AESTHETIC LABOUR

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IF YOU LOOK THE PART, YOU'LL GET THE JOB

In Chapter 2 we outlined claims for the emergence of a new 'expressive age' (Böhme, 2010: 30) or an 'age of look and feel' (Postrel, 2004: 178). Whilst we have some reservations about the more grandiose claims made, especially that of Böhme for a new stage of capitalism, we do recognise that an emphasis on aesthetics is now more pervasive and that a consumption-driven beautification is underway of products and people in the wider economy and society. This shift contrasts with claims made for the workplace: 'Much of modern work lacks beauty', states Donkin, 'there is no place for beauty on a balance sheet' (2010: 241). Instead, jobs are said to be becoming more ugly and brutish. This angst about the quality of jobs reflects a concern with a polarisation – at least in the UK and US – of the labour market into good and bad jobs (Hurley et al., 2015; Kalleberg et al., 2020). Whilst we share concerns about job quality, we would disagree that beauty has left the workplace: aesthetic labour indicates that beauty contributes to the balance sheet of some firms and is currently more rather than less important to employers.

This chapter outlines the fluctuating fortunes of the body in analyses of work and explains the current (re)turn to analysing the body in work. The first section outlines the initial concern and then disregard for the body in analyses of work. The following section then points out how it remained important to some employers, particularly in those putatively glamourous industries, and made a brief re-appearance in some, now classic, studies of work but was quickly dropped either because of a lack of empirics or because of other conceptual concerns with emotional labour (i.e. Hochschild, 1983; Mills, 1951). The following three sections then define, theorise and attempt to locate aesthetic labour. They show the current centrality in employer strategies of worker corporeality in work and employment, and how aesthetic labour conceptually captures this development.

THE GREAT VANISHING TRICK

The body was once a key feature in analyses of work, and particularly in those analyses concerned with the harsh working conditions wrought by the industrial revolution (Brody, 1960; Engels, 1971[1845]). The body is, after all, the source of labour. As part of the industrial revolution, employers needed to take workers physically out of homes and fields and put them into the mines, mills and new factories in order to be able to exert greater control over the labour of these bodies (e.g. Thompson, 1983). Once there, with employer oversight enabled, those bodies could be made to work longer or harder to enable employers to be more competitive in the market.

The nineteenth-century workplace became pathological as the debilitating effects of industrial life took their toll on workers' bodies, which were becoming 'stunted, enfeebled, and depraved' according to one contemporary commentator (Turner Thakrah, quoted in Rule, 1991: 145). In his *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Engels (1971[1845]) charted the death and disease wrought upon urban workers in Victorian northern England. In one town, Carlisle, death rates amongst adults under 40 years of age rose 20 per cent with the introduction of mills. In the US steel mills of the early twentieth century, exhausting work, heat fumes and danger were endemic. In one mill almost a quarter of immigrant workers were injured or killed each year (Brody, 1960). An end of shift stupor would descend on those workers not injured or killed. Brody quotes one investigator at the time who wrote that on the trolley journey home from work, 'Nobody was talking. … [Some] were asleep. The rest sat quiet, with legs and neck loose, with their eyes open, steady, dull, fixed upon nothing at all … No man who works twelve hours … has time or energy to do much outside of this work' (1960: 94).

Work in the developed countries can still be debilitating, even dangerous. In 2004 in Glasgow, the Stockline plastics factory exploded. Nine employees were killed and 40 injured (Taylor and Connelly, 2009). In the US states of Georgia and Alabama there were 12 amputations, most involving the loss of fingers, at Hyundai and Kia component parts makers over 2015–16 (Silverman, 2017). However, the worst ravages of work have been ameliorated through preventative interventions. With agitation by organised labour as well as religion-inspired moralists and enlightened politicians, working time and occupational health and safety regulations were gradually introduced from the nineteenth century, and the physical toll on workers' bodies was mitigated as the twentieth century progressed (see for example, Hofmann et al., 2017; Rule, 1991). Moreover by the late twentieth century, jobs in the mines and mills were disappearing, replaced by service jobs.[1] As the mills have been replaced by malls, and coalmines by call centres, any residual health and safety issues have become less obvious – psychological not physical, as research on job stress and burnout amongst workers illustrates (e.g. Schaubroeck and Jones, 2000; Taylor and Bain, 1999).[2] These injuries tend to be less visible and less immediate.

It is not just that injuries became centred on the mind, with the shift to services, work itself changed from manual to mental. This change was articulated in Bell's (1973) *The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society*, using the metaphor of the game to describe work under different forms of production. Before the industrial revolution the game in agriculture was between man and nature; in the industrial age the game in factories was between man and machine. In the services-led, so-called 'post-industrial' age the new game is between people he claimed. Thus, in service jobs such as retail, Korczynski and Ott (2004) claim that workers now 'enchant customers' with their sales patter. However for Bell and other, more recent writers, the real focus is those workers driving the new 'knowledge society' or 'knowledge economy' using embrained knowledge. With work now said to be driven by brains not brawn, the means of production is lodged inside these workers' heads – their ideas (Nordstrom and Ridderstrale, 2002). The task for capital now, through 'knowledge management', is to help create and then capture and capitalise on these ideas. This emphasis on the stuff inside workers' heads has compounded the lack of interest in workers' corporality. The outcome is that whilst the body continued to labour, it disappeared from or was downgraded in analyses of work (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011; Slavishak, 2010). It then receded from analytical sight by the mid-to-late twentieth century with economic structuring and interventions to improve workplace health and safety (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011).

Whilst interest declined in the body as a factor of production, it rose in analyses of consumption, particularly leisure and pleasure (Turner, 1996). There were a number of sometimes overlapping reasons for this interest. For example, the popularisation of discourse analysis and the focus on the disciplined and sexualised body (Foucault, 1979, 1981), as well as the new potentials to refashion the body as an expression of identity and sexual identity (Featherstone et al., 1991; Giddens, 1991), all of which suggest that the body has become less biological and more social, physically malleable if not plastic, subjectable to what Giddens calls the 'body projects' of entrepreneurial individuals undertaking the type of cosmetic (now labelled 'aesthetic') interventions that we outlined in Chapter 2. These projects received a technological boost with twenty-first century advances in medical science, and the possibility of having a 'blank screen' from which we can choose our bodies and those of our offspring (for a discussion see Shilling, 2007). Even feminism, which had argued for the gendered body (e.g. Grosz, 1994), lost ground to a new sexual politics in which the body was no longer the outcome of social conditioning but a matter of personal preference. As an ironic consequence, the physical body has 'slid from view', according to Shilling, becoming 'a mere metaphor' (2007: 10). At best, Wolkowitz (2002) notes, the concern in these accounts is individuals' work on their own bodies, not individuals' working bodies.

That the body is analytically important as a site of consumption rather than a factor of production resonates with erroneous, evidence-free claims such as those of Bauman

(1998) that work is dead and that we are now what we buy. Unfortunately for Bauman, the evidence suggests otherwise – that, if anything, the developed countries remain work centric, even as the clever robots are said to be coming to take the jobs. Governments of the advanced economies are concerned to encourage, even coerce, more people into work; a concern that only increased as the global financial crisis turned into a global economic crisis and unemployment rose to high levels, as both the OECD's (Scarpetta, 2014) and EU's (EC, 2010) drive for 'more and better' jobs illustrates, with the latter even setting specific targets for increasing employment participation rates. Production, and within it work, therefore remain important. Indeed it is indicative that countries are today often referred to as economies rather than societies (Carlisle and Hanlon, 2011).

In this context, Wolkowitz (2002) has rightly sought to bring work back into analysis of the body, focusing on what she terms 'body work'. Occupations involving this body work are multiple, from maids and care assistants to medical doctors and retail workers. However as Wolkowitz makes clear, body work has a specific and intentionally bounded focus. What workers in these occupations have in common, she states, is that they are employed to work on the 'care, adornment, pleasure, discipline and cure of others' bodies' (2002: 497). In other words, the work of these occupations centres on servicing the bodies of others, a trait found in many of the beauty industry occupations that we discussed in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, this directing of attention to body work by Wolkowitz, and in particular its link to the employment relationship, is important. It attunes to the blurring of reproductive and productive labour as the former increasingly becomes commodified as it is pushed and pulled out of the home and into the marketplace (Wolkowitz and Warhurst, 2010).

The problem is that it is also a narrow conceptualisation of work and the body in services. In only focusing on those workers who work on others' bodies, it ignores a whole range of other service workers whose work is not the production (and reproduction) of others' bodies but involves the management of their bodies by their employers for those employers' benefit – aesthetic labour. Whilst these workers serve food and drinks, sell dresses and jeans or respond to insurance claims and banking queries for example, their bodies – not those of clients and customers – are part of the product being sold to customers and clients.

THE BODY, GLAMOUR AND THE PERSONALITY MARKET

If the body disappeared from research agendas, it remained of interest to employers as economies began to restructure and the workforce began to (re)feminise from the mid-twentieth century. That interest was most obvious in what at the time were regarded as

the 'glamorous' airline and television industries. By the 1960s, airline cabin crew had become feminised (see for example, Barry, 2007; Mills, 2006). Airlines operated strict appearance rules for these workers – rules that still exist in some cases (see Box 3.1 below). Crew were required to take make-up, hairstyling, workwear and comportment classes as part of their training. The aim of this prescription was to standardise their appearance as part of the service offering (Riegel, 2013). Over the years there has been a lingering ambivalence amongst air cabin crew about this requirement. On the one hand, as Riegel makes clear, they enjoyed the training, even found it exciting: 'I loved every minute of those lessons', she says, 'I felt like I was a student at some Swiss finishing school' (p. 96). Moreover it made her and her colleagues the centre of much-wanted male attention – 'the men surrounded us likes flies', she says (p. 97). On the other hand, female flights attendants had regular, company-imposed weight checks and some companies even imposed body shape ratios (Shilling, 1996). Not surprisingly, these demands on their corporeality ran up against claims of sexual objectification – the 1970s Singapore Girl, for example, who became the brand embodiment of Singapore Airlines – and attendants were sometimes cast as little more than 'trolley dollies' (Bolton and Boyd, 2003). In an information leaflet given to us in the late 1990s, the UK-based Monarch Airlines stated that its cabin crew were the company's 'shop window'. Advertising for new crew it stipulated their height and weight, 'with weight in proportion to height', and said that they had to possess a 'pleasing appearance'. Whilst such explicit aesthetic demands have receded in the UK and US, in many other countries they remain alive and well, as Box 3.1 below shows.

Box 3.1 Looks as a business card

In 2017, the Russian airline Aeroflot fought a court battle over claims that it favoured the employment of slim and attractive female cabin crew. The company, asserting that it had a right to stipulate the weight and size of the crew, argued that 'stewardesses are the face of any airline, and the national carrier's stewardesses are the country's business card'. In China similar attitudes prevail with evidence of airlines paying more attention to women's appearance and figure in recruiting cabin crew, rather than elements such as foreign language skills or education. In 2008, one Chinese airline even selected flights attendants using a reality TV show that followed a six-month audition to work for the airline, and included activities such as a swimsuit competition and a race involving luggage, make-up brushes and drink trays. In 2019, Norwegian Air was criticised for its 22-page dress code which, for women, stipulates that they should wear high heels, eye make-up and a light foundation, and only gold- or silver-coloured jewellery. A spokesperson for the airline said, 'Norwegian Air has a comprehensive set of uniform guidelines to ensure that our flying crew represent our brand'.

(*Sources*: BBC, 2017; Oppenheim, 2019; Ren, 2017)

Similar debates occurred around the introduction of female newsreaders such as Angela Rippon and Anna Ford on British television in the 1970s.[3] The debates also focused on these newsreaders' physical appearance and its relationship to their work, as Box 3.2 illustrates.

Box 3.2 The rise of 'autocuties'

The public worried that the introduction of female newsreaders would distract the viewers with their looks: 'Could I suggest that Miss Ford cuts out the frosty lipstick and shiny blush-on' wrote one irate writer in the *Daily Express* newspaper in 1978. What these female newsreaders were saying was subordinated to how they looked when they said it. Newsreaders' looks continue to be debated into the 2000s. Some field reporters, for example Kate Adie, criticised the BBC for hiring news presenters 'with cute faces, cute bottoms and nothing in between'. Significantly, the accusations now extended to include men. Male and female newsreaders were similarly being castigated as 'autocuties': 'pretty young women and handsome young men without a solid journalistic background', according to seasoned male TV journalist Mark Austin.

(*Sources*: Armstrong, 2008; Holland, 1987; Packer, 2002)

Despite the complaints from Adie and Austin, by the start of the 2000s attitudes were seemingly changing and a counter claim was made that appearance is not a distraction from the work of news-reading but instead an integral part of it. Thus, if there was an attempt to deride the focus on newsreaders' appearance in the 1970s, it is argued that appearance is not only part of the job but also an important feature of the job. As UK newsreader Katie Derham explained, 'I'm on screen most evenings, and if you have an on-screen job people are going to employ you partly for how you look. But it's not a case of "Do you look gorgeous?", it's more like "Do you look appropriate and will people take you seriously?" When you're a newsreader you have to look like you know what you're talking about' (quoted in Packer, 2002: 14). Overturning Holland's argument, Derham claimed that her corporeality was an integral feature of her work and helped her to be taken seriously as a newsreader – to look the part. How she looked would impact viewers' perceptions of her as being fit for her job, she believed (and for an interesting discussion of how television viewers respond to the physical appearance of male and female newsreaders, see Mitra et al., 2014).

This shift from disparaging any emphasis on looks at work to not only accepting it but also suggesting that looks help underpin that work has now extended beyond the

putatively glamorous industries. Across services, in retail for example, there is recognition that workers' corporeality is part of the job. In this respect, if Bauman is wrong about the death of work, he is right to suggest that capitalism now attempts to commodify everything, including the body. However, in contrast to Bauman we would argue that this shift indicates that a commodification of the body has occurred in production, not just consumption. This point was first made by Mills (1951) in his classic text, *White Collar*. As the twentieth century was unfolding and services were becoming more prevalent, so a 'personality market' was emerging, he observed, in which workers sold their personalities on the labour market to employers. This 'personality' comprised the attitudes and appearance of workers and was important in the workplace because the shift to services, he argued 20 years before Bell (1973), was accompanied by another shift – 'from skills with things to skills with people' (1951: 182).

From Mills' account, it seems that employer attempts to capture and commodify worker corporality were generally under-developed in these service industries. In Mills' department store, for example, the employer seemingly limited its interventions to the hiring of workers with appropriate appearance. Once hired, the employer left its workers to self-determine the development and mobilisation of their appearance in work. Employers might sanction worker use of their appearance, for example, but not actively seek to mobilise and develop it – an important distinction. As we have pointed out elsewhere (Warhurst and Nickson, 2009), Mills recognised that his analysis was occurring at a time when a customer service orientation was only just emerging. As such it was still under-developed: employers had yet to fully grasp the opportunity afforded by more fully exploiting their workers' corporeality. Offering no evidence of employers trying to mobilise or develop this corporality, Mills quickly dropped analysis of appearance in a further discussion of the personality market.

Thirty years later, Hochschild (1983) picked up on Mills' point, also arguing in *The Managed Heart* that worker personality was bought and sold on the labour market. She also noticed, however, that employers were now trying to manage that personality in work in mainstream service industries. By the 1980s a worker's personality was thus not just a labour market but also a labour process issue – appearance was not just a criterion for getting the job, it was also a criterion of doing the job. It is this new focus that accounts for emotional labour according to Hochschild. With workers now recognised as part of the product on offer, they are required to manage their own feelings and the feelings of customers in order to affect a managerially prescribed service encounter. This prescription results in the imposition of 'feeling rules' to which workers must adhere. These feeling rules result in a performance, with 'acting' by the worker, and which 'in a commercial setting … 'take[s] on the property of a resource' for the employer, 'a resource to be used to make money' (p. 55). Different organisations have different feeling rules that produce different styles of service: neighbourly or sophisticated or sexy for example – though each

style is a variant of 'outgoing middle-class sociability' according to Hochschild (p. 97) – a point to which we return in Chapter 7.

As with Mills before her, Hochschild initially flagged worker appearance as a feature of this service encounter. As her core definition highlights, emotional labour involves 'the management of emotion to create publicly observable facial and bodily display' (p. 7). In other words, the body is used 'to *show* feeling' (p. 247).[4] Body language is the outward indicator of feeling; it is the bodily expression – the smile to indicate friendliness for example (and see Chapter 5 for further discussion of this issue). In referring to this display work, Hochschild fully acknowledged the importance of worker corporeality in making manifest the required emotions. However, as with Mills before her, Hochschild dropped further analysis of worker appearance and, with it, the management of workers' corporeality. This discarding of the body is not surprising: Hochschild's explicit aim was to foreground emotion in work and emotion work as a feature of the employment relationship. What she wanted to emphasise was that, as part of their surplus generating strategies, employers required that emotional labour be 'sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value' (p. 7).

By the end of the twentieth century, emotional labour had become an important, and even dominant analytical paradigm for research on interactive service work. Within it workers' attitudes, not appearance, became the sole proxy for personality, even when corporeality is revealed as an important managerial concern (e.g. Callaghan and Thompson, 2002). When worker corporality was raised in analyses of service work – by Adkins (1995) for example – it was as part of wider debates about feminised service and the propensity of women to provide 'service' work, and even portrayed as a 'gift' from female service workers to male service consumers (Tyler and Taylor, 1998). Alternatively it was seen through the lens of sexual harassment, with men's bodies an arbiter and potential and actual threat to women's bodies in the workplace. This 'point of departure' reflected wider feminist arguments about the marginalisation if not oppression of women according to Morgan (2002: 419). Whilst these arguments had a legitimate basis, the body was not the core focus; it was used to illustrate a concern with gender relations rather than employment relations.

DEFINING AESTHETIC LABOUR

Whilst studies of the personality market have dropped their focus on worker appearance, as we noted in the previous chapter, other studies, although not using the concept of the personality market, have demonstrated that labour market pay premiums and penalties exist for workers as an outcome of their perceived physical attractiveness (e.g. Hamermesh, 2011; Sierminska, 2015). In this analysis, all labour is aestheticised to an extent – with positive and negative material outcomes for workers, as we discuss

in more detail in Chapter 7. Moreover, employers also materially benefit from this perceived attractiveness, with Hamermesh speculating that having workers with good looks 'affect[s] the bottom line of companies' (2011: 7). However, studies that explore the link between worker perceived attractiveness and organisational performance, even in the private sector, are sparse, Hamermesh notes. It is a 'best guess' therefore 'that having better-looking workers helps the company chalk up greater sales', he concedes (p. 100). However, the lack of evidence does not stop him from recommending that organisations hire better-looking workers if they want better sales and performance. The general point, made succinctly by Mears (2012: 815), is that 'looks translate into outcomes'; material outcomes we would argue – producing both value for employers and remuneration for workers. Whilst Hamermesh argues that the the efficacy of this labour is based on its scarcity – few workers are good looking and those that are therefore command more positive attention – we would hold that its efficacy is based on its affectivity, an argument that is beyond economistic analysis Hamermesh concedes, and which also allows us to extend the focus beyond workers with good looks to include workers with the right looks from the employers' perspective.

However, not all aestheticised labour is aesthetic labour. Just as emotional labour is a 'form of labour to be sold' (Hochschild, 1983: 89), so too is aesthetic labour; and if, through the employment relationship, workers' feelings are captured and commodified as emotional labour, with aesthetic labour is it workers' corporeality that is captured and commodified. More specifically, we define aesthetic labour as the supply of embodied capacities and attributes possessed by workers at the point of entry into employment. Employers then mobilise, develop and commodify these capacities and attributes through processes of recruitment, selection, training, monitoring, management and reward, transforming them into competencies or 'skills' which are then aesthetically geared towards producing a style of service encounter. It is an obligation within the employment relationship between employer and worker. With aesthetic labour, organisations seek to control and transmute the corporality of workers' bodies to affect a prescribed performance by the worker in his or her interaction with customers or clients. This service encounter involves face-to-face or voice-to-voice interaction in which workers' corporality is managed to deliberately appeal to the senses of customers or clients. It is a form of labour that is intended to appeal to the senses of customers and enhance their perception of the service encounter. At a very basic level, aesthetic labour is used as a means of delineating and projecting an organisational image or identity. In this respect, aesthetic labour is a twist on the 'person–organisation fit' (Kristof, 1996) approach to human resources. With their aesthetic capital captured by employers, employees become human hardware – a new twist on the aesthetics of organisation, intended to be the embodiment of the organisation's image or identity and part of the product on offer (Witz et al., 2003). As Postrel (2004: 127) states, 'When style is strategy … how employees look can be as much a part of

the atmosphere [of companies] as the grain of the furniture or the beat of the background music'. In his study of Disney, Van Maanen (1990) refers to these transmuted workers as 'talking statues' (see Box 3.3 below).

Box 3.3 Disney's talking statues

Employees ... are also a well-screened bunch. ... Single, white males and females in their early twenties, without facial blemish, of above average height and below average weight, with straight teeth, conservative grooming standards, and a chin-up, shoulder-back posture radiating the sort of good health suggestive of a recent history in sports are typical of these social identifiers ... The Disneyland look [is] put forth in a handbook ... in which readers learn, for example, that facial hair or long hair is banned for men as are aviator glasses and earrings and that women must not tease their hair, wear fancy jewellery, or apply more than a modest dab of makeup. Both men and women are to look neat and prim, keep their uniforms fresh, polish their shoes ...

(*Source*: Van Maanen, 1990: 32–3)

Conceptualisation of aesthetic labour thus recoups and foregrounds employer exploitation of worker corporeality in analysis of work and employment in services-dominated economies. It captures an attempt by some organisations to make those organisations more competitive (in the private sector) and better perceived (in the public sector). What is important to note is that it is a deliberate managerial strategy intended to determine a form of labour centred on using worker corporeality for organisational benefit. In this respect, aesthetic labour is not a 'gift exchange' from women to men, a form of interpersonal offering, as Tyler and Taylor (1998) suggest. Instead, it is an explicit feature of the employment relationship between employer and worker in the service sector.

Making this point does not exclude the role of customers and clients. Worker corporeality is socially relational, part of a triadic relationship between employer, worker and customers/clients: employers want their workers' corporality to affect the senses of the customers and/or clients in order to deliver a favourably perceived service encounter, and employers often legitimise the use of aesthetic labour by reference to customers' and clients' preferences. Thus, employers typically impose aesthetic labour on workers by reference to customers/clients (Warhurst et al., 2000). Indeed, this was the reason Aeroflot said that it prescribed the weight and size of its cabin crew – because passengers preferred attractive flight attendants (BBC, 2017). In our research its seems that employers, or managers as employers in loco, map their own experiences onto customers and clients

or make assumptions about those customers' and clients' preferences. For example, a manager of a style bar in Glasgow told us, 'If you've got nice looking staff then it brings in people'. Other research suggests that these intuitive hunches on the part of employers and managers have some substance. Studies of the hospitality and retail industries have found that the appearance of frontline service employees, especially if they are judged to be attractive, has a positive impact with regard to: attracting customers; facilitating customers' understanding of the brand concept; creating strong, positive emotions amongst customers, such as pleasure and excitement; and enhancing customer satisfaction (see for example Kim et al., 2009; Magnini et al., 2013; Quach et al., 2017; Soderlund and Julander, 2009; Tsaur et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2019; cf. Pounders et al., 2015).

Our initial and others' subsequent research of aesthetic labour has tended to focus on visual perceptions of workers, i.e. employee looks. This dominance is not surprising; since the Enlightenment, there has been a 'visual hegemony in the Western sensorium,' according to Gurney and Hines (1999: 5). Western society thinks visually, dominated by the eye. Hence the emphasis within aesthetic labour on worker appearance or 'looks'. The sound of workers, though, is gaining research attention, and with good reason: there are some employers who emphasise it – it is important, for example, in call centres. In Glasgow, a tele-banking clerk explained to us how good service could be delivered without face-to-face interaction with customers: 'People can hear the smile in your voice. You have to have the smile in your voice', she said. 'You have to always present the nice face of the bank, even though it's on a phone'. Even the manager of the style bar in Glasgow noted that her workers had to be 'well spoken', not just 'well presented'. It is because employers emphasise the sight and sound of their workers in the appeal to the visual and auditory senses of customers and clients, that aesthetic labour is most obviously manifest in the 'ideal' workers sought by companies and prescribed by the use of uniforms, the appearance standards and dress codes, the body language and speech of these workers (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

There are, however, five traditional senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell (or respectively, the visual, auditory, gustatory, somatic and olfactory). These five senses are hierarchicalised, with the visual sense prioritised (Gurney and Hines, 1999). Fine (2009) suggests that hearing comes a close second because it involves intellect. Of the other three senses, touch occupies an intermediate position, and as with sight and sound, is measureable and easily shared. Taste and smell are less certain – attempts to create a measurement for both have failed. Historically because they were said not to involve intellect, they have long been regarded as lower order senses, by Kant for example. Of course, such claims are social constructs, Fine claims, as 'any sense can be a window to the world' (p. 204).

As such, even if the visual and auditory senses dominate research of aesthetic labour, the other senses, e.g. the olfactory, are not necessarily redundant in organisations. Through the major histocompatibility genes, individuals have what is, in effect, a smell fingerprint,

giving off odours to which others can be receptive or repelled (Dunbar, 2012). Depending upon the odour, an individual's smell can make other people calm, alert, or even fearful for example. Some companies use this capacity to effect outcomes through smell in their organisational aesthetics to sensorily affect the physical environment and perceptions of customers and clients. For example, there is a significant amount of research that examines how retailers can use aromas to positively influence shopper behaviour (e.g. Helmefalk and Berdnt, 2018; Morrison et al., 2011). At one time, British Airways pumped the smell of freshly mowed grass into its waiting lounges to create a more perceptibly relaxed environment for its customers (Thornton, 1999). More recently, it was reported that the 'lifestyle brand' Marie-Stella-Maris were launching a new fragrance for spraying in the workplace, with the aim of inspiring workspaces and enhancing productivity through stimulating employees' sense of smell and inducing greater relaxation (*People Management*, 2019). Being part of the organisational aesthetics, some companies also manage the smell of employees. They can, for example, as one UK sushi bar did, and drawing on the fragrance, give their workers an 'Issey Miyake makeover' to make them more appealing to customers (Sweet, 1997). Other senses, such as the olfactory, can therefore also be important potential features of aesthetic labour but are, as yet, relatively unexplored in research, though Karlsson (2012) has suggestions about how such a research agenda could be developed (see Chapter 8).

As we have long argued (Warhurst et al., 2000), aesthetic labour is clearly a form of labour; the aesthetics being mobilised, developed and commodified are those of workers. We appreciate that others use the concept differently. In his outline of what he calls the 'aesthetic economy', Böhme (2003), for example, also refers to 'aesthetic labour'. This labour centres on the totality of those activities that produce aesthetics and sensory experience. Aesthetic labourers are the painters, artists and designers who produce these sensorily affecting products, imbuing the mundane and the material with 'staging value'. This staging value refers to the positioning of the product to be exchanged with an appearance that offers new value based on 'intensify[ing] life'. These products are not needed but are desired for their 'aura' (p. 72). This formulation of aesthetic labour as those workers who produce aestheticised products is also evident in Wengrow (2001). His focus is the transition from simple to complex societies in the Neolithic Near East (c.9–10,000 BC), and he shows how the spread of pottery decorated with particular patterns reflects particular social knowledge in those societies. Different patterns reflect different societies and their knowledge. Through aesthetic labour such material objects are imbued with a 'sensuous and psychological force' (p. 170) that has an 'affective dimension … making up the fabric of everyday life' (p. 182). This affection transforms ways of seeing and knowing the world, Wengrow states; it is about societies' social reproduction. In a more current context, Fine's (2009) ethnographic study of restaurant kitchen work uses 'aesthetics' in the same way to focus on the product being

manufactured – in his case the dishes prepared by chefs and cooks. Echoing Böhme's understanding of the aesthetic economy, these dishes are 'expressive forms of work' (2009: 197). The chefs and cooks desire to produce objects – food – that is pleasing to the senses of customers (and the producer): 'When I make soup … I try to make it look as nice as possible, and to taste. I feel I take a lot of pride in it', one cook explained (p. 197). Chocolate sauce is drizzled over fruit, and plain dishes are arranged to look more abstract. In this way, the cooks and chefs apply their labour to material products and invest those products with an aesthetic appeal that they hope will positively affect customers' senses. Our conceptualisation of aesthetic labour is obviously different, though there is an overlap in that, with our aesthetic labour, workers can become the human hardware of their employing organisations and part of the product on offer. Conceptually it is different from that suggested by Böhme, Wengrow and Fine, who see the product as distinct from its labour.

THEORISING AESTHETIC LABOUR

Understanding of our aesthetic labour draws on several theoretical sources. The first, labour process theory as it morphed from labour process analysis (Braverman, 1974), helps to understand why aesthetic labour has emerged as an employer strategy. The second, the theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1990), explains how aesthetic labour is socially constituted and situated, and able to be used by employers as a strategy.

With regard to the first, the labour process comprises: first, the act of work; second, a product to be worked upon; third, the instruments of production. The labour process is a surplus-producing process in which more value is produced by workers than they need to subsist. Its outcomes are goods and services that have use values (Marx, 1946[1887]). This labour process exists in all forms of political economy: capitalist and socialist, market-based and non-market, the latter including the public sector (Reid, 2003; Warhurst, 1998). Employers' control and organisation of the labour process ensures the material and ideological reproduction of the social relations of production within particular political economies (Warhurst, 1998).

In capitalism, labour process theory points out that use value attains an exchange value through the market. Competition in market economies compels employers to continually develop not just new goods and services but to also re-organise how those goods and services are produced in the workplace. Control of the labour process allows this renewal (Thompson and Smith, 2001). The employment contract partially establishes this control, giving employers the right to direct, monitor, evaluate and even discipline workers – within reasonable limits (Kaufman, 2004); limits that are often challenged or tested by workers in the workplace (Edwards, 1979). The outcome is a wage–effort bargain between employers

and workers. Different employer strategies to control and organise the labour process exist over time, location, and industry (Nienhüser and Warhurst, 2018). What strategies are pursued by employers is open to empirical investigation. In his initial rekindling of labour process analysis, Braverman (1974) thought it was the use of scientific management, regardless of sector. However by the end of the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, labour process researchers were exploring the use of emotional labour by employers in services (e.g. Callaghan and Thompson, 2002; Taylor, 1998).

Beyond the damage wrought upon bodies in the labour process (e.g. Brody, 1960), bodies can be confined within the labour process (see the hotel worker's complaint in Terkel, 1972) and labour processes can be shaped around bodies (see the maleness of the print industry identified by Cockburn, 1983). It is surprising therefore that consideration of worker corporality has largely been absent from labour process theory. This omission has its roots in initial Braverman-inspired labour process analysis that accepted a crude, dismissive account of the body. With scientific management brain and body were separated, thinking detached from doing. The former, as conception, was to be the responsibility of managers; the latter, as execution, the task of workers: 'we do not ask for the initiative of our men. All we want of them is to obey the orders we give them, do what we say', F.W. Taylor (1947[1911]: 9), the father of scientific management, explained. As such workers came to be regarded as mindless bodies, 'empty vessels, stripped of thought and made to act like machines' (Wolkowitz and Warhurst, 2010: 225). Simply having 'able-bodied' workers seemingly now sufficed (Windolf and Wood, 1988). As a consequence, the body held little analytical interest for labour process theorists.

Aesthetic labour offers labour process theory one possibility to rectify this omission (see Warhurst et al., 2009a). In return, labour process theory offers a useful materialist account of the body in work in which aesthetic labour can be understood as a feature of the wage–effort bargain, intended by employers as a strategy to produce a style of service encounter within service organisations that generates (exchange) value for employers. Nevertheless whilst labour process theory can provide the analytical tools to explain why aesthetic labour occurs, it does not provide the analytical tools for explaining how aesthetic labour occurs.

These tools can be drawn from Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice. In this theory, the body is regarded as a form of physical capital. It is both biological and social, and through the latter acquires symbolic value. Key to understanding physical capital is 'habitus'. Habitus is the typical condition or appearance of the body. Through familial socialisation, habitus is 'internalized as a second nature' (1990: 53). Habitus has two parts: doxa and hexis. Doxa produces ways of seeing/knowing. It is the taken-for-granted understanding of the world, the perceptions, attitudes and opinions that constitute 'a particular point of view' (Bourdieu, 1998: 57). The inculcation of mental habits disciplines corporeal ones, which become inscribed and expressed through regular and

ordinary practice. It simply becomes akin to 'techniques of the body' (Bourdieu, 1990: 13). This embodiment is expressed as hexis or the way of being in the world. It is the condition or appearance of the body manifest through body language, speech and dress for example, and which are 'durable, transposable dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1990: 56; see also 1992: 93). Once socialised, the body represents a 'memory jogger' involving 'complexes of gestures, postures and words' (Bourdieu, 2004: 474).

In addition to seeking to understand how the individual is socialised, the theory of practice also seeks to understand how the social is individualised. If producing habitus requires individual bodily labour, acquiring it involves social reproduction. Habitus thus marks and provides for a social identity, and as a concept was intended by Bourdieu to help bridge, even transcend, the objectivist/subjectivist divide (Jenkins, 2002). As Hanks (2005: 69) similarly notes, 'Through habitus, society is impressed on the individual, not only in mental habits, but even more in corporeal ones'. In this respect, whilst individuals exhibit habitus, what these individuals embody is collective, pertaining to all those individuals who are within a particular 'field'. These fields are durable but not fixed networks of relations. The field conditions the habitus whilst the habitus constitutes the field (Ritzer, 2000). In this articulation, 'Social positions give rise to embodied dispositions. To sustain engagement in a field is to be shaped, at least potentially, by the position one occupies', states Hanks (2005: 73). For Bourdieu, the social becomes the personal and the personal is the social, with habitus the embodiment of the field. Habitus are thus not only socially constructed but also socially differentiated and differentiating, denoting a class. Dispositions and manner of body language, speech and dress vary according to class. Whilst individuals within a class can affect their own 'personal style', this individuation 'is never more than a deviation in relation to the style of a … class' Bourdieu stated (1990: 60). Indeed, it might be said that this interest in class production and reproduction is at the heart of the theory of practice.

Although more focused on class relations rather than employment relations, the theory of practice is theoretically useful in conceiving aesthetic labour. Not only does Bourdieu's analysis reveal the materialised body, it also highlights the symbolic value attached to bodily forms as physical capital, and that, whilst a collective manifestation, physical capital is mobilised by individuals. Nonetheless, pitched at the societal level it overlooks how that physical capital is individually developed and mobilised – and exploited – at the organisational level. In the same way that there is a fit between social position and bodily dispositions in Bourdieu's theory of practice, aesthetic labour indicates how organisational positioning manifests in the dispositions – body language, speech and dress – of workers to deliver an embodied style of service, and is intended to provide for successful organisational production and reproduction as well as delivering value for the organisation.

For aesthetic labour, the utility of labour process theory and the theory of practice comes in their combined complementarity. Both are grounded in materialism and, taken

together, provide a theoretical understanding of why and how aesthetic labour occurs. Labour process theory's focus is explicitly the workplace. It reveals why employers are compelled to control the labour process as the surplus producing process. Moreover it highlights why, with control as the means, the organisation of the labour process is dynamic, and why employers continually seek new strategies. Aesthetic labour is one strategy in this respect, and with it worker corporeality has become a feature of the wage–effort bargain intended to help produce surplus. The theory of practice focuses on class relations rather than employment relations. However it explains how aesthetic labour as a form of labour is socially constituted and situated, and how worker corporeality becomes a form of physical capital that acquires symbolic value that can be used as a source of value creation for employers either as use or exchange value. What we would term 'aesthetic capital', imbued of workers but used by employers. It also allows identification and analysis of how the habitus at the centre of specific styles of service are perceived and enacted as an embodied resource for employers within the wage–effort bargain.

LOCATING AESTHETIC LABOUR

Despite Mills (1951) dropping analysis of worker appearance in his 1950s study for a lack of empirics, there are early examples of employers intervening to mobilise, develop and commodify their workers' corporality in order to affect a particular and distinct style of service. There were some employers in the retail and hospitality industries who, even earlier – at the turn of the twentieth century – were recognising the commercial benefits of hiring good-looking staff. Department stores, though not yet called as such, had emerged in the mid-nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic, and by the turn of the twentieth century were gentrifying shopkeeping and providing employment opportunities for respectable young women (see for example, Belisle, 2006; Benson, 1983). These stores were a new shopping experience, promoting luxury. Many feared the 'moral dangers' of this desire-driven consumerism, according to Cox and Hobley (2014: 75). Certainly the 'shopgirls' were part of the display – 'objects of male fantasy', they state, 'often hired for their looks above all other considerations' (p. 76). And yet, with an absence of proper management, Cox and Hobley note, those workers' aesthetic capital was not then explicitly mobilised in work by employers. Historically therefore employer interest in employees' aesthetic labour is not new but, we argue, was 'under-exploited' from the employer perspective. Indicatively, it was not unusual for these shopgirls in Cox and Hobley's study to provide their own workwear. An historical example of a more developed employer approach to mobilising employees' aesthetic capital comes from Glasgow as Miss Cranston's tearoom illustrates (see Box 3.4 below).

Box 3.4 Room de Good Looks

At the end of the nineteenth century Glasgow was a boom town. Building work was everywhere: new warehouses, new banks and new shops. Amongst this bustle, what are now called 'third places', a mixture of public social and work space, were needed for businessmen to meet and ladies to lunch. Tearooms sprang up in response. One such tearoom was that of Miss Cranston. She hired fledgling artist and architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh to design the tearoom's interiors. It was 'wildly overdone, but it was an experience, and it was very appealing' Kinchin states. A popular column in *The Evening News* at the time reported the rooms to be beautiful, decked out in Mackintosh's own Vienna-influenced art nouveau style. 'Even the waitresses were pretty', Kinchin claims. They too had their uniforms designed by Mackintosh – 'white with chokers of pink beads'. When one of the waitresses comes to take his order, the enamoured character in the newspaper column remarks that the 'art tea room', is more like 'the Room de Good Looks'.

(*Source*: Kinchin, 1998: 59, 53, 60)

Miss Cranston not only hired attractive workers, she also developed and mobilised their aesthetic affectivity as part of her desired style of service for the tearoom. However, Miss Cranston's tearoom was notable because it was exceptional, providing an exotic service offering. What makes aesthetic labour more salient now is that it has shifted from the margins to the mainstream in the service sector, from the exotic to the everyday. Our initial research focused on what we termed the 'style labour market' of the 'new' Glasgow, with its designer fashion retailers, boutique hotels and style bars and restaurants – the modern-day equivalents of Miss Cranston's tearoom. A significant body of research now exists that extends the analysis beyond the style labour market into more prosaic retail and hospitality jobs, and into a range of other occupational, industry and sector contexts. It is interesting to reflect on some of this research, starting with how differing aesthetics are used by different organisations as part of their brand/image management and market positioning.

Aesthetic labour and product market strategies

As the context of the reinvention of Glasgow, it is not surprising that our initial research focused on the style labour market, and seemed to suggest that employers were interested in only hiring and deploying workers with perceived 'good looks', i.e. those possessing the socially ascribed type of looks that the beauty industry uses to benchmark consumption of its products – typically thin, blond and blue-eyed (Jones, 2010; and see Chapter 2).

As Ian, one of our focus group participants noted, style-driven bars and restaurants would often 'just hire pretty girls', with Laura, another focus group participant, further suggesting that those 'attractive staff' would often be 'blonde and blue eyed'. Beyond this idealised worker likely to be found in overtly stylish organisations, it is clear from our survey undertaken in Glasgow's retailers, hotels, restaurants, bars and cafés that employers strongly believed that employee appearance was important to their businesses' success. Over half (53 per cent) of the sample felt it was critical, 40 per cent felt it was important, and 6 per cent somewhat important. Thus, at least 93 per cent of employers attributed significant importance to the image of customer-facing staff. Furthermore it is not simply judgements of attractiveness per se that matter. Table 3.1 details aspects of broader aspects of self-presentation that the Glasgow employers considered important.

Table 3.1 Image and aesthetic labour proxies (%)

	Critical	Important	Somewhat important	Not important
Age	5	12	35	48
Size		7	22	71
Height	1	3	16	80
Weight		6	25	70
Dress sense/style	7	42	34	17
Voice/accent	8	36	33	22
Physical looks	2	20	48	30

Clearly, some proxies are considered more important than others, with age, dress sense/style, voice/accent and physical looks all attributed significantly greater importance, than size, height and weight. Eighty-three per cent attached some importance to dress sense/style, 78 per cent to voice/accent, and 70 per cent to physical looks. If aesthetic labour is conceptualised as a composite of a number of aspects of corporeality, certain of these aspects are clearly more important to employers than others – a point we return to in the conclusion of the book.

However, it is important to recognise that there is a body of literature which argues that firms' different business strategies, such those of competing on cost, quality and innovation (Porter, 1980), are accompanied by different human resources practices (Schuler and Jackson, 1987). Firms in the same industry but with different competitive strategies can therefore have different human resources practices. To take the example of 'cost' in this body of literature, cost typically refers to companies that compete on low-cost products. However, firms' business strategies can also be based on high-cost products. Depending upon their product market strategy, companies can have different ideal workers in terms of the desired aesthetic or look. Put prosaically by Windolf and

Wood (1988: 24), 'What constitutes a good worker in an upmarket store, aiming largely at middle class customers, is not the same as the store catering for a traditional working class clientele'. This labour differentiation is a potential source of employment discrimination – an issue that is discussed further in Chapter 7.

To return to our initial research, upmarket, high-cost product retailers and hospitality organisations deliberately hired good-looking workers that aligned with the desired aesthetic of those organisations and in pursuit of competitive advantage. For example, in Glasgow's upmarket Hotel Elba, famed for its rock star guests, workers were expected to be, as we noted earlier, 'pretty attractive looking people', 'with a nice smile, nice teeth, neat hair and in decent proportion'. In short, there were expectations that people would look the part in order to be able to fit in with the brand image Hotel Elba was seeking to present. Significantly, because of their brand attraction, such employers can be selective in who they hire, and the demand for good-looking workers in such organisations has created a style labour market not only in Glasgow but also elsewhere, as Box 3.5 below illustrates for Sydney in Australia.

Box 3.5 We don't give an F how good they are as long as they're good looking

Silver Service in Sydney is a temporary work agency that provides waiting and bar staff to high-end and fashionable clients' corporate and other events. These events can be private parties in private homes and government offices or in retail and fashion houses such as Chanel and Gucci. Although high-end clients, the work has remained basic. Nevertheless, concerned about their own company brand or organisational image, the clients were often very specific about which staff were to be used by Silver Service. As the general manager stated, 'We have some clients who basically said to us "We don't give an F how good they are as long as they're good looking".' As a consequence, Silver Service assessed and monitored employee appearance: 'We know if someone's got a nose ring or yellow hair ... we keep track of that' the general manager explained. Sometimes Silver Service even used a modelling/acting agency to undertake casting calls to select the right staff.

(*Source*: Knox, 2013)

However, in Glasgow it became clear that demonstration effects existed amongst more prosaic retail and hospitality employers in the city – a development noted in research beyond Glasgow (e.g. Pettinger, 2004, 2005). Though with less attractive brands, these mid-market employers still seek to appropriate and commercialise their workers' corporeality, seeking, if not workers with good looks, then workers with the right look.

Having the right look can extend from some employers wanting generic aesthetic compliance from their workers – wanting them to be 'neat' and tidy' most obviously – to other employers wanting corporeal alignment with the organisation's image or brand, such as the employment of plus-sized employees for a plus-sized clothing outlet (Gruys, 2012), or the home improvement retailer B&Q employing a large number of older workers, often retired ex-tradesmen, who in addition to having a high degree of technical knowledge, were also felt to 'look the part' (Foster, 2004; and see Nickson and Baum, 2017, for a discussion of aesthetic labour and age). A further example is Oasis, a mid-market fashion retail company with branches across towns and cities in the UK. It has a well-defined and stringently applied dress and grooming code as one of its staff handbooks reveals in Box 3.6 (and see Chapter 4). Oasis staff need to look 'attractive' but, as we noted earlier in discussing workers as walking billboards, Oasis offers a uniform allowance to its staff – with company product purchased, it should be noted, at a discount rate to staff rather than provided free by the company. Managers must authorise all staff clothing choices however, making their decisions 'based on a commercial view, i.e. key fashion pieces must be represented on the appropriate body shape [of the employee] in a flattering size'. Moreover, the handbook continues, 'All clothing must be of current season and must be an accurate representation of the looks and trends of that season'.

Box 3.6 Definitely maybe

This dress code outlines the minimum required standards of appearance from all Oasis staff. Oasis staff must be well groomed at all times. You are the representatives of Oasis and it is your responsibility to create a good impression.

> Hair must be clean and well groomed.
>
> Nails must be neatly manicured, nail varnish ... should complement [sic] the colours of the season.
>
> Personal hygiene ... When wearing short-sleeved tops, please pay particular attention to regular depilation.
>
> Hosiery should always be worn with skirts and dresses. If applied, self-tanning lotion must be of a natural appearance.

(*Source*: Oasis staff handbook)

As part of an international comparative research project that we organised, our Australian colleagues Richard Hall and Diane van den Broek (2012) explored these

differences in fashion retail in Sydney. They identified three market segments: a *Boutique Style market* with customers that are typically style-conscious but not very cost-conscious; a *Mass Style market* with customers who are both style- and cost-conscious; and a *Value Fashion market* with customers who are typically cost-conscious but not very style-conscious. Hall and van den Broek found that across these segments 'employers in fashion retail routinely recruit and select customer service staff on the basis of their aesthetic attributes' (2012: 99). They also found that the majority of all stores included aesthetic skills and appearance in their worker appraisals. All stores also provided some training in these skills. However, examining the looks policies of these stores, Hall and van den Broek also found that what constitutes aesthetic labour varies according to the market segment and character of the store and brand. For example, they found that it was the boutique segment that had the most pronounced policies in terms of clothing and appearance standards, which were used 'to promote a specific style of appearance and presentation exemplifying the brand' (2012: 95). This approach in the boutique segment can be compared to the value fashion segment where the looks policy was more about workers being 'neat and presentable' – 'a fairly basic level of aesthetic presentation' (2012: 95).

Similar differences have been found in the wave of research that followed our initial research. This research, which considers the retail and hospitality industries in a variety of different national contexts, has found that the expectations of aesthetic labour are shaped by the required brand image and product market strategies of companies (e.g. Boyle and De Keere, 2019; Cutcher and Achtel, 2017; Foster and Resnick, 2013; Gruys, 2012; Johnston and Sandberg, 2008; Maitra and Maitra, 2018; McIntyre Petersson, 2014; Pettinger, 2004, 2005; Quinn, 2008; Walls, 2007; Walters, 2018; Williams and Connell, 2010; Wright, 2005).

Aesthetic labour in other occupations and industries

Another wave of research sought to extend analysis of aesthetic labour beyond occupations in the retail and hospitality industries to a range of different occupations. At a general level, and using self-presentation as a proxy for aesthetic labour, one employer survey found self-presentation to be a 'critical skill' not just for sales and personal service occupations in the UK, but also for 34 per cent, 29 per cent and 39 per cent of associate professionals, professionals and managers and senior officials respectively (Bunt et al., 2005). Unfortunately, there are no disaggregated data to enable analysis of the industry location of these types of occupations. Singling out specific occupations and industries for which there is still a strong emphasis on workers affecting the visual senses of customers and clients, Jeffes (1998) noted the ten occupations most likely to have a significant emphasis on worker appearance:

- Model, actor, actress
- Television anchor, weather presenter, etc.
- Public/customer relations representative
- Sales, e.g. retail, estate agents, marketing representatives
- Hospitality, e.g. waiter/waitress, flight attendant
- Chief executive officer
- Hair stylist, cosmetologist
- Health and fitness trainer/aerobics instructor
- Politician

An obvious point made by Jeffes about this list is that those occupations characterised as having a greater emphasis on appearance involve significant interaction with the public, and importantly also 'require the person to influence others to buy, watch, assist, return for another visit, etc.' (1998: 37).

Other research has (re-)turned to the putative glamorous visual/entertainment industries and the first set of occupations on Jeffes' list. These and other industries – whether visually or aurally driven – are obvious loci for commodification of worker corporality. Some of the accompanying employer prescriptions however can be strict, if not plain draconian, as the rule book for the cheerleaders of the Cincinnati Bengals National Football League team in the US illustrates (see Box 3.7 below).

Box 3.7 Not a lot to cheer about

'Glamour is a priority' it states. The cheerleaders cannot have '... slouching breasts. Support is needed'. Cheerleaders' make-up and hair can be changed 'as the director feels necessary'. Frosted lipstick and eye-shadow are banned. Cheerleaders' 'ideal weight' will also be determined by the director and they are weighed twice a week. Failure to follow these rules can mean not being used and so paid. Flouting the rules is also forbidden: 'Insubordination to even the slightest degree is ABSOLUTELY NOT TOLERATED.* You will be benched or dismissed'.

(*Source*: Mangan, 2014: 3; *upper case emphasis in the original)

Dean's (2005) research on actors and Entwistle and Wissinger's (2006), and Wissinger (2012) research on fashion models have also usefully adopted the concept of aesthetic labour. Entwistle and Wissinger suggest that analysis of aesthetic labour should extend beyond interactive service work and organisational aesthetics to take into account fashion modelling, with its emphasis on 'display' and 'performance' work and 'where the look and appearance of the body is critical to the labour' (2006: 776). Dean also

suggests that aesthetic labour has 'direct resonance with the non-service occupation of performer' (2005: 762). Both research areas focus on female workers. However, extending Dean's analysis, male actors too need to conform to aesthetic ideals in order to be hired. This need was made very clear to British actor Rafe Spall as he auditioned for a film part as a romantic lead. As he explained, the studio told him:

> 'You need to work on maybe becoming more handsome.' After my second audition I started running every day and got my hair cut ... So for 16 weeks I ate no wheat, dairy or sugar. It was an absolute nightmare. That's bonkers I say. 'Ridiculous. Absolutely fucking ridiculous' ... But it's my job. It's a weird thing to have to worry about, looking handsome. (Quoted in Hattenstone, 2013: 19)

Dean and Entwistle and Wissinger usefully reveal that, in the visual/entertainment industries, actors' and models' corporality is also managed and commodified. This use of aesthetic labour is interesting and has the potential to conceptually develop aesthetic labour, given that research to date has centred on occupations and industries involving a direct service encounter. With these other occupations and industries, the 'encounter' is non-direct, intended to affect the senses of customers (as audiences) and clients (magazine editors) – although it should be noted that the first models, who displayed the stock of early department stores, did directly encounter potential customers through what became known as the catwalk (Cox and Hobley, 2014). Unfortunately, whilst this modern-day encounter/non-encounter difference is signalled, it is not explored further by Dean or Entwistle and Wissinger. Moreover, research on aesthetic labour to date has focused on *employees*. The workers – actors and models – in this new line of research are often self-employed, freelancing across the proto gig economy, or working across a portfolio of short-term employment contracts (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013). It is therefore initially not clear who drives aesthetic labour strategies. However, as Haunschild and Eikhof (2009) have pointed out, it is helpful to understand these sorts of workers in the visual/entertainment industries as 'self-employed employees' whose mindset is focused on self-managing, self-monitoring and self-marketing their own labour, regardless of their actual employment relationship. In this context an interesting research question then becomes if and how these workers exercise aesthetic labour: either in direct compliance with employers' or contractors' requirements or, possibly, in indirect anticipation of these requirements. Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) note that models commodify themselves to reflect differing fashions (see also Parmentier et al., 2013). This work on their bodies aims to ensure that they continue to conform to a demanding industry aesthetic, though how far it goes beyond what some other workers now do (see Chapter 2) requires continuing comparative empirical investigation.

THE SECTORAL REACH OF AESTHETIC LABOUR

Though still limited in number, more recent research has extended the exploration of aesthetic labour into the public sector. For example, Dahl (2014) uses aesthetic labour to explain recent developments in a Danish municipality workforce. Wanting to reduce verbal and physical attacks arising from their interaction with an (often irate) public, the municipality's traffic warden department now explicitly hires better-looking applicants, trains these new staff in body language, and dresses them in restyled uniforms in order to positively change perceptions of the occupation. How these traffic wardens look and behave is thus formally prescribed by this public sector employer and is now an explicit part of their job. In China too, aesthetic labour is being applied to traffic warden jobs and again with the intention of improving the image of their work with the public (see Box 3.8 below).

Box 3.8 Chinese flower vases

In the Chinese province of Chengdu, the authorities advertised city warden jobs stipulating that applicants should be tall, female, young and attractive in order to present a 'soft side' to law enforcement. The human resources director of the law enforcement bureau said that 'Their main job is to present a good image so they have to be good looking'. A Chinese idiom for women who are employed for their looks and nothing else is 'flower vases'.

(*Source*: Branigan, 2010: 44)

As we have noted elsewhere (Warhurst et al., 2009b), the BBC (2006) reported that the Chinese government has also stipulated that anyone joining its navy must be 'good-looking, tall and polite'. The reason again is that navy personnel are regarded as representatives of China and are being used are part of the country's rebranding of itself to the outside world. These examples suggest that aesthetic labour exists not only in the private but also in the non-for-profit public sector.[5] That it does so should not be a surprise given that the labour process and employment relationships exist in a range of political economies. What these examples show is that aesthetic labour helps employers in their pursuit of delivering both exchange and also use value, and that developing, mobilising and commodifying (through wage-labour) worker corporality extends beyond the market sector. and is now within the non-market sector of public services.

Aesthetic labour here, there and everywhere?

The danger is that aesthetic labour, as with emotional labour before it (cf. Bolton, 2004), is suddenly found to be here, there and everywhere, and especially if it is recognised that most if not all labour is aestheticised to some extent (see for example, Bruton, 2015; Hamermesh, 2011). For example, research using the concept of aesthetic labour has been conducted in a range of differing organisational and occupational contexts, including hair salons (Barber, 2016), style bloggers (Brydges and Sjöhom, 2019), recruitment agency consultants (Craven et al., 2013), fitness industry personal trainers (Harvey et al., 2014), language interpreters (Cho, 2017), musicians (Hracs and Leslie, 2014), PhD students (Brown, 2017), public relations (PR) practitioners (Simonrangkir, 2013), DJs (Willment, 2019) and circus acrobats (Zhang, 2016). An important issue therefore is delineating the boundaries of aesthetic labour. In this endeavour, all of the current research by ourselves and others highlighted here provides a useful body of work that enables cross-occupation, cross-industry and cross-sector comparison to help identify what is essential and distinct (cf. Stinchcombe, 1959) about aesthetic labour.

The key point we think is the 'stipulation' expressed in the Chinese traffic wardens example. What all of the jobs across the various industries and sectors have in common is that aesthetic labour is an organisationally required feature of the employment relationship. Returning to our earlier discussion about definitions, we suggest that aesthetic labour requires an interaction with customers and/or clients, with workers using their corporality to induce a sensory affect in these customers and/or clients, and that the capture of this worker corporality by employers is intended for organisational benefit and for workers is part of the wage effort bargain – an explicit feature of the employment relationship with their employer.

Being part of the employment relationship, aesthetic labour is not confined to one set of industries or even the market sector but can exist in a range of service industries and any sector, market or non-market in which a formal employment relationship operates. Reflecting back on Dean's and Entwistle and Wissinger's research of actors and fashion models, it might be worth returning to Hochschild's delineation of emotion in work and emotion work as a feature of the employment relationship, sold for a wage and producing (exchange) value for the employer and thereby transmuting into emotional labour. Similarly, as we have noted before, there are aesthetics in work – the embodied impression management used by workers to get into organisations at the point of hire, and by workers to get on within organisations in terms of their personal pay and career progression (Witz et al., 2003). It is when such embodiment is transmuted into a form of aesthetics of organisation, and sold for a wage as a constituent part of the job and part of the surplus-producing process, that it transmutes into aesthetic labour – whether this labour is employed or self-employed or producing exchange value or use value.

In the meantime, attempting to assess the extent of aesthetic labour is a challenge. Ours and others' research still largely draws on jobs that involve affecting the visual and auditory senses of customers or clients. One way to guestimate the extent of aesthetic labour therefore is to aggregate the number of workers in all occupations in the service sector that involve interaction with customers or clients in this way. This analysis was first undertaken by Alan Felstead et al. (2007) using the 2007 UK Skills at Work survey.[6] In this survey Felstead et al. attempted to assess the extent of aesthetic labour across the UK labour market based on the job demands of workers. Focusing on the required appearance and speech of workers, the survey asked employees if they needed to 'look the part' or 'sound the part' in their jobs. The findings reveal that these 'aesthetic skills' are required in 52 per cent of jobs in the UK. At the time of the survey this figure translated into 16.3 million jobs. These aesthetic skills are required almost equally by full-time and part-time employees but, unsurprisingly, are more prevalent in the service industries, particularly sales occupations (p. 30–2). Demand for these skills is relatively high compared to even basic skills. Across all jobs, aesthetic skills are rated as more important than literacy and numeracy skills. Moreover they are not sex-specific, they are a requirement of female and male employees. On a ranking from '0' (not at all important/does not apply) to '4' (essential), men rated their need for these skills as 2.47, and women as 2.83 (compared to 'emotional skills' at 2.73 and 3.17 respectively) (p. 47). Thus, not only does aesthetic labour exist across different product markets, industries and sectors, it also exists as part of male and not just female employees' jobs. An example of this both-sex aesthetic labour is provided by Oasis, the mid-market fashion retail company mentioned earlier in this chapter. Whilst it is a fashion store targeting female customers that stipulates the appearance of its female workers (see Box 3.6), male employees of Oasis are also covered by the company's dress and grooming code. These employees must, for example, 'be clean shaven', with any facial hair 'neatly trimmed and well groomed'. There are also cross-sex rules: tattoos must be covered at all times, the handbook states; any form of body piercing 'is strictly forbidden'; and double-sets of earrings worn by either men or women are also forbidden (and see Chapter 4 for a further discussion of dress and appearance standards).

CONCLUSION

With significant physical injuries wrought by the industrial revolution, the body was of key analytical concern. This concern dissipated with workplace health and safety improvements and the shift from manufacturing to services across the advanced economies in the twentieth century. The body as a feature of employment relations disappeared, though some workers, in putatively glamorous industries, continued to have their bodies managed and commodified by employers – and scrutinised by the public.

At the same time (the mid-twentieth century) a 'personality market' was emerging involving the selling and buying of workers' attitudes and appearance. The outcome is that appearance was now being captured and commodified by employers in the context of a developing service sector. Although by the 1980s it was recognised that this corporality was a feature of doing and not just getting the job (cf. Hochschild, 1983; Mills, 1951), for different reasons both researchers dropped further analysis of this capture and commodification by employers. Conceptually, aesthetic labour foregrounds this corporality to reveal its capture and commodification by employers for organisational benefit. Labour process theory provides the tools for understanding why aesthetic labour has become an employer strategy, and a feature of the wage–effort bargain between employer and worker (Braverman, 1974). How aesthetic labour is constituted as habitus and can appeal to the senses of customers and clients can be understood by reference to the theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1990).

Beyond our initial work the majority of research which has followed has sought to extend the analysis of aesthetic labour in different organisational contexts – sometimes in the same industries as our initial research, sometimes in other industries but within the private sector, sometimes in occupations and industries with non-direct worker-customer/client interaction, and more recently, in non-market sector organisations in the public sector. All of this research shows it to be a feature of the wage–effort bargain between worker and employer that determines what work is done and how that work is to be done. With respect to the latter, with the current emphasis within aesthetic labour on the sight and sound of workers and the visual and aural senses of customers and clients, the three key corporeal components that comprise the aesthetic capital of workers – their dress, comportment (body language) and speech – are explored in detail in the next three chapters.

NOTES

1. It is indicative that it is the newly industrialising countries that now feature in the major manufacturing accidents, as the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in Bangladesh, which killed over 1,100 workers, illustrates (Butler, 2014).
2. Of course such dichotomies can be too neat. Service workers too suffer physical injuries; hotel room cleaners can suffer back injuries (Dutton et al., 2008) and call centre workers can lose their voice through over-use (Jones, 2011). Similarly, there are psychological injuries in manufacturing, as Baldamus' (1961) classic 'traction and tedium' illustrates.
3. Angela Rippon appeared on the BBC from 1975, Anna Ford on UK commercial television from 1978.
4. Fn. 2, emphasis in the original.
5. At the time of writing, we are unaware of similar research for the voluntary sector.
6. We would like to thank Alan Felstead, Francis Green and Duncan Gallie for making this suggestion.