five stages, which represent organizational boundary roles in terms of responsibilities assumed. Each boundary role has different levels of autonomy and responsibility among performance of functions. Therefore, at the bottom, there is the operator, then the expert, the VIP expert, the shift manager B, the shift manager A (all from an operational career), the unit manager B, the unit manager A, and the brand director.

Employees of low and high status categories are relevant to the study because both imply physical presence at restaurants and interactions with customers (Reiter 1997). It seems that these multiple hierarchies benefit restaurants and their organization (Brochier 2001), as they enable permanent attendance of superiors controlling and supervising employees. This involves ensuring that employees stay with the organization through promotions or hope of promotion. The aim is to get managers

performing both supervisory and material tasks, such as being in the kitchen. For those managers hoping to evade the more material tasks, being there also makes them become more involved in order to rise in the hierarchy. In hybrid restaurants, the hierarchy structure is the same as in fast food restaurants. Among classical restaurants, there is the restaurant manager, the assistant manager, and waiters. The professional hierarchy is simpler than in fast food restaurants.

The analyses of work organization take into consideration workstations, equipment, and main tasks. Among fast food restaurants, there are two main workstations—kitchen and window. The kitchen is fitted with refrigerators where the products received are preserved, and a grill which is a specific technical appliance designed to cook meat in a fixed period, measured by its purpose-built control device. This device allows time adjustment according to different types of meat available. The seasoning area is where the cooked meat placed on the bread is seasoned. There is a further technical device to cook fish and chicken. The deep-fryer is designed to fry the potatoes. The window has cash registers, and drink and coffee sections. At the cash registers, employees register the orders. The menu available to customers is fixed on the upper part of the wall behind the window. To look at the menu, customers have to come closer to the window, and make a quick choice and place orders to avoid queues behind them, especially at breakfast and dinner time, which employees call rush hours. After taking the orders, window employees deliver information to their colleagues located in the kitchen. If they already have the orders, they

will quickly slide products over a ramp dividing the kitchen from the window, or if preparation is necessary, this happens a few moments later. Most menu options available to the customer are already prepared, particularly the most popular options. Drinks are near the cash registers and are delivered to the customer by employees taking the orders. The coffee area is further from the cash registers and therefore the customer must proceed to this area with the ticket confirming payment, and request the coffee, the milk-based drinks, and/or confectionery.

This work organization is rather like a "production line," as highlighted by a manager interviewed, an unvarying routine for taking and delivering orders where everything must be done in the shortest time possible and in a small space. Indeed, the size of these fast food restaurants is very small, with many employees in the same place at the same time in both main working places.

Regarding hybrid restaurants, there are three main workstations: the kitchen, the counter, and the dining room. As in the case of fast food restaurants, the kitchen is fitted with refrigerators to preserve food products, but here there is an additional hob and an oven area to cook the food. To defrost the products, employees have to respect the requirements of the frozen products, especially the best-before date and the freezing time. The kitchen is fitted with two tables that provide support to the hob and the oven area, respectively. The oven is used to cook pizzas and salads. Employees at the tables have to take into consideration how the products are laid out according to their proper quantities and their

particular characteristics. Sauces are added to the pizzas before they are taken to the tables, which is not the case with pasta dishes. Employees carry the pre-prepared dishes to the tables. They are in charge of attending customers. The kitchen is also equipped with a dishwasher. The cash registers and the drinks sections are found at the counter. The function of this counter is the same as in fast food restaurants. A bar stands in one of the corners of the dining room, where drinks are fetched for the tables. Some employees are in charge of welcoming customers at the restaurant door and taking them to the tables, others are responsible for waiting at the tables, and others are in charge of supplying drinks from the bar to the tables during rush hours. Finally, the cash register is used to register products that have been served at different tables and to register payments.

In classical restaurants, there are three workstations: the kitchen, the counter, and the dining room. The kitchen is fitted with a hob, a refrigerator, and an oven, with functions similar to those of hybrid-type restaurant. The side tables are used for the preparation of food, and no distinction is made between the side table for the hob and the table for the oven area, as in hybrid restaurants. Potatoes are cut in the kitchen and then fried in the deep fryer. They do not come in packages as in fast food and hybrid restaurants. There is an expert in the kitchen, the cook, who is in charge of cooking for customers, similar to hybrid restaurants. Among fast food restaurants, even though the employees are in the kitchen, they are not exactly cooks because they perform tasks at various workstations, so they are multifunctional. Indeed, employees are taught

in a short time and are fully trained in almost a week (Leidner 1993; Reiter 1997). In the kitchen, they are responsible for one specific task integrated in a particular production process. The counter system is identical to that of hybrid restaurants, but with one difference: employees at the counter remain in the same place and do not wander off to other workstations. Finally, in the dining room, there is no distinction between welcoming the customer and paying special attention to the customer, as there is in hybrid restaurants. Employees often wait for customers to choose their own tables and sit down before offering them the menu, and, a few minutes later, they take their orders.

In sum, hybrid restaurants have the same features as fast food and classical restaurants. However, employees are multifunctional in both fast food and hybrid restaurants since they move around several workstations. In classical restaurants, employees perform only the tasks for which they have been hired. For example, as I saw through the observation, if someone is employed as a waiter or to work at the counter, or even in the kitchen, he or she will only do tasks related to that function. Examining these issues is important to understand the heterogeneous reality of work organization in different types of restaurants, which is far from a homogenous image of workers and work organization among restaurants at shopping centers.

Service Relation in Restaurants: A Qualitative Approach

As stated earlier, the service relation between employees and customers in restaurants can be

analyzed according to five features: approaching the customer, time and space framework, resources mobilized by employees, sales information support, and skills mobilized by employees.

Regarding the moment of approaching the customer, in fast food restaurants, this is generally a process that is initiated by an employee. Indeed, as I have seen during observations throughout the research, the customer is usually still reading the menu over the counter and choosing what they are going to eat and drink, when the employee welcomes him/her and offers some help. The employee guides the customer who is also oriented by the brand suggestions. However, as soon as the customer takes part in the service relation, the brand must adapt itself to the customer's behavior (Whyte 1948). This requires the transfer of work previously done by the employee to the customer. It seems that the production and service model of these brands pull the customer into the process of work, and the result is a reduction of labor costs, benefitting the chains with free labor since these customers are not paid to perform these tasks. As Ritzer (1993) argues, the boundaries between employees and customers have a tendency to disappear, especially in the self-service systems. However, this does not happen in classical restaurants. In these, the customer enters the space, chooses a table, and only then is he/she approached by the employee, even though this approach can take place long after the customers have entered the restaurant. In the case of hybrid restaurants, the situation at the counter is similar to that in fast food restaurants, and the situation at the table is similar to that of classical restaurants.

Moving on to the time and space framework, this type of service relation takes only a short time in fast food restaurants, between 5 and 8 minutes, prescribed by the restaurant itself, while in classical restaurants it lasts for an average of 20 to 50 minutes. In hybrid restaurants, the situation is similar to that of other restaurants. As we have seen, this service relation occurs in specific spaces in restaurants.

Concerning the brand devices used by the employees during the service relation, it is possible to highlight suggestive selling in fast food restaurants where, for instance, customers choose the menu and then the employee tells them that for an extra 20 cents a larger drink can be served. The suggestive selling is also a reality in classical restaurants. However, here, we have longer interaction periods that allow employees to describe the products in more detail. The situation in hybrid restaurants is similar to the two already mentioned.

Sales information support is largely scripted, according to each brand (Ransome 2005). Indeed, in fast food restaurants, there is a clearly visible panel with the menu options and respective prices. In the case of classical restaurants, the menu (describing each dish for every day of the week) is given to the customers.

Finally, the skills mobilized by employees in the three types of restaurants include a group of relational skills that mobilize employees' subjectivity. Organizational and technical skills are also evident, particularly in fast food and hybrid restaurants, where employees are multifunctional and

are obliged to know the products and how to work with the existing equipment.

Regarding the whole universe of restaurants, a glossary on its activity was set up according to data gathered from both semi-structured interviews and participant observations. This is a set of concepts and expressions related to the work undertaken in restaurants; in other words, a language that structures and is structured throughout the daily activities of employees interviewed (Valentine 2002). During the first interviews, I needed to clarify these concepts and expressions used by employees from restaurants. Along the last interviews, my familiarity with the language enabled me to understand the discourse of those interviewed and observed.

Table 2. Glossary on service activity at restaurants.

Beating the record of sales	To exceed the amount of sales of the same day in the previous year
COSC	Control of orders, sales, and costs
Frequent customers	Customers using the facility every day, or every two days
Mystery customer	Customer working for the brand, who assesses the business attitude of employees, the level of knowledge of the products and of hygiene in facilities, without employees being aware of the evaluation at hand
Achievement of standards	Achievement of procedures for the preparation and making of products, rules for paying attention to the customers
Closing of tills	Cash taking at the end of the day's activities
HACCP	Hazard analysis and control critical points
Preparation lists	To collect and prepare all the products needed to begin preparation, on opening the food shop
Preparation manual	Document containing the rules on the preparation of certain products
Rush	Work periods with an intense flow of customers
Sangria	Cash register filled with cash
Seven phases in paying attention to the customers	Group of compulsory phases along which attention must be paid to the customer
Suggestive selling	Suggest additional products to the customers

Source: Self-elaboration.

Among the concepts and expressions compiled in Table 2, special reference must be made to the mystery customer, as it implies the instrumentalization of the customer by the brand (Erstad 1998). This mystery customer defines the assessment of service quality perceived by customers. Non-quality due to a number of successive failures means that is not fit for purpose. As Jougleux (2005) argues, there are quality failures according to perceived expectations, specification of service offers, service production, and communication. With respect to perceived expectations, the employee providing the service is not aware of the customer's true expectations, and does not know the main issues on which the customer justifies his/her opinion of the service nor is the employee aware of the levels of performance expected by him/her. In terms of specification of service offers, they sometimes do not meet the customer's expectations (waiting time, accessibility, delays in the follow-up). Regarding service production, the company fails to provide the service guaranteed before. Finally, concerning communication, there is a difference between promises made to the customer and actions accomplished. Indeed, the notion of quality is quite close to that of satisfaction (Jougleux 2005), seen as the result of the comparison between what customers perceive as services which should be provided and services effectively provided. Thus, service is a product that cannot be dissociated from the customer that requests and consumes it. Even if the shop or restaurant providing the service anticipates its characteristics and production methods, it is only achieved through the interaction between customer and organization, as I observed directly in shops and restaurants. Nonetheless, an excessive fixation on the customer can be harmful. This is not only about the quality of the service relation at the front line, attention

also must be paid to the back line, or in other words, to the production place, where the employee often is.

In terms of results in the case of very standardized services, for example, in fast food restaurants, the limited operating area allocated to employees and also the expectations of customers reinforce the fact that the perspective of quality is determined especially at the functional level of the brand (Jougleux 2005). As noted earlier, even if the service is offered in many places, it is up to the brand to specify the service offer proposed for each shop, without the possibility of adapting locally. Organization of production standards applies both to back line and to front line alike, as well as to the physical characteristics of the place. Nonetheless, there is still some possibility of local adaptation of the service provided to the customer, for example, in terms of skills and courtesy shown by employees who contact customers, which exceed the rules stipulated by the brand. In this context, the mystery customer is a certification practice applicable to employees as a goal to achieve, towards which everyone must work. The instrumentalization of customer pressure means, for example, as some employees put it, the intensification of the work place. Unit managers demand that employees work harder, as they themselves are also under scrutiny and must show their commitment to work among restaurants.

Conclusions

This article explores the opportunities of a qualitative research strategy combining both semi-structured interviews and participant observations to discuss work organization and analyze the singularities of service relation taking into account the different work activ-

ities among shops and restaurants. Based on these service activities most commonly found in the organizational context of the shopping center, the analysis considers the existence of a complex service relation that incorporates relational and material dimensions.

Throughout qualitative analyses that combine inextricably linked data gathering from semi-structured interviews and participant observations, this research explores the opportunities to capture interviewees' discourses and actions. The analysis of work organization and spaces configurations leads us to consider different types of shops and restaurants—self-service, customized service shops and fast food, classical, and hybrid restaurants. Moreover, the article recognizes heterogeneous service work pointing to a service relation incorporating relational and material dimensions. Indeed, in the service relation, the relational dimensions (Borzeix 2000; Jeantet 2003) are not the dominant attribute as there are material tasks involving the creation of shops and restaurants as selling places (Pettinger 2006), suggesting the complex play of interests between employees, customers, and brands as employers (Leidner 1991; 1993). This is a key point because those workplaces at shopping centers are explicitly marketplaces, aimed at selling products.

An analysis that recognizes complex service relation allows highlighting the ambivalent role of emotions therein. Besides focusing on issues about standardization of emotional work and its oppressive effect on employees, this article also noted that such standardization is important for employees (Bolton 2006) since they are able to achieve a greater control of their emotions in the interactions with customers, other employees, and superiors. Indeed, there is a positive experience of emotional labor for employees who do not consider their work as an ephemeral experience, as jobs for students. Service work is therefore a reality that has to be framed in the physical and social space in which it takes place, and among the multiple players involved in such work.

Understanding and examining the nature of service work in organizational contexts such as the shopping center require a wider scope that considers not only the features of service relation as situational, but also the more abiding patterns that structure it, related to organizational goals. Both are crucial to the debate on sociology of service work and should not be neglected among sociological analyses.

References

Abell, Mark, (ed.). 1991. "The Structure of International Franchising Within the European Community: A Statistical Analyses." Pp. 44-81 in *European Franchising, Law, and Practice*. London: Waterlow Publications.

Bolton, Sharon. 2005. *Emotion Management in the Workplace*. London: Palgrave.

Bolton, Sharon. 2006. "Una tipologia de la emoción en el lugar de trabajo." *Sociologia del Trabajo* 53:3-29.

Borzeix, Annie. 2000. "Relation de service et sociologie du travail. L'usager: une figure qui nous dérange?" *Cahiers du Genre* 28:19-48.

Brochier, Christophe. 2001. "Des jeunes corvéables. L'organisation du travail et la gestion du personnel dans un fast-food." *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 138:73-83.

Burgess, Robert. 1984. *In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Czarniawska, Barbara. 1998. *A Narrative Approach to Organization Studies*. London: Sage.

Du Gay, Paul. 1996. *Consumption and Identity at Work*. London: Sage.

Erstad, Margaret. 1998. "Mystery Shopping Programs and Human Resource Management." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 10(1):34-38.

Falk, Pasi and Colin Campbell, (eds.). 1997. *The Shopping Experience*. London: Sage.

Fuller, Lind and Vick Smith. 1991. "Consumers Reports: Management by Customers in a Changing Economy." *Work, Employment, and Society* 5(1):1-16.

Gadrey, Jean. 1994. "Les relations de service et l'analyse du travail des agents." *Sociologie du Travail* 3(94):381-389.

Goffman, Erving. 1961. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Doubleday.

Gubrium, Jaber F. and James A. Holstein. 2009. *Analyzing Narrative Reality*. London: Sage.

Haveman, Heather and Mukti Khaire. 2006. "Organizational Sociology and Analysis of Work." Pp: 272-298 in *Social Theory at Work*, edited by M. Korczynski, R. Hodson, and P. K. Edwards. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hochschild, Arlie. 2003. *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hodson, Randy et al. 2009. "The Benefits of Being There. Evidence From the Literature on Work." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 34(4):470-493.

Holstein, James A. and Jaber F. Gubrium. 2007. "Context: Working It Up, Down, and Across." Pp. 267-281 in *Qualitative Research Practice*, edited by C. Seale et al. London: Sage.

Hughes, Everett. 1981. *Men and Their Work*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Jeantet, Aurélie. 2003. "À votre service! La relation de service comme rapport social." *Sociologie du Travail* 2(45):191-209.

Jougleux, Muriel. 2005. "La qualité des services: vers un modèle enrichi des écarts de non-qualité." *Économies et Sociétés* 17:2037-2063.

Korczynski, Marek. 2004. "Back-Office Service Work: Bureaucracy Challenged?" *Work, Employment, and Society* 18(1):97-114.

Korczynski, Marek. 2009. "The Mystery Customer: Continuing Absences in the Sociology of Service Work." *Sociology* 43:952-967.

Korczynski, Marek and Deborah Kerfoot. 2005. "Gender and Service: New Directions for the Study of 'Front-Line' Service Work." *Gender, Work, and Organization* 12(5):387-399.

Leidner, Robin. 1991. "Serving Hamburgers and Selling Insurance: Gender, Work, and Identity in Interactive Service Jobs." *Gender & Society* 5(4):154-177.

Leidner, Robin. 1993. *Fast Food, Fast Talk. Service Work and the Routinization and Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lowe, Michelle and Louise Crewe. 1996. "Shop Work: Image, Customer Care, and the Restructuring of Retail Employment." Pp. 196-207 in *Retailing, Consumption, and Capital. Towards the New Retail Geography*, edited by N. Wrigley and M. Lowe. Essex: Longman.

Macdonald, Cameron and Carmen Sirianni, (eds.). 1996. "The Service Society and the Changing Experience of Work." Pp: 1-26 in *Working in the Service Society*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Mills, Peter. 1986. *Managing Services Industries: Organizational Practices in a Post-Industrial Economy*. Cambridge: Mass Ballinger.

Pettinger, Lynne. 2004. "Brand Culture and Branded Workers: Service Work and Aesthetic Labor in Fashion Retail." *Consumption Markets and Culture* 2(7):165-184.

Pettinger, Lynne. 2005. "Gendered Work Meets Gendered Goods: Selling and Service in Clothing Retail." *Gender, Work, and Organization* 12(5):460-478.

Pettinger, Lynne. 2006. "On the Materiality of Service Work." *The Sociological Review* 54(1):48-65.

Ransome, Paul. 2005. *Work, Consumption & Culture. Affluence and Social Change in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Sage.

Rapley, Tim. 2007. "Interviews." Pp. 15-33 in *Qualitative Research Practice*, edited by C. Seale et al. London: Sage.

Reiter, Ester. 1997. *Making Fast-Food*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Rifkin, Jeremy. 2000. *The Age of Access*. London: Penguin.

Ritzer, George. 1993. The *McDonaldization of Society*. California: Pine Forge Press.

Silverman, David. 2013. "What Counts as Qualitative Research? Some Cautionary Comments." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 9(2):48-55.

Terkel, Studs. 2004. *Working. People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*. New York: New Press.

Valentine, Gill. 2002. "In-Corporations: Food, Bodies, and Organizations." *Body and Society* 8(2):1-20.

Warhurst, Chris and Dennis Nickson. 2007. "Employee Experience of Aesthetic Labor in Retail and Hospitality." *Work, Employment, and Society* 21(1):103-120.

Weber, Max. 1959. *Il Metodo delle Scienze Storico-Sociali*. Torino: Einaudi Editore.

Weber, Max. 1971. *Économie et Société*. Paris: Plon.

Wharton, Amy and Rebecca Erickson. 1993. "Managing Emotions on the Job and at Home: Understanding the Consequences of Multiple Emotional Roles." *Academy of Management Review* 18(3):457-486.

Whyte, William Foot. 1948. *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry*. New York: McGraw-Hill.