PART 3. SECONDARY ADJUSTMENTS, RESISTANCE & CREATION OF THE SELF IN TMTL

Up to this point, much of this report has focused on the processes and the disciplinary and governmental power produced through the surveillance, inscription, examination, and governmental/managerial practices instantiated in and made possible through the rational and technological apparatuses within the four call centres participating in this study. Through this focus I have described how technologies, rules and face-to-face methods imbricated in these practices are implicated in disciplining or governing particular aspects of call centre agents' and management's conduct.

While throughout the text above I have provided footnoted or parenthetical vignettes and glosses – in some cases complete with references to supporting literature – that tend to mitigate such a conclusion and instead highlight how subjects themselves are actively involved in making themselves subjects, by focusing so closely on the disciplining and governance of personnel, the report so far may make the call centres participating in this study appear to be asserting very strong and perhaps unavoidable (even universal!) forces on the bodies and minds of the workers that inhabit them. The power produced in the manufactured relations described in Part 2 of this report are indeed substantial in drawing and implicating the subjects in TMTL into continuous (re)production, perhaps leading to the image of technology and rationalisation as some sort of 'iron cage' in which labour is trapped (Ritzer 2000b; Sennett 1998; Weber 2001) and power as some sort of universal, unavoidable force that always oppresses people (Braverman 1974; Sennett 1998). In contrast, the chapters that make up this part of the report will identify and describe practices that

highlight how subjects have and acquire knowledge and freedom and deploy it to think and act in ways that if not overtly counter to the organisation, allow them to subtly and sometimes nearly invisibly alter the relations that make TMTL seem so powerful (see also, Bain & Taylor 2000; Taylor, P. & Bain 2003; Winiecki 2004b). Regardless, power is still present and still active in the production of subjects and subjectivity; however, rather than being some transcendental and universal force, power is a thing in which members are implicated and which they have a hand in producing.

The details of the chapters in Part 2 notwithstanding, in the production and exertion of power workers add or incorporate knowledge of the workplace *and* of their own values, goals, etc. that is not otherwise considered in the disciplinary and governmental apparatuses, though still in a way that is tethered to a 'responsibility' to know one's self and to use that knowledge in particular ways. This begins to expose opportunities for fulfilling the visions of Smith (Smith, D. 1990b, 1990c, 1999b) and Haraway (Haraway 1990, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c) to exercise and even incorporate knowledge otherwise marginalised or disallowed into the organisation's discourse/Knowledge. As will be demonstrated below, these ways identify or create and exploit 'spaces left free' in the organisation's disciplinary and governmental discourse and structures, such that actors continuously produce evidence that they are not dominated by the organisation while still being able to produce evidence of meeting its statistical goals (Starkey & McKinlay 1998; Winiecki 2004b). In a curious way, this also demonstrates an orientation and fulfilment of responsibility both to one's self as it is known by the organisation and to one's self as it is known by the individual somewhat separate from the organisation.

That is, while even these 'excess' tactics are shot through with traces of Knowledge and disciplinary and governmental power produced in the architectural divisions, surveillance, abstracted inscriptions, examinations, etc., worker's practices are not *dominated* by these doings (Argyris 1952; Bain & Taylor 2000; Beirne, Riach & Wilson 2004; de Certeau 1985; Deetz 1998; Knights & Odih 2000; Lyon 1993; McKinlay & Taylor 1998; Miller, P. & O'Leary 1987; Taylor, P. & Bain 1999, 2003; Taylor, P. et al. 2002). In many cases, the subject's modification, invention and deployment of local tactics is not intentionally designed to resist or alter the subjectivity-producing aspects of Knowledge and power, or the organisation's rationality (Foucault 1990c; Starkey & McKinlay 1998), but rather to cope with or maintain what they have come to understand to be consistent with the organisation's governmentalised 'way of being' a subject (though sometimes outright resistance *is* intentional). These are instances of self-discipline or self-management – what Foucault calls 'technologies of the self' – comprising tactics and strategies that arise not only in Knowledge and power fashioned by organisations *outside* of the actor (as described in the chapters that comprise Part 2 of this report), but also from the creation and deployment of knowledge of their own making (Foucault 1988a, 1994b, 1997e; Starkey & McKinlay 1998, p. 231; Winiecki 2004b).[201] The result is the creation of subjectivity that is somewhat subterranean, or 'under' or 'within' the visible frameworks in the organisation, curiously dependent upon it but also in excess of its 'objective', 'true' Knowledge and power. Consequently, subjects are not totally dominated by the organisation, but rather are active in their own production in an agonistic relation with the organisations of which they are members.

[201] As will be shown, it is the case that 'knowledge of their own making' is, however, shaped by one's surroundings and the Knowledge and rationality characterising those surroundings – that is, an agonistic relation with prevailing Knowledge and power.

As will be described below, the thoughts and actions in which this is accomplished are frequently obscured by the very same tactics, strategies, technologies and rationality that contribute to the production and maintenance of the structures, subjects and subjectivity comprising the technology-mediated workplace. That is, the very norms and forms of TMTL provide 'blind spots' in which the subject can act to alter the relation of forces in the organisation and work on the creation of one's own subjectivity (Bain & Taylor 2000; de Certeau 1985; Taylor, P. & Bain 1999, 2003; Taylor, P. et al. 2002). Regardless, acts of resistance and secondary adjustments still reflect an orientation to Knowledge and power described in Part 2 of this report – indeed they would not be possible were it not for the already historical order against which or based upon which they might act. That is, they are both context shaped and context shaping.

As will be shown, such practices are frequently not overtly disruptive and rather instantiate what have been called contained secondary adjustments (Goffman 1961, pp. 54ff, 199ff, 315ff), though resistance in the more vernacular sense does occur (Argyris 1952; Barnes 2004; Jermier, Knights & Nord 1994; McKinlay & Taylor 1998; Paules 1992; Sturdy & Fineman 2001; Taylor, P. & Bain 1999, 2003). In doing so, this part of the report aims to show how workers in TMTL have freedom to exert forces back upon the organisation that affect their own subjectivity, and that workers are not 'dopes' who simply submit to and reify the forces immanent to the organisation or society in general (Cameron 2000, esp. Ch. 3; du Gay 1996b, p. 25; Garfinkel 1967, p. 68). Instead, the workers and their subjectivity are made up through their action in relation to these forces:

> The simplest sociological view of the individual and his [sic] self is that he is to himself what his place in an organization defines him to be. When pressed, a sociologist modifies this

> model by granting certain complications: the self may be not yet formed or may exhibit conflicting dedications. Perhaps we should further complicate the construct by elevating these qualifications to a central place, initially defining the individual, for sociological purposes, as a stance-taking entity, a something that takes up a position somewhere between identification with an organization and opposition to it, and is ready at the slightest pressure to regain its balance by shifting its involvement in either direction. It is thus *against something* that the self can emerge (Goffman 1961, p. 320).

Consequently, resistance and secondary adjustments are an important component of subjectivity *to the subjects themselves*. That is, resistance is part of the power in which subjects are produced. This is different from the Marxian vision that places power external to the subject as a repressive force that oppresses the subject's 'true' nature, and where resistance is always a force applied by the subjects against power in order to fight for a return to or freeing of this 'true' nature. For Goffman, as for Foucault, social life is always produced in agonistic relations in which the workers are a primary actor. The agonistic actions – the resistance or secondary adjustments – manifest a struggle over what K/knowledge and power is legitimised in the workplace, and a struggle over how subjects and subjectivity are constituted. This part of the report focuses on those thoughts and actions of workers that act in an agonistic relation to Knowledge and power created and exercised by their organisations.

CHAPTER 1: ACTING IN & BETWEEN FORCE RELATIONS

1. Setting the Scene

It's early on a day in one of my final weeks of fieldwork at *BigTech* – only 6:02AM. I'm supposed to meet Tuley, an agent who agreed to allow me to observe and interview him during this week at the call centre. I considered his volunteering to be a boon to my project. He's got several years of experience here and has been promoted to the position of Quality Support Specialist (QSS). With that status, he'll be able to contribute to my understanding of some aspects of the agents' role and also how they're evaluated – an important part of what I'm interested in. When arrangements were made through E-mail last week, he told that he usually starts work at about 6:00AM.

As I sit in his cubicle, just having got out my word processor and started typing notes, I notice several other agents collecting and chatting in the aisle several metres down from Tuley's cubicle. Initially, all are males ranging in age from mid 20s to what looks to be 50s. A few minutes later a woman walks up carrying a Styrofoam cup, filled with, I assume, coffee. She sips from it as she listens to the talk of the others – boisterous talk about a weekend fishing trip, a flat tire, missing a planned meeting with another agent at a diner along a mountain road and eventually, buying a salmon steak at the local grocery when the trip produced nothing edible. One agent drew a cartoon of this story on a large whiteboard outside the cubicles. The whiteboard is labelled 'Tech Notes', but is now used to document and parody the events of one agent's unproductive fishing trip.

Phones ring in the distance – a low, electronic tone that seems to reverberate for quite a distance. Whenever a ring is heard the group's conversation quiets briefly, and some of the agents turn their heads as if to discern if the ringing is coming from their cubicle. One agent leaves quickly after a phone goes unanswered for several rings – four, I think – then returns, saying, "[i]t bounced".[202]

Now it's about 6:15 AM and Tuley still hasn't arrived. Agents in the group above are still talking, though now they're standing around a large *BigTech* machine located in a common area at the centre of several cubicles. They're pointing at, pulling and inspecting its workings. In the distance I see the call centre's manager walk in from the parking lot. He doesn't seem to notice the group, but one of them nods in the direction of the manager and the group disperses – evidence of a panoptic power.

While I've not learned all of their names, several people in this group are visually familiar from my fieldwork here. One of them, noticing me, calls over and asks if I'm waiting for Tuley. I nod that I am and he tells that Tuley had to leave early yesterday, adding that his wife was sick and he had to take her to the hospital last night. "He said he might not be in today."

In fact, he didn't come in today. Left 'alone', I left my word processor lying on Tuley's desk, figuring I'd use his cubicle as an impromptu home base and a place to write up my notes from whatever I ended up doing this day.

Pat, another agent I've occasionally chatted with, arrives and makes his way over to his cubicle – a cubicle near Tuley's. Noticing me he offers a greeting in what

[202] If a phone isn't answered within several rings, the ACD automatically routes it to another phone that has been logged in. 'Bouncing', as will be shown below, is also something that agents occasionally do deliberately.

I come to accept as his normal sarcasm,[203] "hey Don. Harya doin'? Cold enuf for ya?" (it's about 35 degrees outside, even at this early hour). "Where's Tuley?", Pat asks. I relay the data provided to me earlier. "Bummer", Pat replies as he logs into his computer and begins to read E-mail, "[I] wouldn't wanna spend a day in the hospital!"

As he stands to unlock a cabinet in which he stores company documents, manuals and his favourite coffee mug, I decide to wander around a little bit.

I pick up a paper notebook – in nearly 2000 hours of fieldwork I've concluded that it's easier to write on your feet than to type on your feet. As I do this I remember an episode nearly two years earlier on my first day of fieldwork at *BigTech*. I was reticent to leave my word processor unattended and someone quipped, "I wouldn't be afraid of anyone walking off with *that thing* (gesturing to my old word processor). Nobody here'd want *that*". Indeed, I remember thinking, here I am in a place filled with workers who are probably jaded with the latest computer equipment. What *would anyone* want with my old word processor?

I begin by looking off in the distance and seeing some people over by the vending machines. I walk in that direction, to an alcove about 50 metres from Tuley's desk, winding through what seems to be a maze of aisles. I remember the advice of an agent, also early in my fieldwork at *BigTech*, "Just keep yer eyes on the walls" he said, "like navigating in a boat – watch the horizon" then adding, "[w]hen I first started here I got lost all the time, until I learned to look up. The cube walls all look the same but you can tell where you are by the windows, doors and signs."

[203] If there is anything common about call centre agents, it is the presence – or culturing – of a sarcastic sense of humour.

I peer into some of the cubicles as I walk past. Most are empty. It's still early in the day, I think. Few calls arrive this early and so the call centre isn't fully staffed at this time. Most shifts won't start for another hour or more.

When I arrive at the vending machine area I find a group of about 20 people milling around, some queued up at several large coffee urns. The coffee smells good but I navigate through the crowd, greeting those I know by name and nodding at some I only know by sight, having already had my cups at home before leaving for the call centre. I walk past the coffee urns and into another part of the call centre.

Here, there are more agents at their desks. Some are already on calls. Others are leaning back in their swivel chairs, some leaning up against their cubicle walls, talking with each other, waiting for a call to ring into their phone.

As I stand, surveying things near and in the distance, I notice another QSS walking past. As he walks, an agent who is on the phone with a customer, notices him and gestures to the QSS, muting his microphone so the customer doesn't hear him, and calls out, "Hey! I need to talk to you about my latest quality rating!" The agent and QSS manage a short conversation punctuated by the agent turning back to his computer, un-muting the phone and blurting an occasional 'affective response' – "uuh huh", "right" – or providing a direction to the customer (a troubleshooting step to implement) before turning back to the QSS and resuming their conversation.

I walk past, slowly, intending to eavesdrop.[204] Their talk has to do with the QSS's rating of the agent on a call from last Wednesday. The agent apparently disagrees with one of the marks given him that lowered his rating somewhat. The QSS remarks that he didn't actually record the call, rather that he barged into the

[204] My parents always taught that it was impolite to eavesdrop. With apologies to Howard Becker (Becker 1998), as an ethnographer, however, like reading upside down documents from the other side of someone's desk, I've learned it to be an ever useful trick of the trade.

agent's phone and listened live. "I can't go back and re-listen to it at all." The agent sounds urgent in his appeals.

Eventually, the conversation ends and the agent returns to his customer 'full time'. The QSS, having noticed me eavesdropping,[205] gestures down another aisle – one that is totally empty, "[t]hat guy is interesting", he says, referencing the conversation just ended. "Sometimes he's really good but sometimes he's not. I just happened to catch him on a bad day this time." He goes on to indicate that sometimes he'll throw away a met/not-met evaluation part way through, or he'll not mark down something the agent did wrong and just go and talk to him instead, in order to "...tell 'em what they're doing and how I'm hearing 'em". But this time, the QSS says, "I had to get those met/not-mets done by Friday – 'cause they were due by the end of the month – and I was falling behind. I couldn't do it that time 'cause then *I'd* be behind the 8-ball". The QSS evidences that he is impacted by many competing interests and forces – while he appears to prefer handling quality issues privately between himself and the agent, in this case, deadline pressures took precedence and keeping himself out of potential trouble with his supervisor was more important than other possibilities.

The QSS returns to his desk and I continue my stroll. Two agents whom I've never met see me coming and turn back into their cubicles. Another one, absorbed in a call, appears to have produced an elaborate drawing of a robot in the racy Japanese *anime* style – his cubicle walls papered with similar drawings. Another agent stands in the aisle outside his cubicle, talking with an agent while standing on ice hockey

[205] Although I do it (that is, eavesdropping) regularly, it appears I'm not that good at being covert about it!

skates and 'stick handling' an ice hockey puck on the carpeted floor with a hockey stick.[206]

As I walk, another agent who was an active informant for me the previous year calls out to me and waves me over. Among a group of other agents, he is telling a story of a customer who, after a substantial amount of troubleshooting and disassembling the machine under his direction, found a mouse nest inside a piece of *BigTech* equipment. He laughed as he told how wiring insulation was chewed off and mouse faeces and urine had apparently short-circuited the machine. The agent could hardly contain laughter as he recounted the story, "how can a mouse get in *there!?*", he blurted as he verbally castigated the customer for allowing such a thing to happen. He ends by saying that he's asked the customer to take pictures and send them to him. "I *gotta* see this!" he laughed.[207]

After sharing laughs with these agents, I noticed that a neighbouring agent who was working a call was toggling his computer screen between the database used to document customer cases and what appeared to be his personal E-mail account.

I return to Tuley's cubicle and begin transcribing notes from my paper notebook to my word processor. Aside from documenting what I saw, I also make note of the fact that what I noticed was very different from what I was *able to see* when I first began fieldwork. At that time – it seems so long ago now – I was impressed by what appeared to be the overwhelming order of the call centre: workers

[206] The fact one agent can produce such elaborate drawings and another can practice ice hockey skills at work reflects the much slower pace of calls at *BigTech* than at any of the other call centres involved in this study. Through fieldwork, I noticed both the artist and the ice hockey player practising their skills while working calls. At that time I asked an agent about these things. He replied, "...yeah. Sometimes we get a lotta down time. Then again, sometimes we're all *head down* in our computers for days at a time too!" This alludes to the workers' attention to the rules of the organisation while still allowing themselves some options for personal activities when slack time appears.

[207] Several weeks later, on my last day of fieldwork at *BigTech*, I noticed a display of photographs outside this agent's cubicle of what I assumed to be this particular machine. These photos showed a partially disassembled machine and exposed mouse nest, bare wires and corroded electronics. A handwritten caption under the photos read, "*BigTech* not mouse proof!"

occupying rows of cubicles and fixated on computer screens as they talk to customers from far and wide through headsets, charts displaying individual agent's and teams' productivity and quality, notebooks filled with job aids, hearing agents voice scripted questions punctuated by typing into their databases, supervisors coaching agents, what I later learned to be an act of advising them of options made available by the organisation and how to take advantage of them. Then, everything seemed so orderly and so technical, and so *disciplined and governed*.

With more experience in the field and the ability to begin 'seeing past' the superficial features of the workplace, I now see not only the appearance of order but also points at which workers find and use spaces to affect the appearance of what they are doing, and to produce spaces in which they can *be* other than just an agent of the company. Workers are surely disciplined and governed, but they are also *not dominated* by disciplinary and governmental technologies, tools, rules, etc. – Knowledge and power. They have showed me how they are also adept at making themselves in ways other than just according to the company's rules, examinations and management.

2. Secondary Adjustments & Resistance

> On the surface, life here appears to run almost placidly, but one needs to go only a very little beneath the surface to find the whirlpools and eddies [that show the workplace is not as placid as it appears on the surface, and only appears to run smoothly because workers either 'go along' or act in the margins such that their actions leave no official, inscribed traces]. (Hassler, 1954 cited in Goffman 1961, p. 315)

Goffman (1961) takes considerable space to provide a look into the *underlife* of what he calls 'total institutions'. For him, the total institution is one in which the lives of inmates are controlled such that access to resources and privileges normally afforded an individual 'on the outside' is totally controlled by an organisation.

Prisons, mental institutions, monasteries, military camps and the like, are examples of total institutions. While some have characterised call centres in similar ways (Fernie & Metcalf 1998), it is hardly fair to refer to a call centre, or any other workplace for that matter, in such terms (Bain & Taylor 2000; Knights & McCabe 1998; Taylor, P. & Bain 2003; Taylor, P. et al. 2002; Winiecki 2004b).

Regardless, Goffman's concept of 'secondary adjustment', while presented and documented in his book on total institutions, provides one with a lens that facilitates a unique perspective on organisations, including call centres. Goffman defines secondary adjustments as actions that:

> ...do not directly challenge staff [DJW: thus, the institution] but allow inmates to obtain hidden satisfactions or to obtain permitted ones by forbidden means. These practices are variously referred to as 'the angles,' 'knowing the ropes,' 'conniving,' 'gimmicks,' 'deals,' or 'ins' ... Secondary adjustments provide the inmate with important evidence that he [sic] is still his own man, with some control of his environment; sometimes a secondary adjustment becomes almost a kind of lodgement for the self, a *churinga* in which the soul is felt to reside. (Goffman 1961, pp. 54-55)[208]

By referring to it as a churinga, a sacred object in which one's soul resides, Goffman also attaches the practices of secondary adjustment to an important element to be addressed in this part of the report – the subject's self-construction. That is, it is in the individual's actions – carried out with knowledge of the organisation's Knowledge, and that do not appear in direct contradiction to the rules of the organisation, but through which the individual collects or produces some satisfactions either not allowed or not allowed *through these practices* – that he or she has authority in the production of one's own subjectivity. As will be shown

[208] Sturdy and Fineman (2001) indicate that for those interested in a labour process orientation to the study of labour, resistance is identifiable in terms of workers' measurable deviance from the organisation's defined processes, for the purpose of defeating or overthrowing power, and not with the things Goffman is describing. That is, resistance in labour process is that which is directly against the order of the organisation such that it can be said to be aimed at upsetting or overturning it. Sturdy and Fineman (2001) and other orthodox labour process theorists ignore the 'resistance value' of anything that does not fit this definition (Callaghan & Thompson 2001; Littler 1990; Lucio-Martinez & Stewart 1997; Mulholland 2002, 2004; Smith, C. & Thompson 2004; Thompson 1990; Willmott 1990).

below, these practices can also have the effect of influencing the 'official' subjectivity by manipulating how the organisation sees, inscribes and examines agents' work.

Additionally, in his book on total institutions, Goffman (1961) provides tools and examples that permit one to analyse and describe organisations and institutions in ways that avoid and/or deconstruct the commonsense categories and terminology immanent in the organisations being studied (Becker 2003, p. 660f). Not doing so carries substantial hazard to the researcher in social venues:

> If I choose the terms used by the people who 'own' the territory, and therefore choose the perspectives associated with those terms, I let my analysis be shaped by conventional social arrangements and the distribution of power and privilege they create. This has both technical and moral consequence. (Becker 2003, p. 661)

In other words, if a researcher utilises the terms and categories of the 'ruling relations' (Smith, D. 1999a) when analysing and describing an organisation, he or she allows the relationships, forces and implicit values accompanying those terms and that organisation to seep into one's work – thus allowing its Knowledge and power to affect one's work. By adopting, or creating if necessary, a frame of reference un-colonised by the existing forces in the field to describe what one discovers, the researcher does not unintentionally allow one's work to be either a reification of those things or a direct attack upon them. In either case, the analyst and readers of the resulting research are provided with new 'tools to think with' in order to understand some aspects of the social world addressed.

One such frame of reference, which is also used in the lexicon of social science, is 'resistance'. Conventionally, following the commonality of Marxian influence in social science, resistance is thought of as something done in opposition to prevailing power with a goal of bringing about the cessation of or change in that

power (Bain & Taylor 2000; Clegg 1998; Cobble 1991; Jermier, Knights & Nord 1994; Knights & McCabe 1998; Paules 1992; Sturdy & Fineman 2001; Taylor, P. & Bain 1999, 2003). However, unless one is careful, use of the term 'resistance' can affect one's interpretation of the thing so characterised by latching it to the conventional Marxian interpretation. While it is the case, as will be shown below, that there are many actions that can easily be interpreted as opposition to the organisation or its members, simplemindedly doing so may lead one to think in terms of a Marxian interpretation of resistance and undermining one's attempt to go beyond its structuralism and determinism.

Goffman is not alone in attempting to avoid existing theory and terminology for the sake of going beyond them. Foucault himself asserted the importance of not accepting any particular discourse of truth when analysing a field and its relations. Rather than accept the rationalisation instantiated in an organisation, or the juridical 'truths' of a political action, one should identify "what kind of rationality they are using" – the form of its *dispositif* (Foucault 2000b, p. 299) – and avoid accepting absolutes and juridical forms as an unquestioned truth against which to evaluate something (Foucault 1997c). These pieces of advice are carried out by analysing the relations that obtain, looking at what they create – the 'doings of doings' – and determining how the 'Truth' in the field being researched is actually produced.

That said, totally avoiding 'already owned' frames of reference and terminology in research reports runs the risk of silencing the members of the field in favour of the analyst's own creations. Consequently, care must be taken to position and problematise the frames of reference and terminology 'already owned' by constituents of the field, while still using them when relevant to ensure that

marginalised members' voices are heard, and introducing new analytical concepts and terminology to convey unique analytic concepts or 'tools to think with'.

The contents of this chapter should be read with Goffman's and Foucault's advice in mind. While I do use the term 'resistance', I do not intend to imply that it is aimed at recovering something 'right' or 'true' in a universal sense, nor that it is an adequate benchmark against which to measure the action. Instead, through a description of secondary adjustments and resistance, I intend to highlight how actors in these four call centres demonstrate their substantial power and take advantage of 'spaces left free' within their organisations in order to influence the production of their own subjectivity – their own construction of themselves as a group and as individuals.

a. Affecting the Production of Quality Data

As described and illustrated in previous chapters, the worker in TMTL is enclosed, partitioned and fitted into a multifaceted apparatus in which he or she is made observable, inscribable and examinable. To a substantial extent, subjectivity in TMTL is centred on the product of this apparatus – numbers in tables and charts that describe the worker's productivity and quality.

The methods of enclosing and partitioning workers and work, observation, abstracted inscription, massing of data and subsequent examination of them are considered both objective and subjective. Measures of productivity are considered objective, primarily following from the computer-based surveillance, collection and processing of data that comprises it. Measures of quality are considered subjective, primarily following the fact that it is human interpretation of rules and frameworks,

as inscribed in rating forms, which comprises it. In both cases, however, the number in tables and charts is pointed to as evidence of a subject's adequate or inadequate productivity or quality – a manufacturing of reality and 'truth'.

Through the nearly 2000 hours comprising fieldwork for this research it was a continuously demonstrated fact that as long as the end result – the tables and charts – 'look' normal, typical or unremarkable, the apparatus that produced them would not be questioned or suspected of malfunctioning. That is, everything would be considered to be operating satisfactorily when the surface features of its product appeared 'normal'. However, it has already been shown by others that the modernity implied in such forms is not so much a reflection of modernity as it is a product of thoughts and actions aimed at the production of these forms (Latour 1986, 1987, 1993, 1999b; Latour & Woolgar 1990). Based on this, it is unsurprising to find that many of the secondary adjustments observed in the four call centres occur in and around the apparatuses that produce these documents.

For example, at *DeliveryWorldwide*, text messages similar to E-mail are a primary form of communication between call centres and delivery stations. For example, if a customer calls to track a package that he or she considers to be late, the agent is expected to send a text message to the delivery station asking for its estimated time of delivery. The delivery station responds in kind. Such messages are to be formatted in particular ways so that the computer system used by the delivery station can sort them into categories the organisation uses to monitor its own processes and audit the work of agents. Team leaders at *DeliveryWorldwide* are expected to audit these messages daily, and if errors are found in formatting, the team leader is expected to report the error to the General Office and then provide coaching or ad hoc training to the responsible agent.

Mis-formatted messages are tallied per month and used as one measure for determining the overall performance of the whole call centre, and team leaders make a regular practice of focusing on messages received from *other* call centres or delivery stations and *not* on messages sent from agents at the local call centre. By including only messages originating from other call centres or delivery stations, team leaders can tactically decrease the possibility that they will discover problems sourced locally, thus that the local call centre will have any mis-formatted messages counted against it.

For example, Sheila, a team leader at *DeliveryWorldwide*, told that she will trace the path of any mis-formatted messages found, determining if the problems noted in the message can be traced to something committed by an agent at the local call centre. If such problems are found she will not report the data. She accounts for this by saying "why should I tattle on something that *we did wrong!?*"

It is not that Sheila ignores such errors, however. When she locates such an error she will go to the agent responsible for the error and provide 're-training' or coaching:

> ...to give [the agent] more information on how [the organisation] uses [the data included on reports]. I mean, we have to get it right. It's part of our job. But I don't think it's part of our job to tell management when something is our fault. They'll just crack down and provide nothing to help us do better.

In other words, Sheila is acting on the 'truth' of what she discovers to actually take responsibility for helping co-workers and the overall call centre look better on the monthly audits of their work. However, she also engages in a secondary adjustment that affects how the organisation 'sees' the work and workers, and in so doing obscures certain things from the organisation. She told me that she believes the organisation would only use such data against the workers and not provide any additional resources to remedy what problems might exist.

Similarly, as described above, all of the call centres participating in this study have means for evaluating and rating the quality of agent interaction with callers. One of the facets of these evaluations focuses on the demeanour in the agent's conduct. In all cases the determination of appropriate or inappropriate demeanour is made by the person performing the evaluation – a subjective measure. In *BigTech*, *MHealth* and *MedAdvise*, this is treated as a commonsense sort of criterion – if the agent 'sounds' rude, then he or she may be so rated on the form used to conduct the evaluation. As noted above, *DeliveryWorldwide* has attempted to produce an explicit definition of what 'friendly' sounds like.

For a period lasting nearly a year during fieldwork, the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre participating in this study was receiving a huge volume of calls. This was the result of the closure of several other call centres in the *DeliveryWorldwide* network, forcing many calls normally handled by those call centres to be sent to the call centre participating in this study. Agents rapidly fatigued under the strain of 250+ calls per day, and openly complained to management that more agents needed to be hired. Budget stresses were presented as a reason why this could not be done, and agents were told by the supervisor to simply 'suck it up' for the time being and 'be glad you've still got a job'.

During this time, the supervisor began to tell team leaders that she was noticing an increase in the number of complaints received from customers about rude or abrupt conduct by agents. During several of the weekly meetings of team leaders, including one attended by the organisation's Vice President and Regional Manager for Customer Service, management of the call centre attempted to refine the way 'friendliness' was defined for the purposes of the quality ratings. The call centre manager photocopied a dictionary definition of 'friendly', and several calibration

sessions were held in order to exercise the team leaders' evaluation of what 'friendly' and 'unfriendly' agents sound like.[209] The 'friendly pack' of documents described in the previous chapter was another attempt to produce a uniform and universal definition of 'friendly' for use in scoring the quality of agent's work.

Several of the team leaders expressed their agreement with the determination of 'unfriendly' as it was presented by management, and told they would use this new understanding in their subsequent quality evaluations. However, two of the team leaders, one of them an active union member, expressed reservations about this, and admitted they didn't feel it appropriate for them to make a judgement like this. In particular, they indicated that the determination of 'friendly' or 'unfriendly' was something the *customer* had to determine. One asked "[w]ouldn't it be better if we waited until the customer said something that verified they thought the agent was rude or unfriendly?"

To this, the Vice President of Customer Service stood, and in an amplified and irritated voice said that "[a]ny one of you can tell if an agent is friendly or unfriendly! You don't have to wait to hear an upset customer!" – effectively dismissing the concern and *assigning responsibility* to team leaders for making this determination.

Shortly after the meeting ended, I made a point to talk with the team leader who voiced the reservation noted above. When I reached her cubicle, she was already in a conversation with the other team leader who had expressed similar reservation. She said, "I just can't do that. How can I decide for the customer if an agent is rude or friendly?" and went on to describe another calibration session in which she

[209] All of the recordings used to demonstrate 'unfriendly' were of one agent. While it was officially denied that this agent was a target for poor evaluations, several team leaders admitted their belief that this was, in fact, the case. In particular, these team leaders told that they believed management was attempting to condition their perceptions such that they would produce documentary evidence of poor performance, thus justification for termination of this one agent.

thought a customer was being very rude, and the manager himself (who is from a large city on the East Coast of the United States known for its fast pace and the abrupt demeanour of its citizens) dismissed her concern by telling "everyone's like that [the customer] isn't being rude. He's just being a New Yorker". Recalling this episode, the team lead said:

> [I]f I can't say *that* was rude, how can I say if an agent is being rude? If the customer acts like that and it's *normal to the customer*, then it's not rude! I'm going to score everyone okay unless the customer complains [during the call].

In a subsequent interview with this team leader, I asked more about this. She told that she would also take into consideration the way the customer behaved in a call. For example, if the customer behaved in a manner she thought very rude, and the agent was terse or "didn't go out of his way to be friendly" she would consider the agent to have done an acceptable job. She accounted for this by appealing to her knowledge of the stresses of the work:

> [S]ure, we have to be professional and polite, but sometimes the best you can do is not to swear at a customer! [Management] knows it but they also have a different perspective on things. Depending on the context I might cut the agent some slack and score them okay. But I'll also make sure I go and talk to them and tell them what I heard and that I might not be so understanding the next time.

In subsequent observations of team leaders actually accomplishing ratings of agent work through covertly recorded calls, I saw they in fact did not always apply the 'official' interpretation of 'friendly', even if that team leader was one of those who had voiced agreement in the calibration session noted above. In one concurrent interview (Ericsson & Simon 1980) with Hal, an experienced team leader, during these observations, he said:

> I can't make such a clear discrimination of what 'friendly' means. Sometimes it sounds a little bit close to the line [as defined by the manager in the meeting described above], but if I

> were asked to justify my assessment in a meeting, I wouldn't be able to back it up. It's my opinion and I don't want my opinion to affect anyone's job unless I'm confident I can back it up with something objective!

There appears then, to be hesitation on the part of some team leaders to simply accept the organisation's attempts to produce universal definitions of quality, and instead to deploy and use their own knowledge and experience, or to wait for a clear sign from the customer, in producing what are eventually encoded only as abstracted inscriptions – numbers on a page – on the evaluation form. In so doing the team leader's values and knowledge and *method* of producing the inscriptions are obscured, while the numbers produced reflect the incorporation of the team leader's knowledge and experience – details that are in excess of, thus not dominated by, the programmatic forms of power in the call centre (Armstrong 1994; Bougen 1994; de Certeau 1985; Goffman 1961). This demonstrates the location and exploitation of a 'space left free' in the organisation's apparatus for producing evaluations and subjectivity – the team leader demonstrates authority over one's own knowledge even when the organisation attempted to assert disciplinary and governmental power to control it. At the same time, it is relevant to note that Hal is not undercutting the organisation totally because he indicates he *will* coach the agent – but he won't make official inscriptions of his determination of 'unfriendly' on the rating form. That is, he is fulfilling his responsibility for improving the work of agents without also making official notes of this.

This adjustment does not eradicate power. Relations of power still exist in terms of the obscured action by team leaders, as these actions are agonistically oriented to the forces exerted by the organisation. Such actions occur in relation to the force of the 'ruling relations', leading up to the idea that, "It is thus *against something* that the self can emerge" (Goffman 1961, p. 320). This is not a contrary

force aimed at destroying its opponent, rather it is a move made to redirect force and thus alter the relations that produce Knowledge, power and subjectivity – a redirection that, in this case, aims to incorporate illegitimate knowledge into the organisation's apparatus for producing evaluations. As such, it approaches the vision of Smith and Haraway for giving voice to the marginalised individual (in this case, the team leader) in altering the ruling relation or scientific discourse (Haraway 1990, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Smith, D. 1987b, 1990b, 1992). The same desire for (re)introducing marginalised voices into discourse is envisioned by Foucault as a means for avoiding conditions of domination in any discourse (Foucault 1983, 1988a, 1994b, 2000b, 2001, 2003).

One afternoon during fieldwork, I was observing and performing concurrent interviews with a team leader while she conducted covert barges and quality evaluations of agents' work. When she tapped into an agent's phone line, all that was heard were faint typing sounds and muffled voices – the voices of agents around the cubicle of the agent whose phone was being tapped. After a few seconds, the team leader stood and walked to the end of a row of cubicles adjacent to hers, and craned her neck to peer into an agent's cubicle. She quickly returned to her cubicle and told me that the agent was cheating.

Asking for more details on what comprised this 'cheating', she told me that the agent was just sitting at her computer working on data processing and the handling of text messages sent to her from delivery stations in response to queries about packages. The team leader then walked up to the IT[210] manager's workstation at the other end of the call centre and asked him if she could look at 'the Lucent'. The IT manager launched a program and stepped aside. The team leader navigated

[210] IT is an abbreviation for Information Technology.

through a menu in this software to display a list of agent names – all of those currently logged in. She began scrolling through the list and then clicked on the name of the agent she was attempting to barge. Examining the screen, she muttered 'yup', thanked the IT manager and began walking back to her desk. When I pressed her for an explanation she held her finger up to her lips and I followed quietly.[211]

When we returned to her desk she whispered to me that she had just confirmed that the agent had dialled her phone into a line that made it appear to the ACD that she was working on calls while she was in fact just connected to a 'dead' line. She said, "this is sometimes the only way you can get something done around here, but it's not right." She quickly added that she doesn't feel required to report this to the organisation:

> It's not my job to catch this. That's [management's] job. [But] I'll be sure to tell her that I found her doing this and if I caught her again I might report it but for now I'll just let it go with a warning.

Several months later, I observed Hal, another team leader, conduct quality evaluations. After tapping into the phone of Denita, an agent with nearly six years of experience, he waited until a new call started and began quickly scribbling notes on the evaluation form. After the call was completed, he remarked to me:

> That wasn't a very good [call]. She provided incorrect information when she answered the customer's question about shipment of live animals. The only animals we allow are turtles –

[211] When I asked her about her implicit command to silence while walking through the call centre, she admitted that although some agents knew she could 'see them' through the computer program on the IT manager's computer, she didn't want them to hear her talking about it in a common area. "...you can get a lot more done if they know you respect them. If I go blabbing this stuff to everyone they won't respect you at all and you're toast" Thus, the team leader in this position has to negotiate rocky and loose terrain. On the one hand the team leader acts in ways that affect a particular air for the benefit of relations with co-workers. As shown below, the team leader also occasionally acts in ways that affect a more managerial perspective – perhaps for the benefit of the supervisor.

don't ask me why. I don't know.[212] It's not a very common question and the company keeps changing their policy so that's not too big a deal – but it'll hurt her.

As the next call began, Hal started scribbling notes again. From the team leader's desk we could hear her typing very firmly (hard!) on her keyboard and telling the customer in a very tired sounding voice, "I'm sorry but my computer's acting up again... This should only be a minute." After a few seconds we heard her say in a loud and anguished voice, "I HATE MY COMPUTER!"[213] Hal nodded. "[It] sounds like she's having a really bad day."

Just then, Denita's team leader walked up behind us and, noticing her name on the form Hal was writing on, said, "oh! Evaluating my girl! How's she doin'?" Hal remarked "not too good." Then, crumpling the rating form he said, "I think we're done for the night."

When I asked about this, Hal told that it was late in the day and at the end of Denita's workweek – a time, he assured me, when any agent really starts to show fatigue. "Plus, her computer is acting up and it's probably not fair to do a rating of her today. She's a good agent but things just aren't good right now."

A few weeks later in fieldwork, another team leader told me something else that may have been a factor in Hal's decision – but which I didn't know at the time. This team leader told that, at best, only 10 calls are rated for each agent per month. Since agents at this call centre commonly answer up to 200 calls each *day* (±4000 per month), quality evaluations account for only about .0025% of the calls worked by the agent! Therefore, an otherwise 'good agent's' monthly quality rating could be severely harmed by monitoring calls performed in a brief period when technical problems and *understandable* fatigue are impeding one's ability. This team leader

[212] The italicised text in this quote was voiced *sotto voce*.
[213] Hal indicated that he could hear a change in the hiss in the phone line, indicating that Denita had pressed her mute button. Thus, her exclamation was not heard by the customer.

told me that she too would ‘think twice’ about doing quality evaluations for an agent when he or she was having what appeared to be a ‘bad day’.

After learning this perspective, I asked Hal if this might have been a factor in his decision not to complete evaluations of Denita’s work on the day noted above. While several weeks had passed and he didn’t remember the exact circumstances, after I described the event, he acknowledged that he too would use this knowledge of how much a ‘bad day’ can hurt an agent’s evaluation in a decision on whether or not to perform one.

These examples and disclosures demonstrate that the team leader has access to particular ‘spaces left free’ in the organisation’s surveillance, inscription and examination apparatus. Not only do the team leaders have access to these ‘spaces’, it is not uncommon for them to utilise this space as a region where otherwise ‘unauthorised’ knowledge based on experience in the call centre can be deployed in order to affect the production of subjectivity. It is also the case that this cannot be considered direct resistance of the sort that would destroy the organisation’s imputed authority – the type of resistance advocated by Marxian orientations to social change. Instead, it acts *within the discourse and apparatus* to alter the way they function, while not upsetting their production of inscriptions and evidence of ‘proper’ functioning – an agonistic force that acts within the Knowledge and power of the system to alter the system and its manner of producing subjectivity. At the same time, it demonstrates how Hal and the other team leader are demonstrating an orientation to their knowledge about the agent’s historical status as a ‘good agent’ and the very low frequency of quality evaluations in the call centre. This displays a responsibility to maintain this knowledge, this unofficial ‘truth’ about the agent and contingencies that can affect anyone in the call centre.

However, not all evaluations related to quality are accomplished through what is supposed to be a covert surveillance system. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, verbal quizzes over company policies are delivered one-on-one to agents by their team leads. Questions are drawn directly from the online database of company policies and products used by agents during the course of working customer calls, and scores on these quizzes are submitted to the supervisor for eventual inclusion in the agent's six-month evaluation.

When administering such a quiz, the team leader will walk up to the agent's cubicle and announce the quiz. The agent will put himself or herself into the ACD's 'not ready' mode and hand his or her 'log off recorder' to the team lead, who will write in the date and time, indicate that the agent was offline for 'training' and then initial it, so the agent will not be penalised for unauthorised offline time if the supervisor audits his or her time logged into the ACD. The team leader will then read the questions to the agent, who has an unspecified length of time to answer (quizzes typically contain between three and five questions). The agent may consult the database of company policies if desired, to search for an answer to the question, just as he or she is supposed to do when working an authentic customer call.

In most of the nineteen instances of observing these quizzes, on one or more of the questions asked it was the case that the agent would ask a clarifying question or engage the team leader in a conversational process through which he or she could narrow down the possible answers to the question. For example, in one quiz, Ginna, an agent with nearly six years experience in the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre, spent about thirty seconds looking up information in the policy database and then pointed to a paragraph in a document she found, asking Beverley, the team lead, "should I just read that?" Beverley replied, "what part of that would you read?"

Ginna, later confirming her estimation that Beverley's reply indicated she was on the right track, described how she would read 'this part' (gesturing to the screen) if the question was asked with a particular context and 'that part' (gesturing to the screen again) if the question was asked by a caller in a different context – thus demonstrating her contextual knowledge of the rule in the policy database, and implying that the question as it was asked by Beverley was effectively not answerable without knowledge of an authentic caller's context. Beverley pressed for an answer and Ginna told "but that's stupid. Nobody [that is, no *real customer*] would ever ask it that way! You gotta know the customer's situation!" Beverley's reply was simply 'okay' and she marked something down on the quiz paper.

After the quiz, I asked Beverley if she had scored Ginna's contextual non-answer to the question as correct or incorrect. Beverley emitted a sigh and a laugh at the same time, saying:

> We try to write those questions so they can be answered by just reading something out of the [policy database]. But these guys [the agents] have seen a lot of times when the answer is 'it depends' when the database isn't clear enough. They're right when they try to force us to give them a context, but we're not supposed to do that. Her answers were okay in both cases, so I scored her correct on that.

That is, similar to what occurs when auditing messages above, in this situation the team leader effectively alters what the organisation 'sees' in the form of inscribed ratings of quality by deploying her personal and experience-based knowledge *as an agent*, in addition to the official company Knowledge. In so doing, the team leader accommodates the local and contextual knowledge of the agent, or perhaps suspends any evaluation at all if it is deemed to be somehow hazardous to the agent's subjective status in the call centre.

This sort of adaptation is not simply dismissed, however. In most cases the team leader indicates the agent will be told if the contextualised answer is

appropriate or not, and reminded of his or her responsibility for following policy 'to the letter' in the future. All of this occurs in a region unapprehended by the normal gaze, disciplined and governed by policies, rules and technology. It thus documents how team leaders locate, 'open' and use 'free spaces' that permit them to exercise authority in excess of the Knowledge and programmatic power relations that exist in the call centre (Armstrong 1994; Bougen 1994; de Certeau 1985; Goffman 1961). In so doing, the team leader's normally muffled voice and knowledge is exercised covertly so as to alter the functioning and output of the organisation's apparatus without destroying the apparatus. At the same time, however, the team leader maintains his or her responsibility to 'coach' the agent in the official policies of the organisation.

At *MedAdvise*, the primary measure of quality for the work of nurses rests on the evaluation of 'charts' – the database record of the telephone-mediated triage performed by a nurse. The clinically and legally-defensible nature of these charts is of critical importance to the organisation – non-validated or erroneous care advice can potentially bring forth a malpractice lawsuit against the hospital and call centre. During fieldwork, I observed that it is not uncommon for nurses to work on a chart for a prolonged period following the actual call, verifying the defensibility of care advice. This is especially the case when the nurse has to 'go outside' of the medical expert system built into the database, and use text materials (Figure 34) or Internet resources when searching for information on symptoms and care advice. In some cases nurses will call upon other nurses for advice when 'building a chart', and it is not uncommon for nurses who are new to the call centre to appeal to more experienced nurses when completing the data entry that produces the chart for that call. Experienced nurses also regularly supervise new nurses without solicitation. As

noted above, it is also not unusual for nurses to review each other's 'charts' and collectively edit them post hoc so as to produce a record that accommodates the nursing judgements made while at the same time maintaining clinical correctness.

While this is a process viewed as 'training' newcomers to the call centre, it is also a practice that provides nurses with the ability to ensure that the hospital always sees them as competent and safe practitioners of telephone triage nursing, and not as individuals who present any risk to the hospital of which they are a part – thus, of affecting the organisation's gaze over the call centre.

In these examples, the agents and team leaders play the role of modified compact judges (Foucault 1995, p. 304f), who, rather than deploying the Knowledge of an organisation in a 'faithful' manner when seeing what might be considered a violation of an organisational rule, deploy knowledge gained from experience that is in excess of that included in the official archive of organisational Knowledge. As noted above, this usually includes some component of 'corrective' action, such as coaching, that is consistent with the organisation's goals, but does not include inscribing the violation in official ways. This produces a record of the event that does not include the violation – or may not involve any inscription of the event at all. This affects the organisation's apparatus for producing Knowledge – thus affecting the production of Knowledge and what can be done with it in the organisation. In this way, agents have the ability to alter the way the organisation K/knows itself, and acts upon itself and its components to accomplish its goals. The team leaders and agents effect an inscription/appearance of themselves and the call centre that differs from the actual functioning of the call centre. Since it is the case that the subjects in the call centre are manufactured out of data resulting from various forms of surveillance,

when agents have the ability to alter the data, they have the ability to alter the production of subjectivity and themselves as subjects in the eyes of the organisation.

It is also the case that agents collect data from the environment of the call centre and use it to produce an understanding of context, and then deploy that understanding to affect how they are seen by those who are evaluating the quality of their work. As above, this arises from local knowledge of the apparatus, its goals, what it can see, what it cannot see and when this visibility 'matters'.

As noted above, quality evaluations are normally performed through covert surveillance known as 'barging' (tapping into the agent's phone and listening to or recording his or her calls). Barges are intended to be covert to the agents. However, as described by Taylor and Bain (2003), agents are frequently well aware when barges and recordings are being accomplished. In terms of this project, in the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre, team leaders maintain a schedule of who is assigned to evaluate which team of agents, and some team leaders keep this schedule posted on the wall of their cubicle. Just as management can easily see into a cubicle and at a glance know what that agent is doing, anyone can walk past a team leader's cubicle and inspect this schedule. Agents can also see when a team lead is walking to the 'recording station' – a place behind the supervisor's desk where tape recorders and phone taps are located. Similarly, if a team leader goes to an agent in order to provide coaching on a call just evaluated, it is a giveaway signal that the team to which that agent belongs is being monitored. While it is common knowledge that team leaders can give away what is supposed to be covert surveillance, some team leaders indicated their belief that it is more important to address any problems immediately, "while the call is still fresh in the agent's mind", than to wait until all ratings have been accomplished. Therefore, in the interest of what is 'better' for the

agent, team leaders accept that they are informing others to ‘be on their best behaviour’ for the next few days.

This documents how the call centre’s open architecture not only facilitates convenient line of sight surveillance by management, it also facilitates the agents’ ability to see and consequently know some details of what is going on around them and what it might mean for them. The panoptic potential of the call centre is not only ‘one way’, and the members of the call centre can and do use the bidirectional nature of this visibility as a means to collect information that they can then use. The outcome of this is predictable. When an agent discovers or suspects his or her team is currently being monitored, the word is spread quickly to ‘be on one’s best behaviour’, or to signal a context in which it is relevant to deploy other techniques that affect how one is ‘seen’ through the panoptic gaze (see also, Bain & Taylor 2000, pp. 12-13).

It is relevant to note that this signals a way that the panopticon remains ‘powerful’, insofar as agents will alter their behaviour when under its gaze (Foucault 1995; Foucault, Barou & Perrot 1980). However, it also signals how a panopticon is not ‘total’ and contains features that are actually gaps in its one-way gaze – gaps that provide its normal targets with data of its functioning and non-functioning (Bain & Taylor 2000; Knights & McCabe 1998). Finally, it demonstrates that agents freely choose tactics that will produce the most favourable outcomes for them – they are not *caused* to do this by the structure of the system, rather they freely choose to do so in fulfilling a demonstration of their knowledge of their responsibility in terms of the way their organisation sees them.

A similar thing happens when an agent suspects that he or she has just received a ‘mystery shopper’ call. The agent will usually inform neighbouring

agents, and the word eventually reaches the team leaders, supervisor and manager of the call centre. On one such occasion, the team leader issued a ‘hot message’ – a text-only message through a proprietary E-mail system – to all agents informing them of this discovery and imploring “[f]orget about call length today. Make sure you look up the answer to customer questions and read it back VERBATIM!”

Experienced agents indicated that it was not difficult to ‘spot’ a mystery shopper. These agents referred to a caller’s use of company jargon, or of asking context-less questions that were noticeable by their difference from the way ‘real customers talk’. This is another example of how the organisation’s panoptic gaze is fractured and made apparent to the experienced worker who has ‘cracked the code’ of the organisation’s gaze, and has learned how to use it to affect what the organisation ‘sees’ and thus Knows about workers and the call centre. As above, it remains the case that the organisation’s gaze still demonstrates its effect on workers in that they adopt more ‘proper’ behaviours when they know they are being observed. However, because the agents have some skill in identifying when they are being observed, the uncertainty and fear-induced compliance envisioned by Bentham (Foucault 1995, p. 201ff) is no longer a simple, direct ‘cause’ in effecting docile and compliant workers; rather they deploy their knowledge of the workplace in order to produce themselves as subjects in the eyes of the organisation.

It is not only agents who have discovered ways to manipulate the gaze of the organisation. At *BigTech*, teams of ‘second-level’ agents handle calls that regular agents are unable to solve, or that require more extensive repairs. These individuals are also called ‘case specialists’. In solving such problems, the case specialist often has to dispatch several parts to the customer’s location, along with a local technician contracted by the company to perform repairs that are considered too complex for

customers to perform themselves. The dispatch order is referred to as a ‘CSO’ (customer service order).

Dispatching parts and a technician is a very expensive process for the company, and if the machine’s warranty is still in force, the company collects no compensation from the customer for this service. The company therefore puts pressure on agents and case specialists to spend more time on the phones troubleshooting and attempting to solve the problem remotely, and if parts and a technician must be dispatched, to keep the parts order to a minimum and the tasks the technician must perform as simple as possible so the company ships less material, the job is faster, and thus less payment is due to the technician. However, when a CSO is required, the case specialist often dispatches more parts than he or she thinks might be absolutely necessary so that the technician has more liberty to assess the problem on site and replace additional parts if deemed necessary – all in the interest of ensuring that the technician can fix the machine on his or her first visit; that is, without having to order additional parts and schedule another service call. The result is an increase in the parts ordered and job complexity per CSO, but with an interest in ensuring the customer’s problem is solved as economically as possible.

In order to impose a disciplinary force on case specialists to reduce parts orders and job complexity for technicians, *BigTech* began measuring the ‘quality’ of the case specialist’s work by imposing a new metric: the ratio of parts ordered per CSO. The assumption is that if there are relatively few parts ordered per CSO, the cost to the company will decrease – this parts per CSO metric is thus used as a means to evaluate the effectiveness of the case specialist. A case specialist with a low ratio of parts per CSO is considered to be a better agent than is one with a high ratio.

However, in a casual conversation, Sal and Juan, case specialists with about two years each in that position tell:

S: We know that if you try too hard to keep your parts order down [to a low number of parts] the technician might not have enough to actually solve the problem.

J: Yeah, and then you end up with the technician or the customer calling again and telling you that they need more parts or the machine still isn't working. You end up spending more time and money troubleshooting the thing all over again and sending more parts.

S: And when you do that, you're supposed to put the second dispatch of parts into the same CSO – so even though you tried to keep the parts order down the first time, if you guess wrong you end up shooting yourself in the foot and having to send more stuff. Overall you end up with a really high ratio [of parts per CSO]!

J: Yeah. So we over-order parts the first time. Just to be safe. But that still doesn't look good. So what some supervisors have been doing is to have their case specialists start a new CSO every time they have to dispatch parts, even if it's for the same customer and the same problem.

Sal and Juan went on to describe that by doing this the supervisors have found a way to fool the examination system and to ensure the production of a low ratio of parts per CSO for their case specialists. In other words, by manipulating the way data is inscribed into the database (multiple CSOs rather than only one CSO) a supervisor can manufacture the appearance of case specialists who manage to maintain a low parts per CSO ratio.[214] It also demonstrates how the workers' knowledge of the system was deployed in creative ways to ensure that what they

[214] This issue was actually a topic of hot debate in the call centre. Regardless of whether an agent wants to follow the official rules and document all parts orders for a given case on the same CSO or not, this situation demonstrates how workers – both agents and supervisors – orient to the way organisations observe, inscribe and examine as a principal feature of their subjectivity as agents in the call centre.

considered to be contradictory goals could be met – ensuring quick and thus economical repairs of customer equipment, rather than maintaining the ‘purity’ of what they considered to be a foolish measure of parts per CSO.

In all of the practices above, individuals in the call centres find spaces in which they can deploy knowledge and tactics affected but not dominated by the disciplinary and managerial forces that comprise the official structure of the call centre, albeit while still maintaining their responsibilities to the organisation and using unofficial knowledge in fulfilling those responsibilities. Acting within these gaps allows workers in the call centre to affect how they are ‘seen’ by the surveillance apparatuses and inscribed into official organisational forms without, it would appear, the details of their adjustments being seen by those same apparatuses (Bain & Taylor 2000; de Certeau 1985; Knights & McCabe 1998; Sturdy & Fineman 2001). Altogether, these examples of agents’ and managements’ actions indicate, contrary to a simple-minded assumption of ‘total management control’ and ‘panopticism’, that the power of the organisation and its technologies are not total, that employees are not ‘dopes’ who are simply controlled by power from above. Rather, employees know and use details of the organisation’s techniques to accomplish both the organisation’s and their own ends, all the while producing records that do not draw the ire of the organisation to their adjustments.

All of the examples above demonstrate how workers have come to be able to influence their appearance in a TMTL organisation – effectively ‘morphing’ in ways that produce an appearance for the organisation (Haraway 2004b). This puts the organisation into a ‘shadowboxing match with data’ produced by the agents; because the organisation manages its components based on the data captured and used in its various forms of surveillance, inscription and evaluation, when the workers alter the

contents of such data, they effectively put the organisation into a mode where it manages what it *sees in the data* and not what is actually occurring on the ground in the call centre. That said, it is important to note that there is no conspiracy in which workers have produced an organised front to make these appearances. Instead, these practices are not organised and are rather individual – conducted at the discretion of individuals in particular contexts. It is also the case that workers do not always seem to be aware of the 'doings of these doings' in the sense described here. This is consistent with Foucault's observations:

> People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does. (Foucault, cited in Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c, p. 187)

Exposing this is also consistent with appeals by Smith and Haraway to make the individuals within an organisation aware of the ways the organisation's Knowledge does not *speak for them* but rather *produces* them as individuals. When individuals are made aware of this production, they are then equipped with some of the tools that enable them to begin to speak for themselves, to give voice to their marginalised knowledge in the discourse of an organisation or field of study (Haraway 1990, 1991a, 2004b, 2004c; Smith, D. 1987b, 1990b).

b. Affecting How One is Heard

As noted above, the majority of covert surveillance performed in the call centre is accomplished through the telephone and/or computer systems that make up so much of its structure. When evaluating the quality of agent work, surveillance is almost always conducted by barging (phone taps) into the agent's phone. While side-by-side evaluations are stated to be an option for each of the call centres, they are not

often conducted. Through the nearly 2000 hours of observation-oriented fieldwork involved in this study, I observed only eight instances of side-by-side evaluations – five at *MedAdvise* (and only for new or novice nurses), two at *MHealth* and one at *DeliveryWorldwide*.[215]

Based on their knowledge of the fact that they are usually 'observed' only through phone taps, agents have learned tactics that permit them to influence how they are heard through the various technology-enabled surveillance devices. The fact that agents know they are observed only in particular ways informs the development and deployment of these practices. Through the activation of these practices, agents are thus able to influence how they are heard by evaluators and by customers, and thus how they may be inscribed into the evaluation rubrics and how they are subjectified in examination practices.

For example, at *DeliveryWorldwide*, the quality evaluation form includes a space where the evaluator is to indicate if the agent used the customer's name in the course of a call ('A' in Figure 68). According to the rules for conducting a quality evaluation, failing to use the customer's name will result in the call being scored 'fair' (three on a four-point ordinal scale, with four being the lowest possible score).[216] On more than one occasion I heard agents, after asking for the customer's name and not understanding the reply, mumble something that *sounded like* that

[215] Nonetheless, the examples provided above, and in the first chapter of Part 2 of this report, document how the proximity of agents' cubicles and the porous sonic environment of call centres permits some overhearing and line-of-sight surveillance to occur, such that other agents or supervisors can overhear what an agent is saying to a caller, produce an evaluation of how the agent is managing the 'customer facing' portion of work involved in the call centre and provide feedback, coaching or on-the-job training.

[216] 'Fair' will result also if the agent is not deemed 'friendly', if he or she does not voice the scripted opening, if the agent provides inaccurate policy information, doesn't offer additional assistance before ending the call or doesn't voice the closing script. That is, not satisfactorily accomplishing any of the six items at 'A' in Figure 68, will reduce the overall score of the call to 'fair', regardless of other factors.

reply. Agents confirmed that this was, in fact, a tactic for making it appear to anyone who might be listening, that the customer's name was used.

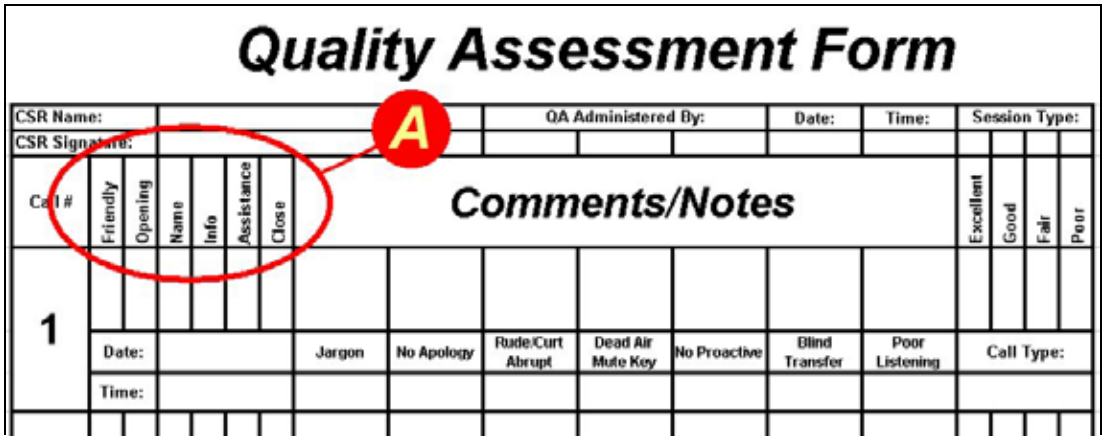

Figure 68. Items a *DeliveryWorldwide* Agent Must Do in Each Call

Regarding this mumbling technique, Sam, an agent with about four years of experience at the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre and nearly eight years of experience at another large call centre, said:

> [Y]eah. I do that all the time. It's a stupid rule [to have to use the customer's name] – especially since so many people use cell phones these days. They call from their car and with all the noise sometimes you can't hear what they're saying and when [team leaders] record our calls the recordings are lousy anyway, so they can't tell.[217]

It is also the case that the call centres participating in this project proscribed eating and drinking when agents were working customer calls. Agents were adept at using a very common feature of the phone system to permit them to breach this rule – the mute button. The mute button is a feature of the phone system that permits the

[217] Team leaders confirmed that they knew this tactic, and just let it pass: "...after all, we were agents once ourselves!" told one team lead. Team leaders also confirmed that they would pass the use of *sir* or *ma'am* in a call, if the caller spoke with an accent they thought difficult to understand.

It is also apparent that this practice orients to the rules delineating quality, and the relation of quality scores to an agent's evaluation. It therefore also demonstrates how agents behave such that they both demonstrate a submission to power immanent in these relations and resist it at the same time (Goffman 1961, p. 315ff).

agent to temporarily disable the microphone on his or her headset so that the customer, or anyone listening to the call, could not hear what he or she was saying or doing.[218] Agents adept at fingering the mute button could thus eat and drink freely while working on a call.

In addition to obscuring the sounds of eating and drinking, the mute button can also be used to obscure any other sounds from the customer's (and listener's) attention. Agents could carry on conversations with other persons nearby through tactical use of the mute button. At times this was considered allowable, such as when a nurse at *MedAdvise* 'tossed' a question or consulted with a peer, or an agent at *BigTech* consulted with a peer or got up to test a procedure on a machine out of range of his or her headset cord. Even at *MedAdvise* and *BigTech*, however, eating and drinking and social conversations were officially disallowed when the agent was logged in and working with callers. However, regardless of the official rules, all of these tactics were commonly performed by agents in all of the call centres participating in this project.[219]

It was also not uncommon for agents to mute their headset microphone in order to conceal epithets or sarcastic remarks aimed at the caller. For example, it was not uncommon to hear agents insert remarks into their talk, and by tactical use of the mute button, allow the customer to hear only what the agent wanted them to hear. This technique was used when the current caller had said or done something that irritated an already frustrated agent, or when the current caller was appealing to conditions the agent thought to be somehow remarkable or worth a sarcastic remark.

[218] It is, however, officially permissible and desirable for agents to use the mute button to obscure coughing, sneezing and the like.

[219] An agent at *MHealth* expressed annoyance at the fact that fingering the mute button on his phone would produce an audible 'click' on the line – something he said often prompted the caller to ask, sometimes in an anxious voice, if the line had been disconnected. This agent told, "…it makes it harder to use the mute button to do things like take a sip of coffee… I wish [the company would] get better phones and headsets so we can have more freedom!"

Sometimes they were performed 'for the benefit of' the agent's neighbours in order to interject the absurdity of the customer's situation or request into the sometimes crushingly boring context of the call centre, thus providing a momentary relief from that boredom. The following represent several such uses of the mute button <text contained in chevron brackets was voiced while the mute button was turned on>.[220]

1. Agent: You'd like to schedule a pickup for a package? <You fucking asshole>

2. Agent: Yes, Mr. Howard, I'll be glad to help you with that <If you'd just get a damned cellphone that works>

3. Agent: No sir. Delivery to that location can't be guaranteed overnight.
   Customer: But Brown express can guarantee it.
   Agent: <Then send it on Brown express you asshole!>

4. Agent: You've got a 386 computer and you want to install a new BigTech laser printer? <Then why don't you get a new computer you cheapskate!>

5. Agent: You're getting 'out of memory' errors when you try to print to your BigTech printer? <Then put more memory in your fuckin' computer!>

6. Nurse: Based on those symptoms you have syphilis <That's what you get for buying a hooker, you idiot> and you should see a physician within twenty-four hours.

[220] All of these examples are consistent with Goffman's characterisation of life in 'total institutions', even though call centres cannot be safely considered under this same categorisation:

> On the surface, life here appears to run almost placidly, but one needs to go only a very little beneath the surface to find the whirlpools and eddies of anger and frustration. The muttering of discontent and rebellion goes on constantly: the *sotto voce* sneer... (Hassler, 1954, cited in Goffman 1961, p. 315).

7. Agent: I need your insurance ID number, so I can complete the processing to authorise your visits to a counsellor.

Caller: I don't give personal ID to *nobody*. I don't trust you stinkin' deep pockets insurance companies!

Agent: <And you probably wear a tin foil hat too>

At *BigTech*, one of the agents who exhibited this tactical use of the mute button to hide talking back to customers did it with such facility that even those agents in neighbouring cubicles said they were unable to tell from the tone and tempo of his voice if he was really muting his comments or not. One of his neighbours remarked that the tempo of his voice never changed at all when he was doing this. The agent doing this drew substantial pleasure from being able to perform these tricks on both the customer *and* his fellow agents.

Hidden comments made during the course of calls were sometimes the source of humour for days following the incident. It was occasional sport for agents at *DeliveryWorldwide* to compete with one another for the most humorous epithets. Agents within earshot of those in such a competition would frequently have to mute their phones to conceal their laughter from customers!

In one such episode, an agent at *DeliveryWorldwide* muted his phone to hide his raucous laughter from the customer. While toggling the mute button to work the call, still fighting to hide his laughter, he told anyone who would listen of this caller from the state of West Virginia[221] who was asking about the expected delivery time of a package. The customer accounted for this question by saying that his wife was mowing the lawn with a riding mower and had accidentally run over their dog, then after leaping off the mower in horror, the mower ran over her own foot – killing the

[221] West Virginia is a rural state situated in the Appalachian mountain range in the Eastern United States. It is the fabled home of unsophisticated, backwater hillbillies. This *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre takes calls from residents of that state, and jokes about West Virginians are not uncommon.

dog and mangling her foot. The customer wanted to know about the package so he could time both taking his wife to the hospital and burying the dog, while still meeting the delivery to sign for the package. For weeks following this episode, laughter could be elicited by referring to 'Fluffy the dog' as 'Turfbuilder'.[222]

Using the mute button to hide one's critical, sarcastic or satiric commentary on and to customers is similar to ritual forms of insubordination in that they cannot be expected to produce official changes in one's environment (Goffman 1961, p. 315ff). However, they do provide agents with a respite from the mundane routine of the work – especially in a call centre like *DeliveryWorldwide* where the work is highly scripted. They also allow the agents to exert a force, that while invisible to its targets, permits agents to "express some detachment from the place officially accorded them" (Goffman 1961, p. 315).

While such tactics were audible in the porous sonic environment of the call centre, a team leader at *DeliveryWorldwide* told me that when performing a quality rating on an agent, he only paid attention to what was hearable through the barge – even if he could hear the agent saying things from across the call centre he would not include it in his rating of the agent. He confided that he thought most of the muted commentary was both funny and had a beneficial effect on morale in the call centre, and that acting to stifle it would have an undesirable impact on the workers.

Other forms of affecting how one is heard through the phone system have broader effect, however. Agents can manipulate their voice so as to be 'hearably' in compliance with regulations imposed by the company. It is also the case that those who typically evaluate the quality of calls act in complicity with this tactic, deepening its disguise and rendering it a tactic that, while not consistent with the

[222] 'Turfbuilder' is the product name of an over-the-counter lawn fertiliser in the United States.

letter of the organisation's expectations, produces 'spaces' in which the agent can both resist the organisation and contribute to one's own subjectivity without drawing the ire of the organisation (Bain & Taylor 2000; de Certeau 1985; Knights & McCabe 1998; Sturdy & Fineman 2001). As demonstrated, these spaces are produced by features of the technology-mediation system that characterises work in call centres, and workers' knowledge of those features. Workers use their knowledge of these features and the 'spaces left free' when they develop and deploy tactics to affect how they are heard, and thus evaluated, by the organisation. In so doing they demonstrate an ability to manipulate the observation, inscription, examination and subjectivity production apparatus that affects the production of power, subjectivity and subjects in TMTL. At the same time, however, these tactics also demonstrate how agents maintain the relations that produce power and Knowledge, thus their official subjectivity in the organisation. The point here is that, even in resistance and secondary adjustment, workers are always demonstrating their responsibility to know themselves and their relation to the organisation and its Knowledge.

c. Affecting How One is Seen & Inscribed by the ACD

As noted above, a substantial amount of technology in the call centre is dedicated to the continuous collection of data on the work of agents, principally by the ACD and computer and telephone systems attached to it. While the ACD's gaze is continuous and knowledge of this gaze has a disciplinary effect on agents' practices in the call centre, it is not the case that the ACD can 'see' everything, and even what it does 'see' is sometimes inscribed as something other than what it 'is'. Over time, through day-to-day experience, tinkering with the system and sometimes

through advice from experienced agents, agents come to learn of gaps in the gaze of the ACD, how it inscribes what it does 'see', and how it can be made to 'see' things other than they actually are. That is, the agent gradually learns of and can produce 'spaces' in which he or she can both be seen as a productive agent of the company, and tinker with the relations involved in the disciplinary power immanent in the call centre, thus affecting one's own subjectivity.

For example, at *DeliveryWorldwide*, as at all call centres, scripts and databases necessitated the agent requesting and typing the caller's name into a field in the database. As noted above, agents do not always hear the caller's name clearly, and in order to avoid being penalised for 'poor listening' have developed a practice of not asking for the name again, and instead mumbling something that 'sounds like' the caller's name so as to satisfy the evaluation requirement to use the customer's name. In such a situation the agent is still somewhat stuck, because the database requires that he or she type the caller's name into the database, along with other details, before the database will allow the agent to advance to the next screen and its associated scripting and data entry requirements. However, agents have learned that they can type virtually anything into the field meant for the caller's name and still be able to advance to the next screen. This permits the agent to both avoid the penalty associated with having to ask for the caller's name again *and* still move past a required field in the database.[223]

[223] At *BigTech*, the company makes use of the agent's collection and entry of names, addresses and the like for direct mail marketing. At *BigTech*, there is no penalty for verifying customer contact information and in fact verifying it is encouraged. This is because erroneous address information may result in wasted mailings. It was not uncommon, however, for there to be several different versions of the same customer's contact information in the database used by agents. This was because there may be several persons who call from the same business, or because of variations in how the agent typed an address (for example, using the abbreviation 'ST', spelling out 'Street', etc.). The result is multiple mailings to the same people at the same addresses – waste no matter what. Nobody at *DeliveryWorldwide* could confirm that names and addresses collected by agents were used for such purposes.

Similarly, at *BigTech*, agents are expected to document the 'issue path' of the problem with the customer's *BigTech* equipment. The 'issue path' is a hierarchically-defined problem stratified by successively smaller electrical or mechanical subsystems and known problems with each subsystem in the equipment. These issue paths are assembled by *BigTech* engineers responsible for designing and modifying the equipment. The agent specifies the issue path by clicking on a series of 'cascading menus' (Figure 38). Each menu contains a list of electrical or mechanical subsystems in the equipment. Clicking on any item in one of the menus will produce another menu 'cascading' from the previous menu. The agent specifies subsystems, sub-subsystems, etc. until the 'path' (in terms of the machine's systems and subsystems) of the 'issue' (problem) is specified.

It is not unusual, however, for a problem to appear that the agent believes is not adequately described in the issue paths provided.[224] In such a case the agent is able to select a generic 'path', and then type a description of the problem that might characterise it to the engineers who were supposed to collect statistics on the frequency of known problems and troubleshoot new problems. However, when a problem not already listed in the menus was encountered, it was not uncommon to see agents clicking menus and then telling me in confidence that they were "just picking anything that looks good" (in order to complete the task and move on to the next call). In so doing, they told, they were able to avoid the extra work it would take to try and describe the issue. One agent said:

[224] During fieldwork, the organisation was also experimenting with an agent-initiated process of identifying and providing feedback on problems to engineers so they could be added to the menus. The organisation prohibited me from collecting documents on this process, and the agents working on its development were not permitted to discuss it with me – or their fellow agents. I never learned of its official implementation.

> [The engineers] don't read that stuff anyway. If they did, then there'd be fifty-five menus on the damned thing. [At one time] I tried to be conscientious about it, but then [my QSS and my supervisor] started getting on me about it. They told me I had to choose from the items already listed – they and the engineers didn't want to know about anything new, I guess. So I don't care any more either. I just pick something that looks good and move on.

This agent learned to just click anything in the issue path menus 'that looked good' and move on. The result was the appearance that most issues were already documented, and better stats for the agent (that is, faster call times).[225] In both cases the organisation gets what, based on the words and actions of management, it appears to want – reification of already-defined issue paths and good stats from agents – and the agent gets less work. The agent adopts practices through which he or she can be seen to be doing one's job, while at the same time just going through motions that produce a purified appearance of what is 'going on' with customers. Since the organisation appears to be interested in only these purified appearances, agents' complicity is both consistent with the maintenance of appearances, while at the same time also producing more free time.

It is also the case that this practice demonstrates the agent's orientation to the relation of forces producing disciplinary power. So, one can ask, 'where is the adjustment or resistance?' By just 'clicking anything that looks good', rather than following the training, job aids or coaching provided by the company, the agent shows that he or she can "...obtain permitted satisfaction by forbidden means..." (Goffman 1961, p. 54). It just so happens that the verbal directions from QSSs and supervisors to choose only from among the included paths can also be seen as resistance to what the agent above thinks the organisation should 'actually want' – that is, conscientiously produced accounts of problems that take advantage of the

[225] Subsequent to this, the organisation launched an effort to produce and deliver training to agents that would enable them to associate errors with the existing issue paths. In this way the organisation attempts to implicate agents into reifying its own already-decided-upon 'issues'/problems and to stifle agents' attempts to 'help the company' identify unique issues/problems with their equipment. More disciplinary tactics imbricated with other disciplinary technologies.

experienced knowledge of front-line agents. This is a curious reversal of one facet of emotional labour – the idea that workers, and women in particular, should be guided by an altruistic concern for others (Hochschild 1985). In this situation, and like one noted above in Chapter 2 of Part 2 of this report, the worker is expected to serve the organisation and not, in the first place, serve the customer's wants and needs.

Other practices by agents are more directly connected with producing better stats for the agent committing them. For example, at *DeliveryWorldwide*, on a day when I was observing and talking with Cassie, an agent with about five years of experience and well known for her ability to produce very high 'productivity' ratings, I observed how she never utilised the 'AUX'[226] mode of the ACD to give her time to complete data processing following calls. Instead, she would hang up from a call and allow the ACD to send her another call while she was completing data processing from the previous call. However, instead of voicing the opening script as soon as a call connected to her phone, she would stay quiet and complete data processing. Only after completing data processing would she begin talking to the already-connected customer.

She described how this allowed her to produce a very high '% Available' ratio and other, more desirable, effects:

> I always get more than we're supposed to [that is, a higher '% Available' ratio]. It doesn't get me any more money or anything but it keeps [the supervisor] off my back. In fact, she thinks I'm the best one here! I don't know if she knows how I do it – and she might be upset if she did – but I don't care. It keeps her off my back and that's all I care about.

At *BigTech*, maintaining a particular '% Available' was also required of agents. Taz and Rae, one of Taz's neighbours, had developed a practice that took advantage of the fact that they had access to the ACD queue, and its display of who

[226] Also called 'unavailable', 'aftercall' and 'DND'/do not disturb (refer to Table 1).

was logged in and how long they had been waiting for a call. Because the ACD is configured to send the next incoming call to the agent who has been waiting the longest, Taz and Rae were able to know if they were 'next in line' to receive a call or not, and to adjust their activities accordingly.

In particular, if, after completing a call and inspecting the ACD queue, they found that there were several agents 'ahead of them' in the queue, they would not log into AUX mode while performing data processing to document the work conducted on the just-completed call. In doing so, they said, they were able to maximise their '% Available' while conserving their AUX allocation for 'better use'. Taz characterised that 'better use':

> Normally, agents use AUX when they have to go to the bathroom, when you're logging a call or things like that. Since our calls last so long there's usually a lot of [data entry] we have to do and with all the coffee we drink you can really eat up your AUX time using it that way! If we keep an eye on the queue we can tell if we have to use AUX or not, whenever we've gotta be doing that stuff. Most of the time I end up with lots [of AUX time] left over [at] 3:15 – 15 minutes before I'm supposed to go home – and I can log into AUX for the last 15 minutes to guarantee I won't get a call and I can go home on time and pick up my kids. And just to make sure nobody can claim I left early, I log in and log out really fast, right at 3:30.

Taz told that not all agents at *BigTech* have access to the ACD queue as he does. He told how other agents in the call centre would occasionally call and ask for information on their likelihood of receiving a call, so they could also make tactical use of AUX time.

Rae told that using this tactic, he could actually show how he was logged in for greater than 100% of the expected time, though because doing so wouldn't 'get me anything' (that is, any *financial* reward) he made sure he was always meeting the expected proportion of available to AUX time – a practice similar to 'goldbricking', as described by Burawoy (1979, p. 57). As he told me this, he waved at a set of 'Performance Excellence' certificates pinned to his cubicle walls, awards based on his superior record of available time! At any rate, both Rae and Taz demonstrated

how they could make use of somewhat ‘forbidden’ knowledge in adjusting their practices so they could always both meet the organisation’s statistical goals and keep themselves safe from undesired overtime work. Making use of this knowledge, they could gain the satisfaction of going home on time so they could attend to their parental roles – reflecting an orientation to their responsibility to maintain a relation to K/knowledge of themselves as both workers and as parents, thus of maintaining and producing multiple subjectivities. At the same time, this demonstrates that, even in secondary adjustment or resistance, the subject remains in a relation of forces that manifest power, within which one’s subjectivity is produced. Here, while in a secondary adjustment practice, Taz and Rae orient to relations that produce power and subjectify them as parents with responsibilities to fulfil.

At *BigTech* and *DeliveryWorldwide,* as described above, it was also well-known that one could log one’s phone into an ‘empty mode’ in the ACD, and in so doing appear to be logged in and ready to take calls, while never actually receiving any calls. Rhia, a supervisor at *BigTech*, admitted that most of the time it was impossible to determine if an agent was using an ACD mode called ‘consult mode’ that makes it appear to the ACD that the agent is working a call when in fact, he or she is not. “The only way to tell is to catch them in the act, and they can see you coming so that’s even unlikely.” As noted above a similar tactic at *DeliveryWorldwide* can be detected by management. However, as other agents at *DeliveryWorldwide* told, if the agent uses this tactic only occasionally and does not loiter in the empty ACD mode for too long, it is unlikely that one will be caught.

This and the other examples noted above indicate how unauthorised knowledge of the organisation and its tools, strategies and tactics affords agents with the ability to create and assert agonistic force within those tools, strategies and

tactics. The outcome is an alteration of the organisation's gaze over workers, and thus an alteration of inscription, examination and subjectification apparatuses, and thus of the organisation's Knowledge and power to subjectify the workers.

While agents have such abilities, it is not that the organisation is totally unaware of them. In fact, during fieldwork, one agent at *DeliveryWorldwide* was caught in the above-described trick several times. After several warnings and suspensions (following the 'progressive discipline' clause in the Union contract) she was terminated without contest from the Union. The Union steward at this *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre told me that the agent:

> ...was really stupid! She knew she'd been caught before and that [the supervisor] was keeping her in view. You can get away with it sometimes, but she was flaunting it. We [the Union] can't support her anymore. She's outta here.

That is, agents are able to escape from the gaze of the ACD for brief periods and remain safely invisible in this practice. Like all of the practices described here, in addition to being a form of resistance, this is a technology of the self – a reflection of self-imposed discipline in the use of knowledge and abilities that in this case serves to put one's self, however slightly and temporarily, in 'spaces left free' of the organisation's *dispositif* (de Certeau 1985; Foucault 1990a, p. 41). Regardless, however, the practice is enabled by unauthorised or special knowledge of features of the *dispositif* itself. Like all resistance practices, it is shaped by and utilises elements of the *dispositif* – resources from the 'inside' – while permitting the production of a subject who desires not to be totally 'inside', a subject who desires to influence one's own subjectivity while at the same time remaining within the organisation (Foucault 1990a, p. 95ff; Goffman 1961; Kendall & Wickham 1999, p. 52ff).

Successful activation of this technology of the self requires some judgement and restraint on the part of the worker. Occasional 'use' of this tactic is acceptable but frequent use increases the chances one will be caught by the surveillance tools used by management. This demonstrates how such practices do not actually alter the apparatus itself to include the marginalised or illegitimate knowledge of workers. Rather these practices exist *within* the apparatus and as long as they are not caught and ended, act as a sort of parasite to *use* the apparatus in ways that serve its own ends while not producing obvious damage to its host. This falls short of the vision of Townley (1994), who suggests that labour and management can meet face-to-face to modify the form and content of the apparatuses in business such that they include the values of both labour and management.

While the above reflects an intentional and forethought decision on the part of an agent, at both *DeliveryWorldwide* and *BigTech* agents took advantage of immediate circumstances in order to give themselves a break from the rigours of work while producing the appearance, to the ACD, that one is working. For example, at *DeliveryWorldwide*, it was not unusual for an agent to forward a caller to a team leader or management in particular circumstances – for example, if the caller requests to speak to one's supervisor, or if the knowledge or skill required to complete the call is greater than that currently possessed by an agent. At *BigTech*, it was not uncommon for a customer to select the wrong option from the IVR and be forwarded to a team that does not support the customer's equipment. In that case, the *BigTech* agent would forward the call to the proper team.

Most of the time the forwarding agent would hang up after completing the process and move on to the next call. However, I also observed times when agents would mute their phones and not disconnect from the forwarded call. Agents told me

this allowed them to both (a) appear to the ACD to be still working on a call and (b) listen to the conversation between the customer and the agent to whom the call was forwarded. If caught in this act the agent was quick to assert that he or she was trying to learn from the other agent's work with the customer. However, agents also admitted to me that they were making use of the opportunity to take a break from the monotony of working calls.[227]

Whether taking a break, trying to learn something or for other reasons, this practice ensures the agent will be seen by the ACD to be working – and *not* to be seen as taking a break, learning or anything else, even by the computer tools used by the supervisor at *DeliveryWorldwide* to troll for illicit use of the phone system (as noted in the previous chapter). In so doing the agent is, as above, altering the relations that make up disciplinary power in the call centre and, in effect, acting in a parasitic manner – using 'spaces left free' in the organisation's apparatus to hide from that apparatus and produce the appearance that everything is going as expected while accomplishing other ends.

Another tactic that makes use of immediate circumstances is known as 'flashing'. In the practice of 'flashing' the agent logs out of the ACD and then quickly logs back in. Logging in and out of the ACD is accomplished by pressing several buttons in rapid sequence – an operation that would normally only occur at the beginning and end of an agent's shift.

'Flashing' has the effect of pushing the agent to the end of the queue. Everyone already logged into the ACD will receive a call before the person who has 'flashed' – producing a longer delay before receiving a call. This practice was

[227] Other accounts were given also. In one case, after transferring a verbally abusive customer to his team leader, Sam, a *DeliveryWorldwide* agent, while listening to the conversation between the customer and his team lead, said, "...I wanna see if (the customer) tries to get away with that with Hal (his team leader). I wanna hear Hal shut 'er down, the *bitch*!" – thus blending with some of the other tactics described above.

observed most commonly at *BigTech* and rarely if at all at the other call centres participating in this study. This was perhaps because the call volume at *DeliveryWorldwide*, *MedAdvise* and *MHealth* is high enough that flashing the ACD would result in only a few seconds or minutes before the next incoming call. However, because the incoming call volume at *BigTech* was relatively low and call lengths were much longer than at the other call centres, flashing the ACD could result in a rest of a quarter-hour or longer.

It is interesting to note that this practice was most common with agents who had no explicit knowledge of their position in the queue, and who could only estimate the likelihood of receiving a call based on how long they thought they had sat idle – the longer the perceived idle period, the more likely agents thought it was they would soon receive a call. Taz and Rae, having the ability to see their position in the queue, told that they never 'flashed' – principally because they were able to deploy other tactics based on their knowledge of their position in the queue, as noted above.

As Rhia noted above, the only way agents could be caught 'flashing' was by seeing them commit the act. However, rather than line-of-sight surveillance, the ACD permitted a supervisor to catch an agent in the act. Doing so, however, was not an automated process. Instead the supervisor had to sit and watch the ACD screen, waiting for an agent's record on the screen to quickly change from 'ACD' mode ('A' in Figure 69) to 'NOT READY' ('B' in Figure 69) and back.

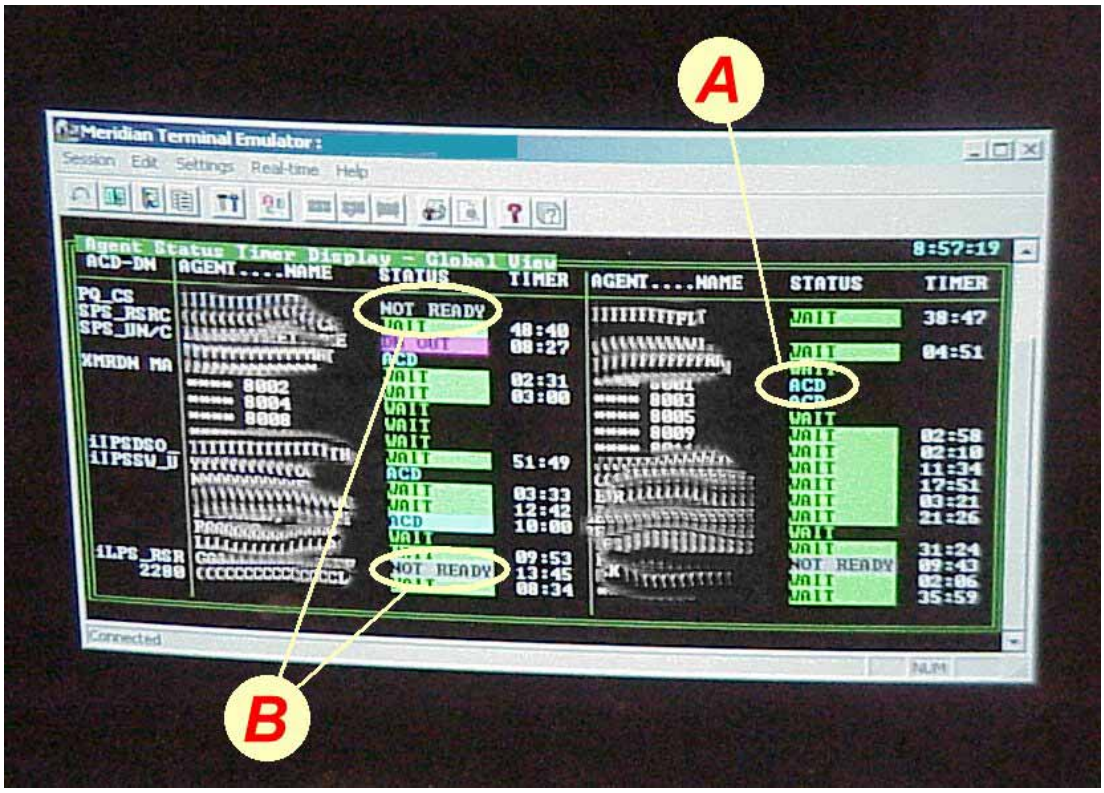

Figure 69. Watching the *BigTech* ACD for ‘Flashers’

Sitting and watching the ACD was not something the supervisor – or anyone else in the call centre – often had the luxury to do. Agents were aware that supervisors were as busy as they were, and could take advantage of this knowledge to feel relatively safe in practicing ‘flashing’. It was only when there was reason to suspect that an agent was regularly ‘flashing’ that such surveillance of the ACD would be done by a QSS or supervisor. ‘Reason’ was provided when the supervisor noticed that the quantity of calls an agent was working was much below that of his or her team mates, if another agent provided such information, or if the supervisor or QSS saw an agent doing it, either by happenstance when inspecting the ACD display or when walking past the agent’s cubicle.

On one day of fieldwork at *BigTech*, I observed one of the QSSs hunched down in his cubicle, watching the ACD display. I crouched next to him and

whispered, “what’cha doin?” He held his finger up to his lips and whispered back that he was ‘watching’ an agent in a nearby cubicle through the ACD, because he suspected that agent of ‘flashing’. He pointed at that agent’s line in the ACD display and said, “[w]atch this here. You can see he’s been waiting for a call for about 15 minutes. I’ll bet pretty soon you’ll see him log into NOT READY and back.”

Sure enough, as we watched, the agent’s display quickly switched to NOT READY and back to ACD. The QSS leaped out of his crouch and to the agent’s cubicle, pointing at him and yelling with a very serious look on his face, “I saw that! I saw you flash!”

The agent, surprised, as he told me later, not only by being caught but also by the dramatic display presented by the QSS, instinctively pulled back, then slowly emitted a big, Cheshire grin, nodding. The QSS cautioned him from doing this again, telling, “now that we’ve confirmed it, we might be watching anytime!” (In so doing, the QSS acted to invoke and even amplify the panoptic power immanent in the ACD and its gaze.)

I spoke later with the agent and he indicated that ‘flashing’ was not that unusual a tactic in the call centre. As noted by the Union steward at *DeliveryWorldwide* (above), he also told that one has to be cautious about using the tactic.

> [I]f you do it too often, you’ll eventually get caught. But, like everything else around here it’s not too big a deal unless they start to think you’re doing it all the time. [But] now that they’re watching me, they won’t be watching anyone else.

Perhaps more interestingly, however, he said:

> [B]ut y’know, it’s not like anyone is out there looking for this stuff.[228] They’ve [the

[228] Unless, apparently, one gets caught!

> supervisors and QSSs] got their own work to do and can't usually be bothered with this sort of stuff. *They've told us that!*

That is, the agent was telling me that cautious use of the tactic was all but normal practice for agents who are seeking a short, occasional, but unscheduled break, and that now that the QSSs will be focusing on his traces in the ACD, others will be relatively safe in their occasional use of this technique. More importantly, perhaps, agents engage in this activity with the knowledge that since the ACD does not capture this by itself, and supervisory personnel are usually too busy with their own work to spend their time looking for deviance, the occasional 'flash' is likely not to be caught. While the 'space' exists for 'flashing', knowledge that supervisors are unlikely to be trolling the ACD display for such violations of policy perhaps makes this 'space' all the more enticing for an agent looking for a brief respite from the repetition and boredom of work in the call centre.

As above, and as with other techniques for resisting or adjusting the apparatus and its powers in the call centre, agents use their knowledge of resources and relations between those resources to alter the power produced, such that agents clear spaces in which they can act in relative obscurity while all the time being within 'full view' of the panoptic gaze (de Certeau 1985; Foucault 1990a, p. 41). As noted above, however, even when acting in these 'spaces', agents are also orienting to the relations that produce their selves as subjects in the workplace, maintaining these relations even while escaping them, however temporarily.

Another practice similar to 'flashing', known as 'bouncing a call', was also observed at *BigTech*, and less frequently at the other call centres, perhaps for the same call frequency issue noted above. When 'bouncing a call', the agent quickly logs out and then back into the ACD *after a call has already started ringing on his or*

her phone. This will 'bounce' the call back to the ACD and to the next available agent in the queue.

I was observing and talking with Ozzie, an agent with about four years of experience at *BigTech*, during a Friday just prior to the American 4th of July holiday. Call volume was unusually low on this day. Nearing 4:00PM, a call rang in at a cubicle on an adjacent row. Shortly, another call rang at a cubicle several rows behind us. After a few seconds, another call rang in a cubicle next to Ozzie's. He interrupted our conversation about his garage band and said:

> Hear that? There've been almost no calls today and now it sounds like we've just gotten three in a span of a few seconds. Y'know what that is? [I shrugged my shoulders] That's only one call getting bounced around – you'll hear that on Friday's sometimes or when it's late in the day. Nobody wants to take a call and they're bouncing it when it rings on their phone.

As we listened to the call 'bounce' around the call centre he noted, "it'll eventually get back here", and sure enough, the call rang on his phone. He looked at me momentarily, smirking, then said "nah!" and connected to the call, voicing the opening script and beginning to work the call.[229] When I asked later about how often people get caught 'bouncing' a call he told me:

> [I do it] once in awhile – but not too often. If you do it only once in awhile you probably won't get caught, and usually when you're caught you'll get a verbal warning. If you do it too much you'll probably get caught more often – but it doesn't look good if you get caught a lot and [a disciplinary warning] gets put into writing.

A few days later, Ozzie stopped me as I walked through the call centre, waving me to his cubicle. He said that he'd been thinking about my questions over 'bouncing' and wanted to add something. He said:

[229] After completing work on the call, Ozzie looked up at the clock and noted "…that call was interesting… Sometimes working a call can actually make the time go faster, so bouncing it would have been a bad idea." Of course, the agent wouldn't know the actual contents of the call beforehand.

> [B]ut it's not like they're looking for this stuff. We're so understaffed here that everyone is pulling their hair out trying to get their own work done![230]

As above regarding the 'flashing' practice, agents engage in a little bit of a gamble when they bounce calls. However, in doing so it is not the ACD and its technologically-abstracted gaze over the worker that is to be considered – the ACD is essentially blind to these practices and experienced agents know it. Instead, it is the existence of relative safety based on the knowledge that everyone is already too busy doing their own jobs to be bothered with extracurricular surveillance of workers. Even with the panoptic effects readily apparent, the workers know the system and know that the 'chances are low' if one plays only occasionally. Even then, agents know that the risk is there and the more often one plays, the more likely it is that one will be caught – even in deviant behaviour, one demonstrates knowledge of and an orientation to 'truths' made possible in the organisation.

As with all of the practices described in this chapter so far, the arrangement and interrelationships of resources, duties, tasks, observation, inscription, examination and subjectification in the workplace shape how workers find, make and use 'spaces left free' – resistance and secondary adjustments arise in the same relations as do the stabilised and 'official' forms of power in the organisation (de Certeau 1985; Foucault 1990a, p. 41). These are all examples of agonistic tactics that both depend upon and feed upon the norms and forms of Knowledge and power in the workplace. However, as noted above they do not actually alter the workings of the apparatus, they only 'fool' it in ways that obscure their own presence – most of the time.

[230] This might seem odd given the low call volume typical of *BigTech*. In fact, supervisors, QSSs and agents themselves were frequently burdened with multiple projects that occupied them despite the low call volume.

d. Making Space for Oneself Within Disciplinary & Governmental Power

While all of the practices in the previous sections of this chapter are means agents can use to create and use 'spaces left free' for rest periods and to obscure their actions, the practices above are particular in that they are done in a manner that acts to avoid the commencement of work on a call. It is also the case that agents have developed practices that permit them to open up spaces *within* the course of working on a call after it has already begun. These practices bear similarity to what Burawoy calls 'chiseling' or 'fiddling' (Burawoy 1979, pp. 58-59). In particular, through specific and apparently widely known practices, the call centre agent can make one's self appear to the ACD (and thus to the official gaze of the organisation) to be logged in and working, while in fact, one is engaged in other activities, not all of them work-related. As with Burawoy, these activities are sometimes done with the complicity of other agents and supervisory staff.

During calls at *DeliveryWorldwide*, if agents encountered questions or problems they were currently unable to solve, they could interrupt a call in progress in order to call the 'Assist line' – an internal help desk staffed by team leaders. One day when I was observing and talking with Hal, a team leader on the evening shift, he received a call on the 'Assist' phone – a portable phone that permitted the team leader to roam the call centre to assist agents. The call was from Bruce, an experienced agent:

H: Assist. What can I help you with?[231]
B: Wha'chu you got for me'?
H: Nothing yet. What can I help you with?
B: Awww, I dunno. It looks like a nice day outside. What're we doin' here?
H: Yeah. It does. We're goin' to the lake this weekend. What can I help you with?
(talk continues)

[231] These statements are not verbatim. They are approximations based on my fieldnotes.

Bruce's comments persisted in this non-directed conversation for about a minute longer. By that time, Hal was very irritated and demanded that Bruce either ask a question or get back to his work. Bruce complied and asked for authorisation to provide his customer with a restricted service. Hal asked a few questions about the package being shipped and the customer, which Bruce answered promptly, provided the authorisation and the 'Assist' call ended. After emitting a sigh, Hal cupped his head in his hands and told:

> Bruce does that a lot. I think he does that to get away from the job for a minute. He's got a customer on the line but doesn't want to do the work right now – so it's not like he's *really* avoiding work or fooling the ACD [by calling an empty line or logging into an empty queue]. But he's *sandbagging*.

Hal admitted that this use of the Assist line was not all that unusual. Additionally, he said that team leaders will occasionally call each other in order to block any incoming Assist calls while still having a means to appear to be 'at work' if confronted by management:

> ...so we can actually get something else done! If we see anyone [that is, the manager or supervisor] coming we'll just start talking about something that sounds work related.

At *BigTech*, a similar possibility exists in the form of the 'Resource Desk' – a location in the call centre staffed by personnel with special training in more intricate details of the mechanical and electronic functioning of the equipment. Lorene, an experienced agent known for her skill at electronic and mechanical troubleshooting, admitted to occasionally asking to put her caller on hold in order to go to the Resource Desk and chat, "...and I'll ask a question that I might already know the answer to – just to get a break from things." In other words, the agent can create a space for rest in the midst of a call by simply claiming that he or she must check with

other personnel in the call centre – implicating others unknowingly in one's own 'space making' practice.

Similarly, one week near the end of fieldwork, when I was observing and interviewing Lorene's practice over several days, and during one long call, she determined that it was necessary to have the customer run what is called a 'calibration' on the *BigTech* equipment the customer was calling about. She told the customer that the calibration process would allow the equipment to reset itself to default settings so that she could continue troubleshooting. The process, however, would take about 10 minutes during which there was little they could do. She said, "[w]e can sit here and talk about something else, or we could take about 10 minutes to handle other business and meet back here then." The caller admitted that there were some other things he could be doing to deal with other issues at his workplace, and Lorene and he agreed not to hang up, rather to put each other on hold and return after about 10 minutes.

When she finally put the caller on hold, she got up quickly, saying, "10 minutes! Time for a smoke!" Then, perhaps realising what this *looked like*, she stopped, bent over and said to me in a hushed tone, "of course, I *could* have told him that we needed to do a calibration just to get a break. *But I wouldn't do that*" – smiling as she walked off.

Additionally, many of the practices noted above in the section titled 'Making Space for Oneself' can also be included here – particularly that of not disconnecting from a call when it has been transferred to another agent. This permits the agent to enjoy a few minutes of rest while not appearing to the ACD to be on a break. While it does not happen often, when the opportunity presented itself I observed it to be almost *never* passed on by agents.

For example, when the time is nearing the end of an agent's shift, and one suddenly finds the necessity of transferring a caller to another agent, I observed agents to nearly *always* not disconnect from the call after it was transferred.[232] Flin, an agent with several years of experience at *BigTech* and years of experience at other call centres, talked with me while she was enjoying just such a respite. She explained:

> [T]his is really lucky! It's only 10 minutes before the end of my shift, and I've gotta get to school right after I get outta here – I've got a test in my night class and I can't afford to get caught on a call that makes me late for the test. I'm gonna take advantage of this.

Other agents 'taking advantage' of this sort of opportunity, told that they had to get to school to pick up children, had night classes, prior plans for the afternoon and evening, pressing responsibilities elsewhere, etc. such that they made their decision to not disconnect after transferring a call accountable given prevailing conditions. Like those agents above who were 'bouncing' a call late on a Friday afternoon, one must account for one's actions, but doing so is not a difficult proposition. There are always resources 'ready at hand' that may be used for this purpose. Even in the situation where one's supervisor catches this activity, as above, the agent is always able to draw upon a plausible, if predictable, accounting by insisting that he or she was curious how the problem was eventually resolved.

What this demonstrates is a 'space' that permits ad hoc deployment of knowledge both 'internal' to the organisation's normal operations and 'external' to it – matters personal to the agents themselves. In so doing agents demonstrate how resources of the organisation normally configured in a particular relation to stabilise the disciplinary and governmental powers in the workplace, can be temporarily

[232] Over nearly 2000 hours – a person year – of fieldwork, I observed this five times. These instances occurred only at *DeliveryWorldwide* and *BigTech.*

appropriated and reconfigured in order to alter the ‘direction of force’ of those powers, and giving the worker some temporary authority over them. In addition, these practices provide the worker with the virtual guarantee of invisibility from the technology-mediated gaze producing measures of productivity and official Knowledge of the organisation. As above, workers invoke their knowledge of the organisation and the interrelation of its resources to alter these interrelations or produce or find ‘spaces’ to gain refuge, while at the same time producing examinable records that do not belie their covert actions. Because the organisation is so dependent on technology-mediation for its economical production, observation and examination of workers, agents are able to effectively hide while in plain sight of the gaze by taking advantage of or producing gaps left un-patrolled by the technology-mediated rules of examination.

This again highlights the non-universal and discontinuous nature of power, even within structures such as that exhibited by the TMTL workplace. Workers have the ability to introduce contextually relevant information, data and other resources in affecting the relations that comprise knowledge and power in the workplace, and in so doing to alter the direction of its *lines of force*, which, in turn, opens new options and closes off options that would have been available, had the worker not introduced such things. That is, the subject has access to the production of discourse, knowledge and power in a situation, and is not simply made entirely by, and slave to a universal structure, Knowledge or power (Foucault 1983, 1984b, 1994b). However, power always exists regardless, and the subject is always produced within the relations that comprise power. Even when engaging in resistance and secondary adjustment practices, new relations are activated in a different constellation that produces one’s self as a subject.

e. Multitasking: Using Resources of the Organisation to Support Personal Practices

The examples above display practices enabling workers to appropriate resources of the TMTL organisation in order to affect how they are 'seen', inscribed and produced as subjects in its technology-mediated gaze. In these practices, workers more or less take advantage of unpoliced regions. Workers in the call centres participating in this project have also demonstrated practices through which they appropriate the technical resources of the organisation to multitask and combine work and personal activities at the same time. These practices effectively 'split' time into several strands that workers can use for more than one purpose, and satisfy the organisation's expectations of them and their own personal interests at the same time. The most common general form of this 'time splitting' activity involves the use of computer resources to perform personal work at the same time organisational work is accomplished. As above, these practices bear similarity to what Burawoy calls 'chiseling' or 'fiddling' (Burawoy 1979, pp. 58-59).[233]

At *DeliveryWorldwide* and *BigTech,* computer systems included facilities to send 'screen pops' to other agents. A 'screen pop' is an onscreen window that can contain a short text message or a static 'screen shot' of a screen from one of the computer databases used by agents in their normal work. Normally these would be used to send work-related messages or database information to another agent who is in need of them in order to complete some process – for example, if a

[233] For Burawoy, chiseling or fiddling is undertaken when a worker adjusts one's timecard record of which jobs were worked, in order to maximise the amount of time one appears to have worked on jobs that pay a higher rate, thus increasing take home pay. This was undertaken with varying amounts of risk. He reports that he practiced it without adverse effects, but that others were fired for chiseling the company.

DeliveryWorldwide agent calls 'Assist' to ask a question, he or she may also send along a picture of the database screen so that the team leader has more information with which to provide help.

In addition to its official use, *DeliveryWorldwide* agents occasionally use this screen pop feature to send personal messages to other agents while they are working a customer call. Manny, an agent with about four years of experience at *DeliveryWorldwide*, demonstrated for me the way an agent can write personal messages into database fields, invoke a computer command that allows one to look up an agent's computer address, and 'pop' it to that agent. He described how the agents sometimes carry on conversations with each other using this feature of the computer system even while working on customer calls. He admitted that he'd pay more attention to the customer's call even when 'popping' messages to another agent, but told how this practice 'helps to relieve the boredom' and allows one to pass and receive office gossip that would normally be somewhat restricted by agents' physical partitioning and isolation in cubicles, and temporal isolation because they may be assigned to a break time when their friends are not. A similar feature exists on the computer system of agents at *BigTech*, and they use it similarly to pass work-related information to other agents in the call centre, but also to communicate with other agents during the time they are working on customer calls.[234]

Similarly, at *BigTech*, agents are provided with a live 'chat' program called 'Agent Locator'. A 'chat' program enables real-time text communication.[235] In its intended use, the Agent Locator program permitted agents to 'call' and correspond textually with any agent anywhere in the company's several call centres in order to

[234] Consistent with the observations of Murray (1989), workers appear to treat such computer-mediated text or pops as a low priority as compared with phone calls, or visits to their cubicle by another agent, team leader or management person.
[235] America Online's 'Instant Messenger' and Microsoft's 'MSN Messenger' are more commonly known examples of chat programs.

facilitate troubleshooting a customer's problem with *BigTech* equipment or any other work-related task. Agents also used it to conduct casual conversations with other agents, and even when the conversation conducted through Agent Locator was primarily work-related, it often broadened in scope to include personal topics, for example, discussions over weekend plans, family matters, sports scores, etc.

Rabbie, an agent at *MHealth*, installed a chat program on his computer and used it to correspond with college friends and acquaintances made on a recent religious mission to New Zealand. I observed him to occasionally flip between it and data processing work, thus demonstrating how he could be both at work and play. He was, nonetheless, very sensitive about using it, and was careful to see that nobody was around or behind him who would object to its use. Noticing me observing him in this practice did not stop him, though he did account for his actions by noting that he was asking an acquaintance in New Zealand to send him literature on a graduate school program at the University of Auckland, a school that he often spoke of attending. He went on to tell:

> [Chat is] free! I can talk with them whenever they want, but I really try not to use it when I'm on calls. Sometimes my friends don't seem to understand that I'm at work and shouldn't be talking to them here, so sometimes it overlaps [on] what I'm *supposed to be doing* here.

At *BigTech*, *MedAdvise* and *MHealth*, workers are also provided with free access to the Internet.[236] This is in order to facilitate use of Internet and intranet websites that contain data or tools used in the course of everyday work. In the case of *MedAdvise*, access to the Internet permits nurses to access the many health care related archives commonly available online, for example, the popular

[236] *DeliveryWorldwide* has programmed its computer systems such that agents have no access to conventional Internet resources. At the end of onsite fieldwork at *MHealth*, management had announced plans to restrict employees' access to the Internet. During fieldwork, however, workers had unrestricted access to the Internet.

'WebMD.COM' website. Access to the Internet also affords access to many different online programs, including 'unauthorised' chat programs, personal E-mail, online games, news outlets, eBay auction websites, etc. All of these were common Internet locations visited and used by agents through company computers.

At *BigTech*, agents commonly checked their personal E-mail during the working of customer calls, and switched freely between the company's database used when working and their personal E-mail. As did Rabbie above, agents also commonly installed and used 'unauthorised' chat programs on their computers to permit communication with family and friends outside of the company. Taz, an experienced agent at *BigTech*, whose parents and siblings' families were located in another state, told that he used such a chat program to communicate with his family members while at work. Additionally, he told, "[m]y wife has the same program on a computer where she works, and we'll chat back and forth whenever else she can get to the computer". This was frequently, he said, at the same time he was working with customers. Several agents at *MHealth* made it a similar practice to keep personal E-mail and chat programs running concurrently with the database software used to conduct work.

It was also common to observe *BigTech* agents haunting the eBay online auction website, either to sell or purchase items while working on customer calls.[237] Some agents at *BigTech* regularly split work time with the playing of online, multiplayer games and carrying on chat conversations with each other at the same time.

Reading online newspapers was also a common pastime for agents. Lorene, a *BigTech* agent who grew up in an East Coast city, regularly read her hometown

[237] One agent at *BigTech* bragged about how much money there was to be made on eBay. He boasted about plans to eventually open his own local 'eBay consignment shop' – a hint at how much time he actually spent on the eBay websites!

newspaper, as did several nurses at *MedAdvise*. Lorene expressed frustration about one of the hazards of doing so:

> [A]ll the time you're reading this stuff, you're also getting all sorts of pop-under advertisements[238] – but you don't see 'em. It's only when you see your supervisor coming and try to close the window quickly that you see a dozen ads [that have] popped under the site you were reading – you can never close all of 'em in time and you're busted!

News websites were particularly popular among agents during the 2001-2004 span during which fieldwork was conducted. Agents were hungry for news on current events including the 'war on terror' and the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, among other things.[239] Additionally, during this period *BigTech* was involved in the attempted buyout of another major computer equipment manufacturer, and agents regularly visited newsgroups, stock web pages, and company news releases on the proceedings.[240]

Use of all of these various resources commonly occurred during 'dead times', when no calls were incoming, but it was also not uncommon to see agents utilising them at the same time they were working on calls. Consequently, agents demonstrated the development and use of tactics for 'splitting time' that could be said to 'belong to' the company, into pieces that could be allocated by the agent

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[238] Pop-under adverts are a feature of many websites. They are analogous to small billboards advertising products of companies sponsoring the website. When the main website window is open, it is also programmed to open these adverts 'under' the main window. When the main website window is closed or minimised onscreen, the pop-under adverts become visible.

[239] The region in which these call centres are located is known for its orientation to Christian interests, and highly conservative and pro-military politics. Management was generally tolerant of agents' interest and reading of news websites so long as it did not observably interfere with company business. One supervisor confided to me that she was wary of questioning any worker whose productivity appeared to be affected by attention to news about these wars, for fear "...that they'd start attacking me for being a *liberal*." Thus, even if caught, social forces independent of the workplace affected how agents and supervisors approached various transgressions. (Note that in the United States, 'liberal' has come to refer to highly Democratic politics and socially liberal practices, and not to neo-liberal economics and its policies – the latter is the common definition for 'liberal' in other places around the world.)

[240] After contentious battles among stockholders, *BigTech* eventually succeeded in this effort. Stock prices promptly plummeted, producing its own repercussions through the call centre – especially for those who had invested in the company.

rather than only by the company. In so doing, workers demonstrate their ability to appropriate resources out of their normally stabilised positions in the organisation's *dispositif*, assert authority, and create and operate in spaces that previously did not exist or were not officially available to them.

There are other practices observed in the call centres participating in this study that, while consistent with the general idea of 'using resources', take the notion of 'resources' differently than the above. Sometimes co-workers at *MedAdvise* and *MHealth* – and myself – were used as resources by agents to alleviate requirements imposed upon them by a newly activated law.

A law was passed in the United States in August 1996, known as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), Public Law 104-191. HIPAA was enacted with the primary goal of limiting access and distribution of an individual's health care information. While the law was passed in August 1996, provisions that affected workers at *MHealth* and *MedAdvise* did not come into force until October 2003. These provisions are called the privacy rule. Per HIPAA:

> A major goal of the Privacy Rule is to assure that individuals' health information is properly protected while allowing the flow of health information needed to provide and promote high quality health care and to protect the public's health and well being. The Rule strikes a balance that permits important uses of information, while protecting the privacy of people who seek care and healing. Given that the health care marketplace is diverse, the Rule is designed to be flexible and comprehensive to cover the variety of uses and disclosures that need to be addressed. (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services 2005)

In practice, HIPAA limits access, use and distribution of personal health information (PHI).[241] Organisations handling and generating PHI are required to establish polices and procedures for limiting the access, distribution and storage of PHI. The central component of HIPAA is what is known as a 'minimum necessary

[241] The Privacy Rule protects all *"individually identifiable health information"* held or transmitted by a covered entity or its business associate, in any form or media, whether electronic, paper, or oral. The Privacy Rule calls this information "*protected health information (PHI)"*.

policy' that limits workers to access and use only the minimum quantity of PHI needed to complete their officially assigned duties. Additionally, when workers are not 'in direct control' of PHI to which they have been given access, they are expected to store any paper documents containing PHI in locked storage (usually their desk drawers) and to 'lock out' their computer such that any PHI stored in computer accessible databases cannot be accessed by non-authorized personnel. The provision of 'direct control' is what was actively interpreted and manipulated by workers such that it is of interest here.

During the course of work, the call centre agent at *MHealth* gradually accesses and usually has laying on his or her desk, several open folders containing paperwork documenting clients' insurance benefits, and how much of their benefit allocation has been used, history of usage of insurance benefits, etc. – that is, many pieces of PHI. While there is no particular order in which such materials are accessed and used, it is the case that having these resources ready at hand is of benefit to the agent in getting work done in an expeditious manner. When one has to take a bathroom break or leave one's desk for any reason, having to reorganise these materials and lock them up not only takes time but may also increase the discomfort necessitating the break in the first place. It will also necessitate that the re-filed materials be extracted again before work can be restarted.

Also, in the process of working on any given case that includes PHI, the worker may produce or encounter a situation where he or she must leave one's desk to retrieve a fax or materials from the communal printer, consult with data in paper files or other personnel, etc. As indicated above, in such situations the employee is expected to 'lock up' all PHI and 'lock out' their computer (if it is displaying a client's PHI) before leaving his or her desk area. While this process is mechanically

trivial, usually requiring less than 15 seconds to initiate, and less than a minute to reverse when the worker returns to his or her desk, it is frequently perceived to be a hassle, especially in situations during which the worker will be away from his or her desk for a very brief period. Additionally, if the worker is on a call when he or she must leave one's desk, these activities will prolong the length of the call. As described above, workers are very sensitive to call length and to the duration of any activity that will keep them from answering client calls, exacerbating the perceived hassle.[242]

Thus, the requirement to comply with the privacy rule of HIPAA produces a situation in which the worker may consciously weigh the risk of being caught in breach of the 'lock up' policy versus the risk of violating the organisation's rules for call length, service level, etc.

However, in my fieldwork, it was not uncommon to observe workers utilising a unique alternative. Workers would alert a nearby co-worker, "I've gotta leave my PHI for a few seconds. Will you be my HIPAA police?' thereby producing a situation that makes it possible to claim that one's PHI has never, in fact, been 'out of the direct control of an authorized person.' That is, workers occasionally use each other as resources to avoid 'the hassle' of complying with the letter of the 'lockup policy', and also reduce risks associated with it by operating in the grey areas of that policy such that they can claim while the letter of that policy has been violated, its spirit has been maintained.

[242] In addition to being associated with tinkering with a rule to facilitate personal matters, these situations *also* demonstrate how the worker is disciplined by productivity metrics and develops and adopts particular technologies of the self to fulfil that discipline.

Commonly, the 'watcher' also fulfils his or her role by accounting for the worker who has left the PHI, if called for.[243] For example, when Rabbie had to leave his desk he asked Verity, the agent in the neighbouring cubicle, to "watch my PHI for me". When the team leader walked past and noticed Rabbie's empty cubicle, exposed PHI paperwork and unlocked computer, she asked Verity, "...where's Rabbie?" Verity, apparently assuming the team leader was implicitly asking why Rabbie had left PHI unattended, replied, "I'm watching his PHI. He'll be back in a minute." In this, and most other cases where I observed a similar happening, such accounting was sufficient to satisfy the person asking, and all parties moved on.[244] Thus, co-workers are accessing and using each other as resources in their work, implicating them in a breach of regulations and asking them to multitask on their behalf.

However, I never observed workers asking management to act in this capacity. Only certain individuals are asked to fulfil the 'watcher' role. While observation was sufficient to identify and crudely dimension this phenomenon, informal interviews in the form of chatting between calls or in the break room were used to further dimension its use, including who is selected for playing the role of watcher. Through these interviews I learned that the individuals asked to fulfil this role are those who are (a) 'ready at hand', and (b) can be expected to protect the interests of the worker doing the asking and the policy interests of the organization. Thus, the candidate for watcher is an individual nearby when the desire to solicit

[243] Based upon the statements of agents, this is perhaps the more important role to be fulfilled by the 'watcher'.

[244] One particular agent, who was habitually late for work and who was known to be a complainer, frequently drew the ire of the 'HIPAA police' (management who acted in the role of identifying and tallying violations to the rule) and received verbal and written warnings for leaving her desk and PHI unattended – even when she asked a co-worker to 'keep an eye on things'. During fieldwork, I observed that virtually all other workers' accounts were accepted or drew only verbal notice of violation of the rule. Thus, management used their ability to accept or reject an agent's breach of the letter of the rule as a tool for punishing those they thought to be 'bad agents' for other reasons.

such duty occurs, but who is also trusted to have the worker's interests in mind, in particular, one who would not be in a position that is administratively associated with maintaining the sanctity of rules for their own sake. In other words, the person usually fingered for this role is another worker in the same job as the individual making the request.

However, this is not always the case. A few weeks into fieldwork at this site, I, an individual known by workers to be a non-employee, unaffiliated with the company and an academic researcher whose interests were independent of the interests of the organization, was unceremoniously invoked into this role, and in a way that differed from the now familiar ritual involving a deliberate asking for a 'watcher'. This occurred in a situation where Yazmine, the second most senior agent[245] was working on reconciling errors in paperwork that had been compiled over the past several weeks. This task necessitated that she have many pieces of PHI piled and arrayed on her desk as she compared and analysed various documents in completing the task.

During this task, she was approached by another worker, a 'smoking buddy' with whom I occasionally saw her standing on the outdoor steps of the building while taking an impromptu break to smoke. "Wanna go for a smoke?" asked her buddy. Yazmine sighed loudly as she surveyed the papers strewn on her desk, blurted "yeah", grabbed her coat and got up to leave. I was sitting in a neighbouring cubicle, left empty by an agent who was absent on this day, reviewing collected documents and writing fieldnotes. As she was putting on her coat, she put her head in the cubicle I occupied, asking, "[w]ould you watch my desk?" – implicitly asking me to be the

[245] While Yazmine was the second most senior agent in the call centre, at the time of this event she had a total of less than two months experience in the call centre.

one 'in control' of the PHI on her desk and computer.[246] I nodded and moved to her cubicle where I continued my fieldnotes.[247] She returned several minutes later, thanked me, and I returned to the empty cubicle and she back to her work. Nobody asked about her whereabouts during her absence. I was invoked into this duty multiple times over remaining fieldwork at *MHealth*, and I frequently observed other workers involved in the fulfilment of both roles at different times.

Thus, while the technical resources of the organisation can be appropriated by workers to produce 'space' in which they will be seen to be at work while in fact they may not be, so are workers (and myself!) invoked into multitasking for others in order to make space for them. Interestingly, the space may be useful for either personal or employee-productivity reasons. In so doing, employees demonstrated

[246] While unknown to many of the workers in *MHealth*, I had received training at *MHealth* on HIPAA policies early in my fieldwork at that site. At the conclusion of this training I had to sign a form that 'authorised' me to come into contact with PHI and made me legally responsible for protecting PHI should I ever have access to it in the workplace. Consequently, even though workers were unaware of it, they were actually not passing on responsibility to an unauthorised individual. That said, I made it a point never to inspect PHI on any occasion when I had access to it – even on computer displays when I was observing agents at work. Similarly, I received HIPAA training from the training department at the hospital of which *MedAdvise* was a part, prior to my fieldwork at that site.

[247] For me as a fieldworker, this episode indicated a status change. I have been unceremoniously transformed from an outsider to an individual who is trusted to protect and maintain the worker's responsibility of limiting access to PHI, while at the same time alleviating the worker from 'the hassle' of complying with the letter of the privacy rule. Subsequent to this event, most of the workers in this office have exhibited the same, and now commonly invoke the role of what has since come to be called 'the HIPAA ninja' – the stealthy and trusted protector of the worker's interests. With this transformation I have realized other changes, all for the better, I conjecture, in terms of my fieldwork purpose but all of which also put more responsibility on me.

I am now a part of conversations during lunches and breaks, I have been invited to attend informally organized and ad hoc functions like 'lunch out,' company picnics, gripe sessions, I no longer feel as though they're trying to ignore me in the workplace. All of these things make it much easier to collect data, ask questions and get what appear to be unguarded and unscripted answers. They also come with the notion that since they are no longer 'on guard' for my activities, I now have access to activities, contexts, dialog, etc. where my still very naïve status allows me to commit *faux pas* and oafish acts that could use, abuse or take advantage of these persons who have allowed me 'in'. This newly given status comes with sudden new responsibilities for actually guarding and maintaining the workers' values, even if I don't yet know all of them. Suddenly, I found, fieldworking had gotten more complex and serious.

Whereas previously I was clearly an unknown to the workers I was there to observe, and had the feeling of better rapport with management than labour – an undesirable position given my interests in the subjectivity of the worker – in only a few weeks time I have been given a standing by members of the field that signals their acceptance and their trust. While this is surely not the same as running with other members from a police raiding of a clandestine cockfight (Geertz 1977) it similarly signals a turning in the research, the members of the field and in myself, the fieldworker. This turning signals more responsibility and raises the stakes remarkably (Winiecki 2004a).

very flexible means to manipulate resources of the organisation for their own purposes in several contexts related to and at the fringes of workplace activity. It is also the case that those invoked into the 'watcher' role were those the agent felt could be trusted to represent oneself in this breach of the HIPAA rules. In effect, the 'watcher' is an individual who shares the informal knowledge of the agents and is not in an official position to defend and enforce the Knowledge of the organisation. Thus, the agents acted to insert their knowledge into the operation of the organisation such that it frequently replaced official Knowledge, even for those normally charged with defending and enforcing it.

In this way, the workers demonstrate their ability to deploy their knowledge and desires in situations, unlike most of those noted above, that are not hidden or obscured by the technological apparatuses that characterise TMTL, but that are readily apparent to anyone who walked past the agent's unoccupied cubicle. Thus, 'spaces left free' do not exist only in gaps within electronic technology, but also within gaps in the social technology of the workplace. This also demonstrates how the actors can assert their knowledge not only in covert contexts but also overtly. In so doing, even when deviating from organisational rules, the subject still actively participates in relations – even implicating others – that produce Knowledge, power and themselves as subjects in the organisation. As indicated by the occasional questions by management to the 'watcher', the subject also remains responsible for one's freely exercised actions.

f. Asserting Oneself in the Face of Management, Customers & Each Other: Flaunting One's Position as a Knowledgeable Agent of the Company

In previous sections of this chapter, knowledge and practices of subjects that affect the production of productivity or quality data, thus how the organisation 'sees' the workers through its technology-mediated gaze, were described. These practices showed how workers can act in the 'spaces left free' in the discourses and *dispositif* comprising TMTL, and through those actions *alter* the relations between resources and the subsequent production of power, Knowledge and subjectivity (Foucault 1972, esp., pp. 118-125; 1988a, 1996a, 2001; Knights & McCabe 1998; Sturdy & Fineman 2001).

A unique attribute of these practices is the maintenance of appearances such that the technology-mediated surveillance and examination apparatus does not typically detect the presence of those practices. That is, despite these practices on the part of agents, the tables, graphs, lists, etc. that are generated by the examination system frequently appear as if everything is functioning normally. Even when the displays can disclose the presence of these practices, the organisational forces imposed on those who would normally address those disclosures may mitigate the chances they would actually do so. However, this is not the only form of resistance that was found to exist in call centres. Workers occasionally exhibit open and occasionally flamboyant displays of resistance to each other, management and customers.

Based on the extant 'position' of workers and customers on either end of the technology that mediates their interaction, many of these practices could be categorised as 'backstage' using Goffman's dramaturgical theory (Goffman 1959).

That is, while visible to each other and to management, they were hidden from customers. For example, the technology-facilitated muting of epithets, insults and sarcasm aimed at customers described above, can be considered an example of such backstage resistance to customers, or reactions to the protests of customers in the face of their status as 'agents' of an organisation, thus responsible for its upkeep.

When confronted by a rude, angry or recalcitrant customer, agents were also observed to raise their middle finger, or 'flip the bird' at the computer screen currently displaying the customer's data, the common emblem signifying the epithet, 'fuck you'. This display was commonly coupled with angry, anguished facial expressions and the technologically-muted verbalisation of the epithet. However, I also observed it to be displayed at the same time as the agent maintained a pleasant-sounding voice to the customer – a feat of emotional and voice control envied by other agents and which belied the existence of only 'surface acting' in one's emotional labour (Hochschild 1985).

Agents also displayed backstage activities that demonstrated their orientation to organisational discipline. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, a call in which a customer was scheduling a package for pickup was normally disciplined by a highly scripted series of questions from the agent, the answers to which had to be entered into the computer database before a driver would be scheduled to perform the pickup. Customers who made frequent use of *DeliveryWorldwide* services were accustomed to this script, and dutifully answered all questions without interjecting other questions that interrupted the script – thus demonstrating a successful translation of the discipline encoded into the script from company to customer. (Agents almost universally referred to this type of customer as a 'good customer'.[248]) However, if a

[248] When asked to define a bad customer, one *DeliveryWorldwide* agent told: "...they're pushy and sometimes try to control things". She turned to her team leader, who was giving a quiz to the

customer is either undisciplined by the script to which the agent is confined or interjects questions about the scripted items or other factors, I observed agents to demonstrate frustration in various ways, often culminating in the practices noted above.

For example, if a customer interrupts the script by asking questions that don't relate to the scripted questions or data the customer is expected to provide in response, I observed agents to 'waggle' their hands off the keyboard, as if silently gesturing, 'what do you want me to do now!?' An experienced agent would usually follow this unrelated questioning with comments to reorient or 'control the call', for example, "[w]e'll get to that question next. First, let's finish the pickup information". Novice, distracted or very tired agents were observed to see this as a more disruptive action and might 'flip the bird' to the customer, mute their phones and insult the customer, or hang their heads in their hands in a display of frustration.

During the scripted questions for scheduling a package pickup, the agent was required to ask for the physical dimensions of the package – approximate height, width, length and weight. It was both surprising to me and a pet 'peeve' for agents when a customer stumbled at these questions. During one day in which I observed and interviewed Manny, an experienced agent at *DeliveryWorldwide*, he took a call for a pickup and at one point in the call told the customer "we're required to ask for the dimensions of the package; length by width by height". The caller paused and said, "oh, I really don't have a – it's a computer." Manny replied, "well, you know what? Never mind. I'll just ask the driver to measure the box for you."[249] and loudly

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neighbouring agent and asked/stated, "...well that's what it's about right? Controlling the call? I mean, I know the steps to go through to help them get their answers - but *noooo*, they've got to tell me all sorts of other things."

[249] This is a fabrication just to get past the question without having to actually require the customer to estimate dimensions. Similar to the practice of entering *anything* in place of a mumbled name noted

slapped the keys of his keyboard as he typed 12x19x21[250] into the dimensions field of the database screen for this transaction. When he ended the call, Manny turned to me and said:

> You wouldn't believe how many people just freak out when we ask them to estimate dimensions. It's like we just asked them for all the passwords to the military defence system at the Pentagon!

After this, we heard an agent on the other side of the cubicle wall say "its always fun sitting near Manny." Manny retorted, in an annoyed tone, "well I hate it when they don't know things so simple!" He added, "and we tell them it doesn't need to be an exact thing, just an estimate!" As he said this he picked up a book off his desk, hefted it and then said "12 by 2 by 9, and 3 pounds" as he dropped it back on his desk.

At *MedAdvise,* it was not unusual for some of the nurses to criticise callers who exhibited what they thought were misplaced values or lack of personal responsibility. One nurse, who seemed to receive a disproportionate number of calls from people describing symptoms of drug overdose, alcohol poisoning or sexually transmitted diseases, regularly muted her phone when assailing these callers' values and habits, which she presumed contributed to the symptoms described. After such calls she would commonly pull other nurses into her backstage talk of how foolish and stupid were many of the patients she talked to. While covert remarks appeared to be her usual practice, this nurse also occasionally engaged the caller directly in a temperance or chastity lecture.

At *MedAdvise*, other situations gave rise to similar backstage resistance to customers. In the United States, medical care is not officially socialised, and not-for-

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above, it is not uncommon for agents to use such fabrications to avoid what they find annoying or difficult to work through with customers.

[250] Dimensions are in inches – Imperial units are used in the United States.

profit medical institutions are required to accept indigent patients for care. Costs for such indigent care are usually paid for by the Federal tax-sponsored program called Medicaid. Under most conditions, indigent persons with access to Medicaid get their medical care at no cost to them when they seek care at a not-for-profit medical institution. The hospital in which *MedAdvise* is located is such an institution.

Many of the nurses at *MedAdvise* grew noticeably upset when an apparently indigent patient who was advised to seek assistance from a family physician indicated they would instead go to the 'emergency room' of the hospital – especially if the patient told, "I'll go to the emergency room because it's free." Long, almost ranting conversations would erupt, where nurses criticised the 'freeloaders' who were seeking what they knew was one of the most expensive (to the hospital) forms of medical care and dismissing it as 'free'. Regardless, as members of an institution that was legally required to fulfil its public service obligation, they were careful not to allow themselves to be heard by callers, yet openly continued their talk 'backstage'.

While many nurses objected to the practice of these 'freeloaders', they were not the only persons held in contempt by agents at *MedAdvise* and *MHealth*. At these call centres, nurses and agents were often faced with what they called 'frequent fliers' or 'repeat offenders' – individuals who make frequent and, according to the institution, unnecessary appeals for assistance.[251] These individuals were noticeable for the nurse or agent by the record of prior calls he or she had made, that were either contained in the database record associated with that person's name or linked to it in various ways. Nurses and agents would occasionally have to consult with prior

[251] The term 'repeat offenders' calls to mind the issue of recidivism in penal institutions. Given Foucault's assertion that the 'strategic completion' of juridical and penal institutions was the production of subclasses of criminals, one can't help but wonder if the medical and health insurance institutions have not similarly 'completed' themselves by producing a class of people who continually reify the need for such institutions (Foucault 1980a, pp. 195-196).

records in order to collect historical information on the patient, thus making this information known. While neither nurses nor agents were officially expected to be 'gatekeepers' for the organisation in order to protect it from these individuals, the latter were a regular topic of conversation in these call centres. Expressions of either concern for their wellbeing or more commonly, contempt for them based on the fact they made more work for the agents and 'stole my tax money', were not unusual.

Not all backstage resistance is directed at callers, however. At *BigTech*, QSSs were responsible for 'calibrating' with their counterparts in call centres that subcontracted call centre services from *BigTech*, and in so doing, it was said, "to help train them to see it like we do".

Ty, a QSS who was very active in working with his counterparts at a subcontracting call centre, was quietly persistent about his frustration with the way that the subcontractor measured the quality of its agents. This subcontractor used a rating form very different from the met/not-met form used at *BigTech*. In particular, the subcontractor's rating form was described by Ty as being very subjective – especially in a question requiring the evaluator to assess if the customer was satisfied with the service received from the subcontractor's agent. Ty said to me and his counterparts on more than one occasion: "how can you know if a customer is satisfied!? The only way to satisfy a customer is to solve their problem!"

He pointed out how agents at the subcontracting call centre had developed a tactic of asking the customer at the conclusion of a call if he or she was satisfied with the services rendered – a tactic he claimed was an attempt to solicit empirical evidence with which to answer that evaluation question. He played a recorded call for me in which the subcontractor's agent did not actually solve the customer's tech

support problem, but asked this question in what Ty described as a 'tricky' way. The agent asked:

> Even though we didn't solve the problem, based on all the things we tried and our willingness to troubleshoot the issue, were you satisfied with how you were treated today?[252]

Ty indicated that it was not uncommon for this subcontractor's agents to do this. Nonetheless, he told "there's nothing I can do about this! They got *BigTech* to sign a contract, knowing about this stuff! All I can do is try to affect their perspectives." On one occasion after the subcontractors indicated they would be more than happy to renegotiate their contract with *BigTech* to accommodate changes in expectations, Ty scoffed, "[o]f course they'd like to renegotiate the contract. They want to get more money from us when we do all the work!" – that is, when the subcontractors simply take rules and processes from *BigTech* and charge back for their fulfilment without adding value to the relationship.

Following on from Ty's and the *MedAdvise* nurses' frustration with subcontractors and patients who take advantage of the company, during fieldwork I also observed episodes in which agents confronted customers directly in ways that could be interpreted as resistance. As above, these typically reflected an agent's orientation to the disciplined or managed practices and perspectives, or what appeared to be a form of defending the organisation.

Stevie, a team leader at *DeliveryWorldwide* was well known for his quick temper and sarcastic sense of humour. While being openly critical of the organisation's regimentation of the work, and particularly of what he and others perceived to be ineffectual and sometimes labour-hostile practices by management,

[252] As such, this subcontractor's agent demonstrates a tactic Ty believes is fashioned to affect his quality rating – even though what Ty thinks is central to customer satisfaction, problem resolution, was not accomplished. That is, the subcontractor agent demonstrates something that could also be included in the section titled: "Affecting the Production of Quality Data".

he also defended the company when he thought customers or workers made unreasonable demands or were attempting to take advantage of the company. For example, on several occasions during fieldwork when I was observing and interviewing Stevie as he took customer calls, customers protested and claimed they had been overcharged on insurance that was requested on a shipment. These protests were made after the package had been delivered, and were accompanied with a request – sometimes sounding very much like a demand – that the insurance charge be dropped from the customer's bill.

In one such call, a customer asked about a $50 billing for a letter envelope weighing less than several ounces – implying that the charge must surely be a mistake and requesting that it be recalculated. Stevie used an online computer program to retrieve a facsimile of the shipping slip filled out by the customer, and silently pointed to me that the customer had filled in a line on the form to declare that the envelope had a $10,000 value.

Stevie told the customer that making a $10,000 declaration was the same as requesting $10,000 insurance, and that was why he was being billed $50. The customer indicated that he did not intend for this declaration of value to be interpreted in that way. Stevie, whose voice was growing and escalating into apparent anger, snapped to the caller that writing a value in *that particular field* of the shipping slip means the customer is requesting insurance at that value.

The caller, pausing for a few seconds, said, in a tone much less agitated than Stevie's, "[w]ell, judging from your tone I don't think we're going to reach an agreement here." Stevie continued to insist the declaration on the form means the customer is requesting that value of insurance. The caller tells that he asked the delivery driver, and the driver indicated that whatever the contents are worth is what

the value should be declared to be. Stevie overlapped the end of the customer's statement to assert that delivery drivers are not authorities on these things, that drivers are paid only to pick up and deliver packages, and if the customer wants details on services he should call the 1-800 number (uncharged call number, that is the call centre).[253]

The caller replied, sarcastically, "I'm sorry your drivers are so clueless". Stevie again overlapped the caller's statement and curtly told he'll begin processing a claim for him. The call ends with Stevie exhibiting the same tone of voice the customer identified as problematic above. The caller's last comment, voiced without a sarcastic tone, was "[t]hank you. You've been very helpful".

After hanging up, Stevie held his middle finger up to the computer screen (still displaying the customer's shipping slip) and said in an angry tone:

> It really *chaps my ass* when the shipment arrives and they won't pay the insurance. This happens all the time – people think they can get the company to do something and then not pay for it!

While he pounded keys on his keyboard to process the claim for reimbursement, he went on to tell that this kind of call is not uncommon, and that he's grown calloused of customers who either don't take the time to read the contract details on the back of the shipping slip[254] or, in his estimation, intentionally attempt to defraud the company.

While he has in so doing demonstrated an aggressive allegiance to protecting the company from what he suspects to be false claims from customers, note that he has nonetheless initiated the process of submitting a claim for reimbursement on

[253] In fact, it is company policy for drivers not to advise customers on such matters, and to refer them to the 1-800 number for answers.
[254] The size of printing on the back of the shipping slip is tiny, to say the least, and also printed in grey rather than black – making it very difficult to read, even for those interested in it.

behalf of the customer. In so doing he demonstrates both a *technical* orientation to 'customer service' (though one marked by what was to me also a display of aggression) and an orientation to protecting the company from unseemly clientele.[255]

Such displays of 'technical' orientation to service while also demonstrating resistance to customers were not uncommon. Kylie, a *DeliveryWorldwide* agent with over four years experience at this call centre, had a history of being 'talked to' by management for exhibiting her frustration to callers, but management received very few customer complaints on account of these displays. On one day near the end of fieldwork at *DeliveryWorldwide*, I was observing and interviewing another agent when Kylie's voice penetrated the atmosphere from several aisles away. She said, in what I heard to be an angry and amplified tone:

> I told you sir, I'm not in a position to get the package and deliver it to you.[256] The package was misrouted and you'll get it tomorrow. It's not my fault! ... Don't tell me that I'm not doing my job – I'm doing my job – telling you where the package is and when it will be delivered!

As Kylie said (yelled?) these words, agents around the call centre could be seen smirking and shaking their heads, even while talking with other customers. One agent said, in a voice just loud enough to be heard through the ambient, "[y]ou tell 'em Kylie!" The agent I was with laughed softly also, shaking her head, and in the

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[255] Zimmerman (1969; 1970) describes how a welfare caseworker and his supervisor deployed a similar sort of suspicion of a client in an intake process. He also tells his own assessment was that the client was making a reasonable case in requesting special consideration, thus that the caseworker and supervisor were being overly suspicious of the client. However, Zimmerman also told that through subsequent research into the client's history the caseworker found similar attempts that had been determined to be fraudulent – thus justifying the caseworker's and supervisor's suspicion and organisationally validating a denial of services. Thus, the experienced practitioner's professional scepticism, while unelaborated in bureaucratic rules, was found to be organisationally appropriate.

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, no follow-up research is conducted, or feedback provided to the agent on the outcome of claims filed on the customer's behalf, so there was no way for me to verify the organisational validity of Stevie's suspicion. Indeed, there was no way for him to validate it either.

[256] I found it to be not uncommon for anguished customers to insist the call centre agent retrieve a delayed package and deliver it himself or herself. In such instances, agents told that they were in a call centre nowhere near the customer's location. Only occasionally did they tell the city in which the call centre is located.

middle of a call, muted her microphone, turned her head toward me and said, "[i]t's the evil twin again."

When there was a long enough break between calls to feel safe asking, I inquired about my informant's remark – what is the evil twin? She laughed and told that Kylie has a reputation for talking back to customers, and whenever she's called into the manager's office for doing so, appeals to the convenient fiction of her 'evil twin' sister having come to work for her on the day the outburst occurred. Regardless, in Kylie's angered statements that she's doing *her job*, she orients to the rationalised distribution of labour in the call centre – something she knows about, but something most customers would probably not know – effectively accounting for and defending the organisation and herself as she resists the frustrations of a customer.

This also displays a curious effect of emotional labour (Hochschild 1985). The agent is expected to maintain a pleasant affect even in the face of what is sometimes annoying and at other times outright hostile behaviour on the part of customers. As demonstrated by Stevie and Kylie, and as reflected in co-workers' responses to Kylie's outbursts, it is not unusual for an agent to be unable to maintain the dichotomy between one's emotional labour affect and the seething anger underneath. All of the resistance practices noted above share another commonality. They all demonstrate how agents remain freely able to produce behaviours – covert or overt – and remain responsible to some set of K/knowledge, thus somewhat responsible for the subject and subjectivity so produced (Rose, N. 1999c). Sometimes this is an individual's personal knowledge, such as that represented by nurses at *MedAdvise*. Sometimes it is official organisational Knowledge, such as that represented by agents at *DeliveryWorldwide* who exhibit frustration over customers who were not disciplined by their scripting. Sometimes it involves both, as also

demonstrated by Stevie and Kylie, whose 'on stage' demonstrations to customers make use of both personal knowledge and organisational Knowledge.

Other resistance practices are not blatant but nonetheless obvious. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, several agents regularly chewed gum while working customer calls – something that the organisation proscribed. When an agent was caught chewing gum, he or she was asked by management or the team leader who found the infraction to throw it away. Agents normally complied with this without question. On several occasions, Manny was caught chewing gum, and when asked to throw it out, he did, but with such speed and accompanied by such feigned contrition as to mock the situation. Also, once the team leader or supervisor was out of sight, he would pull another piece of gum from a pack, and ceremoniously unwrap it and put it in his mouth, sometimes leaning back as he jawed the gum in an exaggerated display of enjoyment while producing a noticeable mouth-full sound in his voice. In doing so it appeared he was flouting the organisation's rule for anyone to see while also affecting a show of disrespect to the customer.[257]

In resisting customers and defending or representing the company's policies and rationalisation, agents are demonstrating how the relationship between disciplinary technologies and governmental responsibilisation produces power that affects their actions. While these actions are not entirely consistent with the delivery of service alluded to in the quality evaluation rubrics, they do reflect how workers orient to the technical matters of the job as disciplined by the tools, technologies and continuous surveillance of workers. They also reflect agents' orientation to the self as a member of the organisation, however frustrated by their position and responsibility

[257] This appears not to be a unique form of resistance. Similar practices have been identified and documented in research on Scottish and Australian call centres (Bain & Taylor 1999, 2000; Barnes 2004; Taylor, P. & Bain 2003; van den Broek 2002).

to confront or be confronted by customers. Goffman provides a unique perspective that may account for both:

> Our sense of being a person can come from being drawn into a wider social unit; our sense of selfhood can arise through the little ways in which we resist the pull. Our status is backed by the solid buildings of the world, while our sense of personal identity often resides in the cracks. (Goffman 1961, p. 320)

A sense of personal identity is also exhibited in resistance to management or management's dictums, or the more or less normal orientation to status divisions in the day-to-day goings on of the call centre. Taylor and Bain (2003) describe many resistance practices in call centres through which agents attempt to demonstrate how management is only 'in charge' to the extent that agents orient to this as a normal subordination to authority. By flouting this normal arrangement of authority, agents can demonstrate how superficial it is, and how necessary it is for workers to orient to it in their own behaviour in order for *authority* to, in fact, exist. This is another point in which the workers can demonstrate that power is not simply an effect of a universal structure. Through their non-complicity – what amounts to a small 'wildcat' strike – they can deflect the workings of power and in so doing highlight their important place in its production and existence. This shows that the Marxian and labour process orientation to resistance is not so much wrong as it is incomplete (Knights 1990, p. 310) – workers can effect resistance through such means, but as demonstrated above, other means also exist and demonstrate the very fragmented nature of power and the ability of the workers to tinker with it at any time they wish.

For example, as described above, agents at *DeliveryWorldwide* and *BigTech* have the ability to send screenshots or messages to other agents in order to facilitate the handing-off of work from one agent to the other. Manny, an agent at *DeliveryWorldwide*, also told that agents occasionally 'pop' screens and taunting

messages to the call centre manager and supervisor, “just to tweak ‘em, so they know they’re not totally in control”.

Manny also demonstrated another resistance practice that utilised the mute button. While working a customer call, he noticed that the call centre supervisor was standing over the cubicle of an agent in the adjacent row, reading the Classified Ads Section of the day’s newspaper. In the middle of the call he muted his microphone, stood up and pointed at the supervisor, and saying in a voice loud enough to be heard across the call centre, “[a]re you looking for a job?! *Good Luck!*” Manny remained standing with his microphone muted, waiting for the supervisor’s reaction. When she peered wryly over the newspaper and emitted a sarcastic smirk, he emitted an exaggerated laugh before sitting down, un-muting his phone and continuing with the business of the call.

Taylor and Bain (2003) indicate this type of taunting has a built in safety. If the supervisor were to discipline him or to confront him for this action, she would be seen to be overstepping the technical authority of her position and demonstrating an abuse of authority (see also, Foucault (1995, p. 94)), or be seen to lower herself out of the presumed decorum called for by her status, all the while in direct sight of all of the other agents. However, by not reacting in any specific manner at all, the supervisor is demonstrating how she is without real power to contest such taunts. That is, Manny demonstrates how some of the relations that make up the organisation are not as stable as they might appear when things are going ‘normally’ and are, in fact, manipulable by anyone who chooses to tinker with them. This, in its small way, demonstrates how power is not safely considered an artefact or a commodity ‘owned’ by status groups or individuals. Instead, it is made up as a relation that owes its stability to the mutual complicity and reification of parties

otherwise ‘subject’ to it (Brigham & Corbett 1997; Deleuze 1991; Foucault 1983, 1991a; Power 1994; Rose, N. 1997, 1999c, 1999d).

While most of the above examples illustrate solitary practices, sometimes resistance is collective, and done in ways that are overt or covert, institutionalised or subversive, and with coordinated impact. For example, near the end of fieldwork at *DeliveryWorldwide*, the call centre manager indicated his plans to hire several new individuals for a position to be titled ‘Quality Administrator’ (QA). The QA job was to be a position that took over the role of performing quality evaluations of agents and coaching of agents for the improvement of their quality of service – that is, to take part of the work currently performed by team leaders.

The labour union protested this on the grounds that it was against the contract to take work previously done by union personnel and give it to non-union personnel (some of the team leaders were union members at the time). Since team leaders currently had the responsibility to perform quality evaluations and coaching, and the QA was to be a non-union position, this was seen clearly to be a violation on the part of the organisation. However, the union stewards indicated, additional negotiations could be held and the existing contract modified, in return for suitable concessions on other matters by management.

Additionally, management’s plan to hire workers from outside the call centre for the job of QA produced considerable upset among some workers. This upset was based upon the widely accepted notion that adequate and legitimate ratings of quality required an individual who had experience in the job at the call centre, and who could draw upon that experience to interpret the criteria in the evaluation form based upon technical, affective and other factors not included in the form. That is, workers wanted to be able to solidify and enjoy the ‘informed’ but *ad hoc* adjustments

demonstrated by Sheila, Hal and other team leaders in their evaluations of agent's work as described above – effectively installing the potential for such adjustments into the official workings of the organisation by arguing that those hired for the QA job should be existing agents.

Management insisted that no such experience was necessary, and that the existing evaluation form, along with commonsense understanding of what 'good service sounds like', was sufficient for any individual to do the job. One of the current agents, whose husband is also a call centre agent in another organisation, argued:

> My husband has worked in [another] call centre for five years. He's a *good agent*, but he *doesn't know what goes on here!* How can you expect someone who doesn't know what we have to deal with everyday, who doesn't know about these tools [the software used to accomplish the work] and how things crash all the time, or how crazy it gets around here. How can you expect that person to be able to tell me that I'm not doing a good job! It's just absurd!

This sentiment was commonly held by agents, and resistance persisted until the organisation and union renegotiated job descriptions and policies for appealing quality ratings. Personnel hired for the QA job came from the ranks of existing agents and those who had previously been team leaders – thus satisfying worries of labour – or those from other departments of the organisation with credentials arguing for their capability. While this hiring occurred after my exit from onsite fieldwork, it became apparent, through telephone interviews with personnel in the call centre, that QAs who were previously team leaders and agents were influencing those hired from other parts of the organisation to be sensitive to the intricacies of the job, from the standpoint of an experienced agent (this occurred through coaching, counselling, etc. from existing agents hired as QAs – practices that, as noted in the previous chapter, are implicated in producing governmental forms of power). Thus, resistance that was

at once collective, overt and institutionalised was also covert and somewhat subversive – workers succeeded in institutionalising their values and inserting their own 'managerial visions' upon the new hires unfamiliar with this particular call centre. That is, workers demonstrated their own production of power by modifying the existing relations of force instantiated in rules and policies. This is similar to what is recommended by Townley (1994) – negotiations between labour and management such that the values and goals of each can be coalesced into new policies and procedures that effectively give institutional voice to all parties in the organisation. It also orients to the theorising of Smith and Haraway (Haraway 1990, 2004a; Smith, D. 1987b, 1990b, 1990c) who both envision how giving voice to the marginalised and silenced 'others' in an organisation or scientific discipline can alter the constitution and production of Knowledge and thus power in the organisation.

While acts of resistance could be seen as successful in many ways, they also demonstrate how they do not operate as an orthodox Marxian would prefer. That is, power is seen to continue to exist in the workplace and still be instrumental in the production of subjects. It is the case, however, that workers succeeded in altering the relations that make up official Knowledge such that there is a more equitable mixture of organisational Knowledge and experience-based knowledge from the workers themselves. Additionally, even in this resistance, the workers demonstrate their orientation to K/knowledge, and also an immanent responsibility to both types of K/knowledge, in altering the organisation and thus, themselves as subjects in the organisation.

A different sort of resistance, although similarly covert and overt, institutionalised and subversive, occurred at *MedAdvise*. Like what happened at *DeliveryWorldwide* above, it also demonstrates how much the subjects could

influence their situation, even in the face of what appear to be institutionally-stabilised relations, rationalities and policies.

At *MedAdvise*, many of the nurses are nearing the end of their professional careers and could no longer comfortably withstand the physical and time pressures imposed by ward nursing. Other nurses were mothers of young children, and the part-time shifts permitted them to maintain a primary caregiver responsibility while both practicing their vocation and contributing to the family income. The possibility of part-time hours was desirable for both young and older nurses – not only the fact that part-time hours were available, but also that, depending on status with the hospital, nurses had varying levels of influence on what hours they actually worked from month to month. In addition, nurses regularly swapped shifts with each other to accommodate their own medical needs, family responsibilities, etc. These various kinds of flexibility provided a workplace that nurses could manipulate in ways that usually accommodated responsibilities and needs both within and beyond the organisation. The nurse-manager of the call centre imposed few official limits on this flexibility, expressing a desire not to turn the call centre into an environment as unbending and stressful as she said it is on "the hospital floor".

Utilising this flexibility, nurses regularly discussed schedules when they came in for their shift and during times when call volume was low. In fact, these discussions frequently filled time between calls also. The creation of a 'shift trade form' provided the nurse-manager with the ability to administratively oversee the process – primarily to provide a paper trail that allowed her to ensure that shifts were being covered and that nurses in any given shift represented a range of experience levels and clinical specialty (Figure 70). The nurse-manager or an assigned surrogate

would review these requests and approve, deny or mediate the requests if called for.[258]

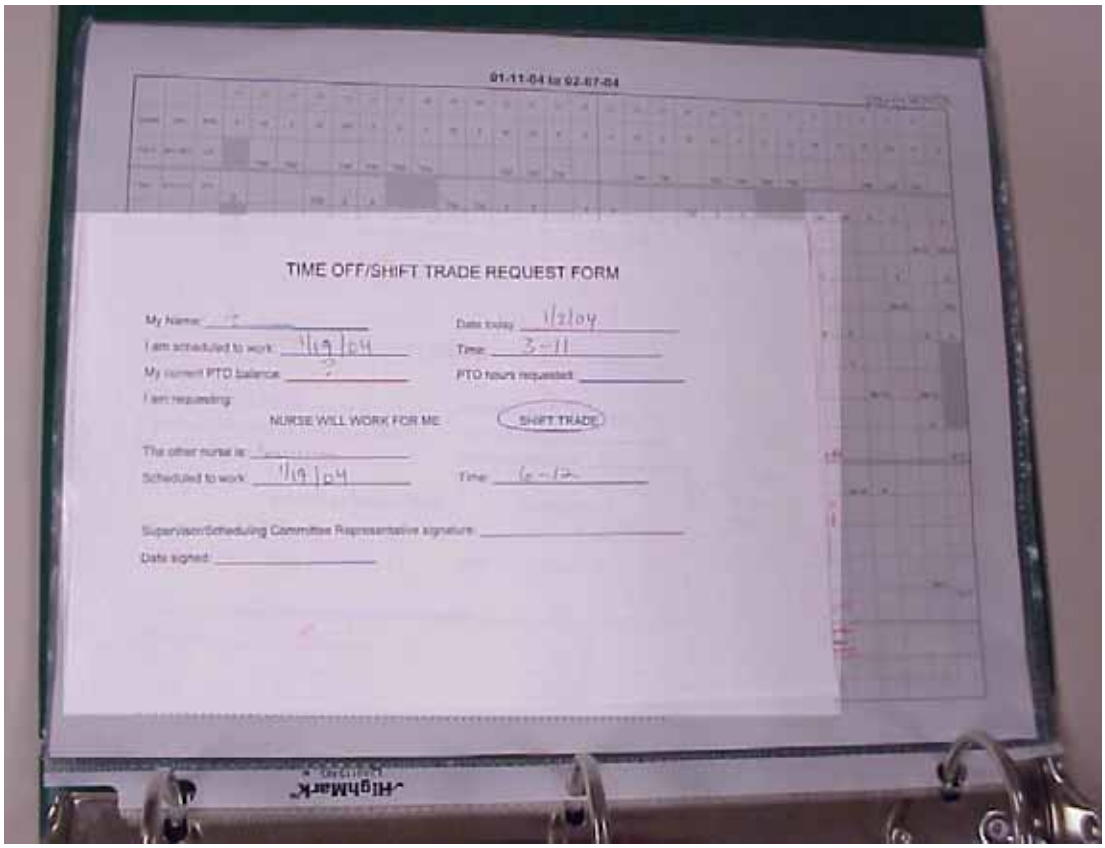

Figure 70. Time Off/Shift Trade Request Form at *MedAdvise*

Pat, one of the nurses at *MedAdvise* had accepted placement as a 'flex' nurse[259] to permit time to develop a business in real estate. However, the real estate market, and thus nurse's business plans were hurt by a downturn in the housing market and about half-way through onsite fieldwork at *MedAdvise*, Pat expressed a desire to increase hours at the call centre. However, because Pat was still classified as a 'flex' nurse, thus eligible only to pick up a few hours per month to fill in where

[258] One might imagine this as a tactic for exerting bureaucratic control or authority over the processes of trading shifts. In practice, this did not appear to be the case – although there were times when such shift trading was disallowed, such as when such trading would leave the call centre staffed only with relatively novice telephone-triage nurses.
[259] Classifications included full-time (.9FTE), part-time (between .4-.6 FTE) and flex (< .4 FTE).

higher classification nurses did not choose to work, Pat was limited in how many hours could be collected. Consistent with entrepreneurial practice, Pat began soliciting other nurses to take over – not trade – their shifts on days when they had medical appointments or family obligations, or wanted to take a day off but did not want to bill it to their vacation allocation or sick days. Pat offered this as a service to fellow nurses, and many of them took advantage of it. This was considered to be a benefit for all nurses involved – Pat was able to increase work hours and other nurses were able to accommodate their personal needs and desires without impacting the call centre.

All of this went on for about a month, apparently without the official knowledge of management – although most nurses were well aware of it. Over several consecutive days, Pat would appear in the call centre around 5:00PM and begin setting up in one of the cubicles. When asked, Pat would joke about impersonating another nurse, whose shift was being worked: “I’m Helen today”, or, “I’m Dale today”. Eventually, Pat’s appearance in the call centre when not scheduled to be at work was accepted as a regular occurrence, and was met with teasing questions from other nurses: “[w]who are you supposed to be today?”

On one day when Pat had taken another nurse’s shift, I observed Graf, one of the full-time nurses, ask why he was at work, since he was not scheduled to be on shift. Pat said these arrangements had been made last night by telephone with Sally, to work her shift, and Pat was unable to update the shift schedule in time. Graf, who was also beginning to take over the scheduling task from the nurse-manager, stood and slowly lumbered to the schedule book where she updated the log to reflect Pat working instead of Sally.

On the following day, Graf talked with the nurse-manager about Pat's practice of working additional hours by soliciting other nurses, and was told that the hospital's attendance policy proscribed this practice, the manager indicating that if any given employee or a unit in the hospital could afford to lose hours in this way, that employee or the unit may lose FTEs and be assigned to a lower FTE-shift, or lose employment altogether.

Pat and the nurses who had been availing themselves of these services were upset by this. They considered their shifts to be their *property* and insisted they could trade, give away or take other hours so long as the hospital and the call centre were always covered. After several tense meetings and managerial pressure to stop the practice, it was largely discontinued. However, Pat, upset at having lost the ability to increase scheduled hours, gathered support from other flex nurses who, it was found, were equally upset at their relative lack of clout in scheduling their hours. Pat effectively organised those nurses such that they refused to schedule any hours – thus leaving large holes in the required staff schedule – until the nurse manager agreed to consider alternative scheduling arrangements.

There was initial resistance on the part of Graf, who was now responsible for scheduling for the call centre, on account of her desire to maintain and reinforce the rules of the organisation. After several days of fieldwork and interviews during which she skilfully skirted my questions about the matter, Graf admitted that she had a greater interest in ensuring that the call centre functioned such that it did not draw the ire of hospital management – thereby risking her own job as well as the job of everyone else – than in maintaining the rules for their own sake. Over several weeks she met with Pat and other nurses in the call centre, both in groups and individually,

to work out other ways of scheduling hours. Eventually all constituencies were satisfied with the arrangements made.

In effect, the initially surreptitious and then openly defiant actions by nurses asserting authority over their own shifts and acquisition of unpaid leave had exerted a force that affected the entire call centre and its ability to function harmoniously, and without drawing unwelcome attention from hospital administration. Graf confirmed that her annoyance over others' wilful deviance from hospital policy and fear over unwelcome attention from hospital administration motivated her; the tactics of 'shuttle diplomacy' and détente between nurses in the call centre exhibited her respect for these others – all of whom had the same clinical status as her – Registered Nurse. Thus, as reflected in matters of supporting each other to produce clinically and legally defensible records, mutual respect and solidarity remains an important component in the production of subjectivity in the *MedAdvise* call centre.[260]

Graf told that many nurses and herself felt very frustrated at the resistance imposed by flex nurses, and the flex nurses felt very frustrated at Graf's and the nurse manager's desire to maintain the status quo – tactics and frustrations the nurse manager was previously unaware of. She noted that the compromises made were for the best. In fact, while all nurses did not, as Graf said, "get what they wanted", several were able to increase their hours, while others were able to decrease their hours in light of upcoming medical procedures that would temporarily disable them for several months. In effect, the resistance culminating in a job action by flex nurses imposed a situation that forced management in the call centre and its surrogates to reconsider how scheduling was done. In other words, through resistance, the workers

[260] Compare this with other instances of regular workers who have some management responsibilities, and must negotiate relations as both agents and management (footnotes 211 and 267).

were able to effect change in the relation of forces, rules and policies, such that their individual concerns and changing needs were better accommodated.

In these examples, workers demonstrate how they are not dominated by ossified relations that produce power in the call centres. Instead, through their action – whether associated with a formal labour-management contract or not – they can influence the relation of forces such that they are rearticulated before being re-stabilised. Thus, while workers eventually return to a stabilised relation of forces, in organised action they demonstrate that the asymmetries immanent in previously instituted and solidified relations of forces can be altered. Such tinkering with the existing technologies and rationalities of a workplace may not produce organisation-wide systemic changes, but local changes can be created without drawing the entire organisation into the fray (Jermier, Knights & Nord 1994). The agents are able to operate with some degree of freedom to alter their positions, within 'spaces opened' by their opportunistic, tactical action, or in 'spaces left free' by the current rationality of the organisation. This is consistent with the local and distributed nature of power and the ability of actors to influence its organisation, its relations and its effects, as forwarded by Foucault (Foucault 1983, 1988a, 1994b, 2000b, 2001, 2003).

Not all displays of resistance are so overt, individual or aimed at active change. Some are nearly anonymous, intentionally ironic and sometimes deconstructive! For example, coincident with rumours and allegations that *BigTech* was the major owner in several companies to which it was outsourcing call centre work, the Scott Adams cartoon 'Dilbert' ran a series on call centres. Outsourcing of call centre work was a major concern of *BigTech* agents. They believed it was slowly putting this call centre out of business and them out of work.[261] A *BigTech* agent

[261] A worry later confirmed by the company's CEO, when it was announced that all call centre work would eventually be moved to providers in India.

saw one of these 'Dilbert' cartoons as fitting and ironic criticism of *BigTech's* practices, and posted it on an outward facing wall of his cubicle (Figure 71).

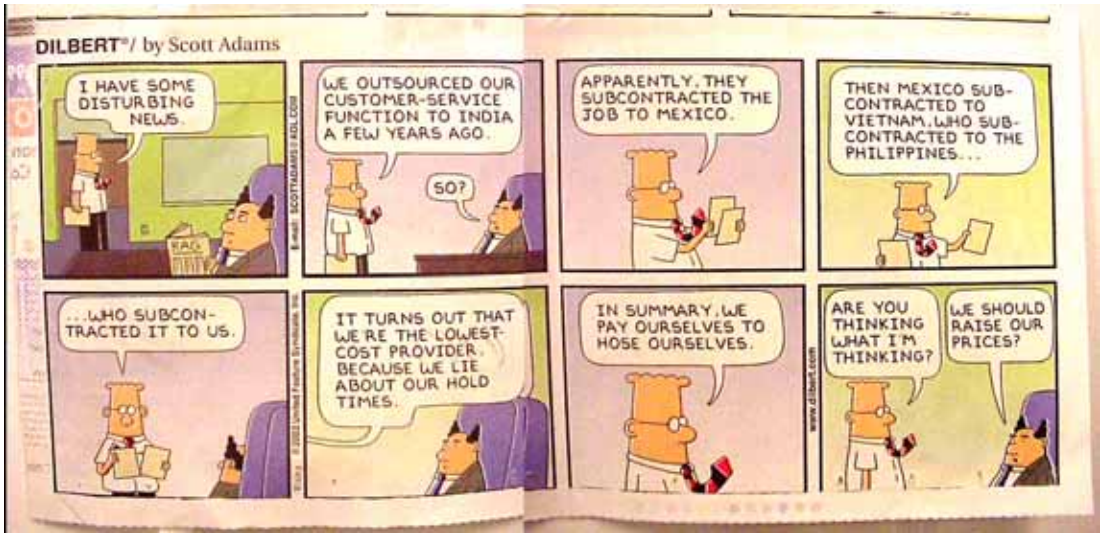

Figure 71. Dilbert Cartoon Displayed by *BigTech* Agent to Protest Company Policies

Similarly, one anonymous *BigTech* agent modified another 'Dilbert' cartoon in order to portray his or her frustration with the introduction of a new computer database agents were expected to use when documenting details of customer calls – a software program many agents found slow, unreliable and difficult to use. This cartoon was displayed in several agents' cubicles (Figure 72). These displays of cutting irony are similar to some practices described and depicted by Taylor and Bain (2003) in their discussion and illustrations of subversive humour in Scottish call centres.

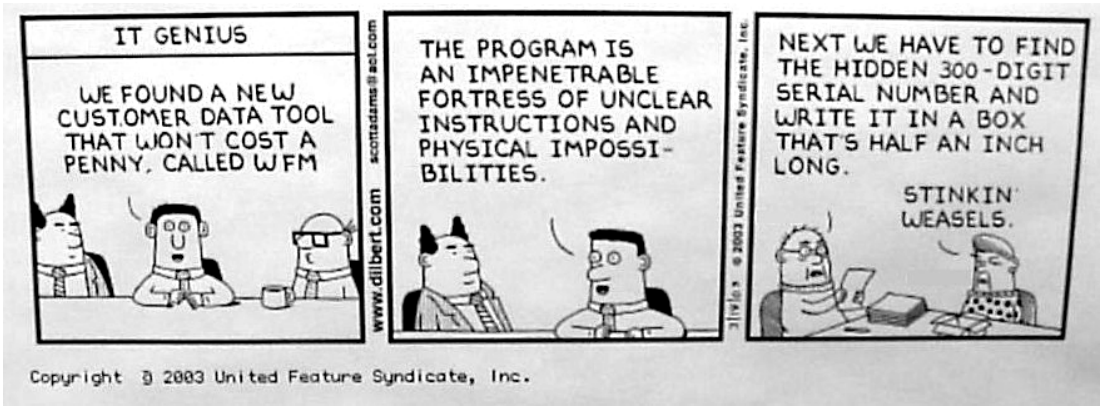

Figure 72. Dilbert Cartoon Displayed by *BigTech* Agents to Protest a New Database Tool

Less entertaining, but no less apparent, agents at *BigTech* demonstrated their contempt of meetings in a passive display of resistance. At *BigTech*, agents are scheduled to attend one, one-hour long meeting each week. These meetings alternate between what are called 'staff' and 'tech debriefs'. Staff meetings are held in order to dispense information and policies that are not technical in nature, for example, new human resources policies, operating statistics of teams, company financial information and the like. Tech Debriefs are used as a venue for delivery of new or emerging technical issues related to the equipment being serviced by agents, new test procedures, demonstrations of equipment and the like – in effect, informal training by and for agents.

Generally speaking, *BigTech* agents express a preference for the contents of tech debrief meetings and a common disdain for staff meetings. Taz, an experienced agent with several years of experience told:

> 'Staff' is a waste of time. You go in there for an hour and don't get anything you can actually use. It's a place where your soop'[262] just talks at ya' or you've gotta sit through an hour of listening to someone tell you how wonderful the company is and why you're supposed to be

[262] 'Soop' is a commonly used verbal abbreviation for 'supervisor'.

> excited to be part of it. We gotta go to 'em – they take attendance![263] – but they're never useful. Tech debriefs are different. You get stuff you can actually use. Like last week we got to talk with an engineer from corporate[264] who showed us all sorts of self-diagnostic tricks built into the [equipment]. It's so *cool!* From our computer we can log into the customer's machine – as long as it's hooked up to a network and the Internet – and run tests on it. We hardly have to talk to the customer at all!

I was permitted to attend the staff meeting held later that week, and observed how agents express their displeasure of staff meetings. The agenda of the meeting, scheduled to begin at 8:30AM, had been announced to include a presentation on a new company anti-discrimination policy. At 8:30AM, only seven of the fifteen agents scheduled for attendance were present. The guest presenter, a supervisor from another part of the company, was standing at the front of the room. The team's supervisor sat in the front row reviewing statistical charts and making marks and notes on them, apparently oblivious to the time and low attendance. Those agents in attendance talked and joked loudly among themselves. A few minutes later the guest presenter asked the team supervisor if she should begin. The supervisor looked at her watch, turned abruptly and seeing that only about half of the expected personnel were in attendance, groaned, "[y]eeeeah. Maybe we should start".

The guest presenter began and those in attendance quieted. Over the next few minutes a few more agents arrived. One of them announced loudly over the voice of the guest presenter, "Bill's on a call. Taz'l be here in a minute". When Taz arrived, he had a plate of food purchased from a nearby cafeteria, chewing as he sat in the back row. He continued to tuck into the food, occasionally making chewing noses and paying no attention to the presentation. Whispered talk could be heard from other attendees.

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[263] Another example of surveillance and inscription practices. I never discovered, however, if these inscriptions were put to any sort of use.

[264] 'Corporate' is a commonly used verbal abbreviation for 'the corporate office', similar to *DeliveryWorldwide* agents' references to the 'G. O.' when referring to the corporation's general office.

When a videotape produced by the company to introduce the new policy was queued and started, the room was darkened and whispered talk became more noticeable. Taz was just finishing his plate of food and he dumped it perfunctorily into the waste bin, clearing his throat after eating. Agents made jokes about some of the imagery and statements by actors in the videotape.

When the videotape ended the presenter asked Taz to turn the lights back on, then asked if there were any questions about the policy. No response from the attendees to this question was coupled with whispered chat between some of them. The supervisor turned to the group, herself having ignored the presentation in lieu of reviewing a sheaf of documents, and said, "[y]ou'll be getting a booklet in the next few days that repeats what you saw in the video. This is a new company policy and has to be adhered to".

As agents began to stand up, apparently signalling their desire to leave, she said, "okay, no questions? Back to it!" The room emptied, agents collecting into groups and continuing their discussions as they left.

Contrast these displays of inattention and interest in other matters with a tech debrief meeting in which an engineer with the company made a presentation and demonstration of a 'third party' add-on for some of *BigTech*'s equipment. The engineer presented this equipment as 'unauthorised', and said that if any customer is found to be using it, their warranty is voided. He also noted that the third party company instructs its clients to lie about its existence, and in so doing to try and fool *BigTech* agents into providing service on a machine with, what is to *BigTech*, an invalidated warranty.

As the engineer's presentation continued, agents actively asked questions, walked up and stood closer to the demonstration equipment, crouched to inspect the

pieces more closely, and watched in interest as he provided instructions on how to recognise if the equipment had been installed (through verbal questions and technical tests performed in the course of a phone call), despite a customer's statements otherwise. At the end of the presentation, one agent volunteered to produce a job aid that contained the symptoms of this equipment and procedures for verifying its installation. When the scheduled hour was over, agents continued their questions and eventually had to be reminded to return to their workstations.

The behaviour of agents in staff meetings and tech debrief meetings demonstrates Taz's remarks above. Obvious inattention, and behaviour which mocked the official nature of the venue and the status of those presiding over it marked the staff meeting. In contrast, attendance at the tech debrief, while occasionally irreverent and boisterous, was marked by attention to the topic at hand and active involvement in it. While resistance, however more or less passive, marks one venue, the opposite occurs in the other. Not able to avoid attendance at staff meetings without risking consequences of an unknown panoptic practice,[265] agents instead mock it to show they have "...some selfhood and personal autonomy beyond the grasp of the organization" (Goffman 1961, p. 314).

Similarly, game planning meetings at *MHealth* contained a mixture of technical and non-technical information, and also drew varied attention and resistance from agents. While inattention was sometimes exhibited, it was also the case that agents would occasionally make sarcastic remarks about new requirements or *ad hoc* duty assignments in light of consistent pressures to perform – thus resistance to the demands of productivity as they were drilled by management and

[265] Although many did not attend the staff meetings. Sometimes this was justified by 'being trapped' on a call that extended into the meeting time, but other times, the agent might just skip the meeting. As with other such practices at *BigTech*, the occasional *faux pas* such as this was not fatal: rather the agent was only risking consequences when management determined that a 'pattern' of such deviance occurred.

displayed in the stats. On one occasion, Yazmine, an *MHealth* agent who had developed a special expertise for processing a particular type of insurance claim, was asked to complete a pile of these claims "in-between calls". She blurted, "yeah, right. I'll have it done for you before lunch." Then, when she noticed that the call centre supervisor was staring at her with a wary expression, she cowered, saying demurely, "[o]kay. I'll get it done". She then ducked her head and smiled broadly toward another agent – as if to relish the moment and enjoy having been caught in the act while being somewhat 'saved' by the public venue.[266]

Game planning meetings at *MHealth* were also a common, though usually understated, venue for agent's complaints about management or other departments in the organisation. Agents occasionally offered advice to each other on how to handle particular other personnel in the office in order to avoid or mitigate upset. Similarly, in meetings between team leaders and management at *DeliveryWorldwide*, it was not uncommon to hear team leaders complaining openly about particular agents, and the trading of advice on how to manage them.

In one such conversation over Sam, an agent with several years of experience at *DeliveryWorldwide* and also several years experience at another large call centre servicing clients of an international corporation, Hal expressed his frustration at Sam's habitual recalcitrance and even aggressive response to feedback from quality evaluations. He said, "I'm glad he's not on my team anymore, but I sure don't like talking to him about his evaluations. He just snaps at'cha!" Max, Sam's current team leader, replied:

[266] Taylor and Bain (2003) indicate that workers can demonstrate sarcastic resistance against management with relative impunity, if performing it in open view of others. As told above, management actions against such resistance can backfire and damage the manager's credibility by demonstrating how heavy-handed or openly oppressive he or she is or can be.

> Yeah. I don't like it either. But if I'm gonna have to do it, I'm not gonna let him push me around. Y'know, like the TV commercial, 'don't ever let em see you sweat' I just stare 'im down. Eventually, he blinks first.

The conversation continued over several minutes, with other team leaders joining and providing examples of their encounters with Sam. Meetings thus provide these team leaders, operating in a management context with a 'backstage' venue to protest, appeal for assistance or simply engage in what is in many companies characterised as ritual bitching about others and situations.[267] In these actions, team leaders demonstrated their orientation to K/knowledge of the organisation and themselves as experienced agents, and a responsibility to exercise that K/knowledge.

There were also instances in which agents demonstrated resistance against social forces in the workplace. Like many workplaces, these call centres were a source of socialisation for many workers, sometimes spreading to more than just working hours. *DeliveryWorldwide*, *BigTech* and *MHealth* all had corporate social functions – company picnics, holiday parties and the like. It was also common for agents to form informal 'social committees' in order to sponsor fund-raising efforts to support or embellish company-sponsored social activities. Additionally, agents commonly took it upon themselves to decorate the workplace, or formed informal groups to do so (Figure 73, Figure 74, Figure 75).

[267] Compare this with the team leader who changes her or his affect to agents in order to facilitate good relations with non-management co-workers, as described in footnote 211.

Figure 73. A Dog Statue Decorated per the Season by a *MedAdvise* Nurse.

Figure 74. Halloween Decorations at *MHealth*

Figure 75. Agent Cube Farm at *BigTech* (Note American Flag in Foreground and Canadian Flag in Background)

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, an annual company picnic was organised and held on a Saturday at the call centre. Some agents sold candy and snacks during the workday to raise money to increase the funds from that provided by the organisation for this picnic. Photographs from previous picnics were displayed in the breakroom and occasionally on agents' cubicle walls. One of the team leaders attempted to begin a regular bowling night, cards night, etc. for other team leads and their spouses. At *BigTech*, an annual picnic was also held, though during work hours – agents were permitted to participate during their lunch break. Because lunch breaks were spread from about 10:00AM until 3:00PM, the activity spanned much of the workday. *MHealth* organised several 'department lunches' at which attendance was mandatory, and the company pitched in for lunch at a restaurant within walking distance. It was also the case that agents developed their own friendships and organised their own private outings. Topics of discussion between agents often addressed golf, bowling, fishing, picnics, their children, and other non-work topics.

The extent to which workplaces become a location for both work and social activities has been called 'work centrality' (Hyman et al. 2003). In a study touching on work centrality in call centres and software development businesses, Hyman, Baldry, Scholarios and Bunzel (2003) indicate that while popular among many employees, the larger proportion of workers in the surveyed businesses preferred not to take part in such activities, citing a desire to keep work and home lives separate. Similar things were observed in the call centres participating in this study.

In particular, many of the agents at *DeliveryWorldwide* refused to participate in the company-organised social activities, citing a desire to keep themselves and their family life separate from the workplace. One agent told that she and her family

participated in the activities briefly, but had since decided they'd "rather keep our own friends rather than have to make friends with everyone at work – or pretend to". In so doing this agent, and others I spoke with, expressed a preference toward developing a subjectivity that was less dependent on or linked to the relations constructed by the workplace and its proponents. Though nobody put it into words, by their behaviour, it appears that workers may be weary of organisational pressures to be subjects of the company when on the clock, and preferred to have the ability to control their own subjectivity when away from work. In so doing, workers also take responsibility for knowledge of their own selves and use it to produce subjectivity that is separate from the workplace.

In all of the cases noted so far in this chapter, agents demonstrate in various ways how they have some authority over their own subjectivity. Various techniques and strategies are developed and deployed in manipulating how one is seen, heard and inscribed by the official technology-mediated gaze, finding or creating 'spaces' within the relations that comprise power in an otherwise disciplined and managed workplace, and asserting one's independence and autonomy in ways that may not directly affect these relations, but which highlight their tenuous and continuously constructed nature (Garfinkel 1967, 1986; Latour 1986, 1999b; Zimmerman 1970). Sometimes agents reject these relations outright, separating their selves from the relations that produce power and organisational subjectivity in various ways. These technologies of the self provide workers with their own resources and a degree of freedom in appropriating the organisation's resources for their own purposes. While the workers may not be 'free' of relations that make up the organisation's discipline and managerial powers, they have a degree of latitude *within* these relations to engage in a struggle for subjectivity. By acting in the 'spaces left free', workers

actively demonstrate how they are not dominated, and instead free to choose options for themselves that are made available in the constellation of relations that come to exist. In exercising this freedom, they accept responsibility for the subject they produce, whether it becomes examinable from the point of view of official organisational Knowledge or from their own personal knowledge.[268]

g. Exit

As described above, secondary adjustments and resistance come in many forms. For those who find no satisfaction in any of these methods, or for those who conclude that there is no other recourse, there is always one more option – exit (Foucault 1994b, 1996b). While for Foucault, exit was frequently associated with suicide or other 'limit' acts, exiting from the workplace remains an option for any employee. However, it is in the accounts provided by workers themselves that decisions to exit become relevant for inclusion here.

At *MHealth*, two new agents were hired shortly after fieldwork commenced at that location. One of these, Rabbie, was a recent college graduate whose undergraduate major course was psychology. The other, Verity, had also recently graduated from college with an undergraduate degree in international business. Rabbie was hired following on from the organisation's idea that it would be beneficial if its agents were knowledgeable in psychology. Verity was hired for two reasons. First, she is fluent in Spanish as well as English – there is occasionally a

[268] While Foucault's 'Discipline & Punish' and other works (Ellul 1971; Foucault 1995; West, C. 2001) can be read as books portraying increasing social control, Foucault himself and others have argued consistently that discipline and governmentality are at their most forceful when they exist in a field of freedom (Foucault 1980a, 1981, 1988a, 1988d, 1993, 1997a; Foucault, Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983; Quinby 1991; Ransom 1997; Rose, N. 1999c, 1999d). While unique programs, strategies and technologies exist here and show new ways that subjects are produced and produce themselves, the same points are made throughout this report. Thus, no matter the appearance of domination and impenetrability, modern subjects always have room to manoeuvre.

need to work with Spanish-speaking callers. Additionally, she has several years of experience in customer-facing work as a hotel desk manager. With these combined, she was considered to have important skills sought after by the organisation.

It so happened that Rabbie and Verity were also the first persons I would have the chance to observe during their training period. Both also agreed to participation in the study. During their on-the-job training period, I observed them and the training process itself. While I was involved in this observation, I also maintained their scheduled work hours, breaks and lunch period. This permitted me to talk with them about their training and related matters when they were not actually *in training* or otherwise responsible for being involved in work.

Early in his tenure at *MHealth*, Rabbie was optimistic, even enthusiastic about the work – even though it was all new to him:

> I feel like I'm able to make a difference. I mean, the people who call really *need* the things this company does. I'm only embarrassed that I'm learning slowly and wish I could do things more quickly for 'em.

Regarding his co-workers, he was similarly positive:

> [Co-workers are] great. Everybody here seems to really care about how I'm doing. Yazmine and Maude [two other agents with about two months experience] are always willing to help me when I have a question – of course I have to wait until they're off a call before I ask – it seems like everyone's always busy but they're also nice when you ask for help.

Similarly, Verity lauded her co-workers and the company:

> ...they're really nice. I had to take care of things at my apartment when the phone broke and I had optometrist appointments that took longer than my lunch break, but they let me take the time and make it up later. That's better than when I worked at the hotel! If you had to take some time there it was like pulling teeth! I know it makes it harder on the others when I'm not here, but I'd do the same for them.

In fact, she, and others, did cover for their co-workers when asked. She said, "it's kinda like a family. You help each other out 'cause you're all in it together". Rabbie concurred with this consideration of co-workers in the call centre as a family.

Only a month into their employment, their passing comments and responses to informal interview questions began to show a change. Rabbie still felt the work was important for the customers, but began to conclude that the company's policies and practices were at odds with *his* values:

> I feel like these people [the callers] really need us. We're here to make sure they get access to counsellors so they can make their lives better. I mean, I want to make sure they have confidence in me and in the company, that we're gonna make their lives better. But, y'know, if I've gotta constantly rush to get through with a call because there's another one in queue, I feel like I can't *help* that person! It's worse when Krin [the call centre team leader] asks me to hurry and 'get that call in queue' – I *know I have to get it*, but when she says that all of a sudden I know that she thinks *I'm not doing my job*! I think my job is to help people, but [the company] thinks my job is to answer more calls – even if I have to rush through every call to do that!

Verity began to tell similar feelings. She actually approached Krin and asked for overtime so that she could catch up on the backlog of paperwork produced by her resistance to 'rushing' through calls.

> I don't wanna have to rush through every call just to get the next one. It's like [the company doesn't] care about the current call, they only care about the next one! If they want us to make a good impression for the company, they've gotta let us do that and not keep pushing us to rush through calls.
>
> When I asked them if I could have some overtime to finish all this [gesturing to the pile of forms on her desk], *they told me I wasn't working fast enough*. It's like they thought I was just trying to take advantage of them and get overtime pay! *I care about the customers – THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT THE CUSTOMERS!*

Both Rabbie and Verity express a conflict described by Hochschild (1985) – the (typically female) worker is expected to approach work with an altruistic aim that is then appropriated by the company and converted for its own ends. While for Hochschild these ends involved the forced display of emotions, for Rabbie and Verity – as for most of the agents in the call centres described here – an altruistic

orientation was subordinated to an interest in *production* and *quantified quality* (see also, Ritzer 2000b, pp. 62-82) with the result being, as demonstrated by their statements, disenchantment and eventual detachment from the work.

In February, about seven months into her employment, Verity announced her resignation. One week later, Rabbie announced his. Rabbie announced plans to go to graduate school in New Zealand, and a desire to spend time preparing for his move out of the country the following June. Verity told that she was moving back to her hometown to think about what she wanted to do next.

One day, when walking out of the building at the end of his workday, Rabbie told what he said was the 'real reason' for his resignation so far in advance of his planned departure for graduate school:

> I still think it's a good thing *MHealth* is doing. They're helping people get to counselling so they can make their lives better. I just don't think I can keep doing this until I leave for grad school. Y'know, I like what they're [*MHealth*] doing. But I don't like how they're doing it and how they want to make me do it. I'm not gonna give up my values for the company.

Verity's comments were similar. Face to face with the company's implicit pressures to alter their values about service to people, both chose exit. Following their resignations, Kam, the call centre manager told me in an off hand remark, "I don't think they were a good fit for the company" and then offered a justification, "[s]ure; we do customer service for people with mental health problems. But we're a business", as if to account for the very apparent orientation that business pressures for efficiency should trump service to customers – something that seems hopelessly embedded in Ritzer's McDonaldization thesis as one symptom of modern society (Ritzer 2000b). In their exit, both Rabbie and Verity maintained an orientation to their selves and their personal subjectivity that is admirable. Rather than bargain it off for the job, a paycheck or something else, they chose to move on. This is not to

say that their decision is the universally correct move for anyone in their position. Both Rabbie and Verity are just starting their adult lives. Other agents at *MHealth* were equally frustrated but were faced with responsibility for family and other matters that did not burden Rabbie and Verity. While Rabbie and Verity remained faithful to what they freely chose to be responsible for and to, so did the others, and they made decisions consistent with how they interpreted their responsibilities. In any case, all of those described here have some degree of freedom in their ability to exercise their personal and professional selves, and are always responsible for decisions made in this exercise. In so doing, they accept or act upon power such that they are active in producing their own selves (Rose, N. 1999c). The various decisions made by these individuals show the diversity of options that obtain in any situation, even one as highly regulated as the call centre.

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, it was unusual for agents who had successfully passed through the 90 day probationary period to resign.[269] When an employee did so, it was exceptional. When Cassie, an employee with nearly six years in the call centre, resigned, it was a cause for muted celebration! Far from being disliked, Cassie had friends in the call centre and extended this friendship to social activities out of the workplace. She was also known by the organisation as one of its most productive workers, with an average call length *well under* two minutes and thirty seconds.

When I observed and talked with Cassie, only a few days into fieldwork at *DeliveryWorldwide*, during a few second lull between calls, she offered:

> I really don't like this job. I used to work at Micrax [a local manufacturer] on the assembly line. I liked that a *lot more*. It wasn't hard but it was physical, and at the end of the day you can look over and see what you've done – that pile of stuff in boxes was what we did. Here, it's different. You sit here all day getting a fat ass and sore wrists and at the end of it there's

[269] The organisation reported employee attrition only *after* this 90 day period. This made it possible not to report the fact that up to 90% of employees hired resigned within that 90 day period. The trainer at this *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre indicated its official attrition rate was less than 10% per year.

> nothing to show for it – it's like you haven't done anything at all! If I could be back at Micrax, I'd be there. But, y'know that business, feast or famine. They laid off a lot of the plant so here I am. The pay's better here, but I'd rather be doing that.

Two calendar years later, near the end of fieldwork, I learned that Cassie had just worked her last day. Some workers were shocked at her departure, remarking how she'd never find another job that paid as well. Her friends disagreed. Beverly, an agent with almost as much experience, told me:

> [S]he'd been going to night school. Only a few of us knew about it. She didn't want to go telling everyone she was doing it. She went to school for finance and something-or-other. Now she's working at Kronus Bank – y'know, that big building downtown. She says she's still sitting on her fat ass all day [laugh], but she can talk with people and apply what she learned in school instead of being plugged into headphones all day. I'll miss her, but I'm really *happy* for her!

Others in Cassie's circle of friends made similar remarks, "we're happy that she got out of here. This place is nuts".

Exit was a goal for others too, and its occurrence was also celebrated in various ways. At *BigTech*, Aubrey and Sid mused about finding other jobs. However, their goal was not to get out of *BigTech*, rather to get out of the call centre. Aubrey, a QSS who had been promoted up from a regular agent, told:

> The call centre is a dead end. They're outsourcing everything and only a few agents will be left pretty soon. I let Rhia [his supervisor] know that I wanna move up into the business end of the business – get out of this technical stuff. She's been giving me more and more projects to do, trying to help me build a reputation and a record that I can do that stuff. It may take some time, but I'll get out of here.

In a phone interview with Sal, another *BigTech* agent, after intensive fieldwork had ended, I asked about Aubrey. Sal told me in excited voice:

> Oh! He got named to go to a project management workshop! That's a really big deal! The company only picks a few people a year to do that and he got it! He's on his way outta here.
>
> I gotta tell ya' though, I wanted to get to go to that workshop too. But he's better 'n me and he deserves it more. Plus, he's a lot younger. If I can hang on here for awhile longer I'll be able to retire okay, combining my military pension with my investments from here... He's got a long time to work and he deserves this chance!

Syd had a different idea. He had used the company's tuition reimbursement program to fund an MBA with a concentration in human resources management. He constantly haunted the company's internal job postings – even when he was performing met/not-met evaluations on agents' work. He told me:

> It's only a matter of time. I'll find [a job] that fits. I do so much research on these jobs. it's like I know every person you'll have to interview with and all the ins and outs. Plus I know the company and I've got an MBA. Somebody will eventually take notice and I'll get a rope out of this hole [laughing]!

So, where resistance and secondary adjustments take many forms, so does the ultimate form – exit. For Rabbie and Verity at *MHealth*, resistance to the corporate alteration of their own value systems leads to the decision to exit. Cassie's quiet pursuit of a night school diploma was fuelled by her dislike of the workplace. For Aubrey, Syd and Sal, the pursuit of a 'rope' out of the call centre was aimed internally, at other parts of the business. Cassie, Aubrey, Syd and Sal share something in common. They all used company resources – tuition assistance[270] or company sponsored workshops – in an effort to make themselves eligible for other jobs either outside or inside the company, and to give themselves other chances for a new or altered subjectivity. That said, it is the case that Aubrey's, Syd's and Sal's aims are also subject to the governmentality of the organisation – efforts to shape the workforce by making particular options available to them – options that have been instituted due to their potential to help the company. For them, however, the goal is exit – the final option for a subject who otherwise finds no way out. As with those at *MHealth*, Cassie, Aubrey, Syd and Sal are all demonstrating an orientation to forms of K/knowledge, and are individually exercising choice to use or alter the relations

[270] As noted above, Taz, an agent at *BigTech*, was also pursuing education through the company's tuition assistance program. As with Cassie and Syd, his goal is also to make himself eligible for another job.

made available in their workplaces to pursue other goals. These choices also exhibit their taking on of responsibility for their own selves, whether it is governed by the organisation or otherwise.

3. Chapter Summary: Subjectivity in the Margins

As shown above, secondary adjustments and resistance are actions with significance within the relations from which power is produced. Their existence also signifies that the actors within these power relations have freedom to devise and deploy actions even when in these relations. Thus, they are not held in domination – power cannot exist where there is no freedom, and subjects and subjectivity do not exist where there is no power (Foucault 1994b). In fact, secondary adjustments and resistance are essential components of power – they dimension its phenomenal edges and its current reach, and at the same time induce a force that holds such acts in a sort of orbit around it, thus allowing them to be recognisable by this relation. Note, however, that secondary adjustments and resistance do not dimension power in universal terms. Rather, secondary adjustments and resistance expose its edges and reach only in terms of the relations that exist 'right now, right here' as they are for the individuals that live them.

Where there is power, there are secondary adjustments and resistance (Foucault 1990a, p. 95; 2001; Goffman 1961, pp. 304-305; West, C. 2001, p. 141). They are mutually shaped and mutually shaping. The agonistic relation between secondary adjustments, resistance, power and K/knowledge is one in which each is given shape. The relations that make up power also influence the way secondary adjustments and resistance are activated (Bain & Taylor 2000; Barnes 2004; Foucault

1990a, p. 95; Knights & McCabe 1998; Taylor, P. & Bain 2003; Winiecki 2004b). Different contexts will give rise to variant adjustments and resistance. This refers to what has been called a *tactical polyvalence* in discourse (Foucault 1990a, p. 98f).

Through secondary adjustments, workers demonstrate their knowledge of the systems they inhabit and are subjected to. They also demonstrate their knowledge of how the organisation sees them, examines them and attempts to subjectify them – in the present research, in terms of data that is produced through particular disciplinary and governmental programs, technologies and strategies activated in practices of dividing, partitioning, observing, inscribing, examining, coaching, counselling and cajoling. While it is the case that the worker engaging in these adjustments is also orienting to those visibilities, examinations and subjectifications, the worker demonstrates through secondary adjustments that the *dispositif*, the set of relations that make up power in the call centre, is not congealed, stabilised or fixed. Instead, it is filled with potential gaps that may be inhabited or produced by workers so as to alter the relation of forces, while in many cases, examinations make it appear that everything is going along as expected – the workers can 'hide in plain sight' as they deploy secondary adjustment practices.

That is, secondary adjustments allow the worker to act in ways inconsistent with the organisation's desires and yet go largely unnoticed, because these actions do not *observably* decay the structure or the contents of the organisation's examination apparatus. In Sheila's decision not to follow the organisation's definition of 'friendly' or Hal's decision not to produce quality evaluations that document an agent's 'bad day' at work, no traces remain. The organisation is literally blind to them and as a result, for all practical purposes, these events do not exist for the organisation. However, Sheila's and Hal's actions alter the workplace insofar as they

permit these events to exist unreported, undisciplined and unapprehended by the organisation, and as a result the practitioners of these adjustments ensure their persistence where the organisation would rather expunge them if it could locate and identify them. Also, the workers' ability to enter data – any data – into some fields of their databases in order to reduce pressures on their selves serves notice that the organisation's gaze and power is not as penetrating as one might initially imagine, and that an individual has subjectivity that is not owned by the organisation. That is, these adjustments alter the lived reality of the call centre while preserving the surface appearances made possible by examinations. 'Bouncing' calls and 'flashing' in the queue also permit the workers some space, however tethered to the system and short-lived, to control their activity and how the organisation sees, inscribes, examines, subjectifies, disciplines and governs them.

Similarly, agents' tactical use of the mute switch on their phones is something that alters the organisation's gaze at an even lower level – a power relation put literally at the fingertips of agents themselves. This power is variously used to permit the agent to mute sneezes, coughs and the like, to eat and drink, to mouth epithets directed at the customer or company, to question or converse with peers, etc. – things that in and of themselves may not alter the apparatus of the organisation, but which obscure actions that may be proscribed, thus providing some unauthorised satisfactions by unauthorised means (Goffman 1961, pp. 54-55).

Appropriating the tools and technologies provided to them by the company, agents can engage in hidden conversations, check personal E-mail and even play online games at the same time a call is being worked. These also alter the relation of forces normally considered to be stabilised in the call centre. Subjects remain visible in the same ways the organisation intends, but they have found ways to fracture time

and the gaze into multiple pieces so that the organisation sees what it wants and the worker gets something too.

It is also the case that workers can exhibit highly visible resistance to customers (the evil twin!), managers and each other, and tactically deploy and account for such in ways that lessen its impact on the worker's official subjectivity, or allow other subjectivity to arise. Flaunting rules or decorum publicly also provides the worker with the ability to assert the tenuousness of the organisation's disciplinary and managerial power, and thus come with their own rewards and their own considerable force in the face of organisational force – all in an agonistic relation that allows the agent to alter the constitution of power without changing the data-driven appearances of the organisation.

Exit provides the individual with one option otherwise not considered (Foucault 1994b, 1996b). Without a desire to submit to the subjectifying forces of one's surroundings, an individual can choose to exit to the unknown prospects of one's wits and providence. In some cases the individual can also find exit *within* the apparatus one currently inhabits. While this shares links to the organisation's governmental or managing forces, it can also prove a viable option for an individual with few other prospects.

These practices open or utilise gaps in the discourses and strategies of these organisations, colonising them, covering them, camouflaging them, but always drawing together resources somehow ready at hand in the organisation to redirect or tap the flow of power for one's own use. This opening up, this existence of gaps and un-patrolled spaces in the discourses and apparatuses that make up systems, is a constant theme through Foucault's body of work (Foucault 1972, p. 119ff; 1990a, p. 41ff; 1995, p. 79).

Also consistent in his work is the notion that power is not a repressive force. Rather, it is a *productive* force (Foucault 1995, p. 194). Not only this, but the forces from which power to produce subjects arise, can also be used by those subjects to affect their own subjectivity and sometimes, the overall apparatus. In addition to Foucault's considerable work on the topic, these many practices reflect ideas of Dorothy Smith, Donna Haraway and Barbara Townley (Haraway 1990, 2004a; Smith, D. 1987b, 1990b, 1990c; Townley 1994) in which actors' voices may be freed and amplified to alter the codified organisational Knowledge and the apparatuses through which it is produced, and in so doing, alter the direction and flow of power in a *dispositif* toward a more egalitarian configuration.

It remains the case that these adjustments and resistances are performed using resources readily accessible to the agents. Consequently, even when not fully disciplined or managed, the worker is still attached to the relations that comprise power to subjectify, to produce subjects and subjectivity. These relations keep the actors 'linked in' as if by a centripetal force. However, these forces not only affect the workers when they are at work. As will be described and illustrated in the next chapter, workers also use what they see as resources made available by the organisation to construct parts of their lives outside of work – however, a construction in which the actors themselves already have a leading role.

CHAPTER 2: BUILDING STRUCTURE WITH TECHNOLOGIES FROM WITHIN THE SELF & FROM OUTSIDE THE SELF

1. Setting the Scene

It is a late summer day – nearly 40 degrees outside. As I stand near the front of the building, looking out one of the few windows, I can see the heat rising off the *DeliveryWorldwide* parking lot, warping the view – yet the temperature inside is a cool 18 degrees. I remember the words of one agent:

> It's not such a bad job. We've got air conditioning, no heavy lifting, no physical danger,[271] good benefits and a working wage. I used to work in a convenience store in Union City[272] and we'd get robbed every couple weeks – sometimes with a guy carrying a gun or knife!

At the other end of the call centre, I notice Lonnie preparing to leave. He stuffs a sweatshirt, soft-sided insulated lunch box, and today's newspaper into a backpack and begins heading for the door. I had already alerted him of my desire to interview him and other agents, and I had made a mental note this morning to schedule a time to interview him, but I got wrapped up in observations and conversations with other agents and management and time got away from me. Now would be my last chance to talk with him for a few days, because I am scheduled to do fieldwork at another call centre next week.

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[271] That said, many workers at *DeliveryWorldwide* wear the wrist cuffs available from orthopaedists and at the chemist to reduce the pain of repetitive stress disorder – a primary impact of years of incessant typing on the job. One of the nurses at *MedAdvise* has had several surgeries on her wrists to cut open the carpel tunnel – a sheath through which the tendons that move your fingers pass from their muscles in the forearm. Constant rubbing of these tendons on the inside of the carpel tunnel produces chronic inflammation and pain – the symptoms of carpel tunnel syndrome. One QSS at *BigTech* actually had orders from a physician to limit the time he spent typing on any given day.

[272] A pseudonym – the same pseudonym of the city where John Van Maanen did fieldwork for his ethnography of police work (Van Maanen 1988b). I choose this name only as a joke, for I have no idea if *my* Union City is the same as Van Maanen's.

He's standing near the time clock at the entrance door as I walk up, searching the board on which agents place their ID cards, for his. I interrupt him just as he pulls his card from its slot. "Lonnie?" I ask, "I want to schedule a series of interviews with you. Gotta minute?"

"Sure" he says, watching the clock on the time clock as I fumble to open my calendar. When it clicks to 2:30PM, his scheduled quitting time, he slides his ID card through a magnetic card-reader slot, punching out, and re-inserts his card into the board.

As I get my calendar open, I turn to allow him to see its pages, so he can get a view of the month. "We can do it just about anytime after next week – I gotta be at another call centre next week.[273] What day and time do you think you could take about an hour to talk?"

"Maybe Monday would be a good day," he said as he pointed to the day in my calendar. "Let's do it right after my shift ends. My wife doesn't start work until later in the afternoon and she can keep her eye on the kids when they get home from school until I get home."

Okay, I nod, and scribble the note in my calendar. "I'll check with you when I get here that day, just to make sure it's still okay".

"I'm sure it will be. My wife and I do this all the time. I run all the errands after work. We arranged our work schedules so there would always be somebody home when the kids are. I see the kids off in the morning when she's sleeping, and she gets up in time to greet the kids when they get home from school. She doesn't start her job at *her* call centre until about 7PM so we'll have plenty of time".

[273] It was common knowledge that my project had me travelling to four different call centres in the area.

a. Building Structure With Manufactured Structures

On the surface, Lonnie's situation is not altogether unusual. American families are commonly funded by two jobs, one held by each parent. In some cases, one individual considers the job to be a career, and the other wage earner more or less adds a second income. In other cases, such as with Lonnie and his wife, jobs are not so much selected for their career potential as they are for the wage and other factors.[274]

In subsequent interviews, Lonnie told me that he had always wanted to be a nurse – a job his mother held, and one that he thought was admirable and reflected his vision of what it was to be a socially-responsible individual. "I'm not smart enough to be a doctor, but I could do nursing – plus it's more hands on with people. I like that part."

In our interview several weeks after the above conversation, he told that even for a while after starting work at *DeliveryWorldwide*, he entertained visions of taking advantage of the tuition reimbursement policy of the company to attend the local university's night classes and earn a nursing degree and license. He mused:

> That kind of went away after a couple of years. We [he and his wife] started a family and then all of a sudden I didn't have the desire to do so much for my career as I did to take care of my kids. Funny how life does that to ya... Plus, my daughter has a chronic medical condition that we've really gotta keep an eye on and one of us [he or his wife] have to be there pretty much whenever she's around.

[274] Hochschild has produced an accounting of the toll a dual-career family can take on home life and childrearing (Hochschild 1998). As with her work on emotional labour, her findings are unsettling and problematising. Curiously, from her discussion, while it is clear that the highly disciplined and governed workplace provides a highly regulated workplace, such a highly regulated workplace can actually be *more comfortable* for some than a chaotic, unpredictable home life with children. The result is, for some, the creation and adoption of technologies of the self that lead the worker to be able to cope better within the rules and restrictions of a workplace than at home where there are typically no such things. Perhaps predictably, having developed and enacted comfortable technologies of the self at work, the parent develops other technologies of the self that excuse his or her voluntary overwork, leading to increased fatigue and decreased ability to cope with the relative chaos at home. A vicious circle forms and as work hours increase, the stability of families decreases.

> So I got this job and I always make sure I have an early shift. My wife – she's always been a night person – found a job in another call centre where she can work overnight. We balance our schedules so one of us is always home.

Lonnie told of another positive outcome of he and his wife both working in call centres, in contrast to what he has been told by other agents.

> [My wife and I] can commiserate with each other. Some of the other agents here complain that their husband or wife just doesn't understand the stress of this job. They [that is, the spouse] scoff and say, '...you're just talking on the telephone! How tough can that be?' They just don't understand! It can be really tough! With me and my wife, we can complain about each other's jobs and the asshole customers we had to deal with and the stupid polices of the company and that sort of stuff, and know that we're not being perceived as a whiner! I understand what she's going through and she understands what I'm going through. It's like, when I get home I bitch to her for a half-hour and when she gets home she bitches for a half-hour. It really works out great! It's so much easier when you get understanding and support. The only down side is, our kids have learned some words they probably shouldn't have [laughing]!

Lonnie tells that he and his wife have been able to take advantage of the temporal requirements of their jobs in order to fashion a schedule that, while having blocked off access to his original plans for career and self-actualisation, allows he and his wife to satisfactorily deal with their present personal desires, obligations and values as parents – some of which, at least, were entirely unpredictable when Lonnie started work at *DeliveryWorldwide*. Having an individual who can understand the personal stresses and frustrations of the job is an added benefit too. Lonnie's and his wife's strategy and tactics for taking advantage of features of the workplace instantiate various technologies of the self that, while drawing upon stable factors from the highly regulated ecology of the workplace, have been channelled into his and his wife's home lives. In so doing, there is a confluence between work and home that exceeds a purely financial or consumption-oriented gain, as was hypothesised by Burawoy in his accounting for 'manufactured consent' in the machine shop (Burawoy 1979); this situation differs from the gendering of work that satisfies the male workers' desire for *some sort of dominion*, as hypothesised by Cockburn

(Cockburn 1983). Instead, Lonnie and his wife are *using* aspects of their work lives in order to fulfil their responsibilities at home. They have also realised some serendipitous benefits, and come to recognise call centres as a much better situation than as described by some of their co-workers.

On the one hand, this demonstrates how an autonomous actor is able to make more or less free use of 'resources' existing at work to enhance or reinforce more than just consumption or patriarchal practices, and to develop one's life from personally held desires and values. On the other hand, the result is a *self-*manufactured confluence of work and home in which he and his wife have come to link themselves to some of the regulative characteristics of the call centre. Even in satisfying conditions of one aspect of their out-of-work lives and demonstrating autonomy from theoretical universals, they have freely bound themselves to the workplace – but translating parts of it to satisfy features of their home life.

This is not to say that the workplace now controls Lonnie's and his wife's home lives – though their decisions are surely linked to it. Instead, this demonstrates the agonistic nature of power – a boxing match in which the actor's moves are not *caused by* power in the workplace, but rather in which an actor's moves are imbricated with that power (Cooper 1994; Willmott 1990). Through this boxing match, power can be divided, redirected or blended with other forces to give it new meaning in one's own life, or, as noted in the previous chapter, in the workplace itself.

Similarly, Taz, an agent at *BigTech* who, as described in the previous chapter, uses his special knowledge of and access to the ACD, and his view of the queue, to ensure he can always go home on time and pick up his kids from school, and who is taking courses to qualify him for other types of work, uses the structure of the

organisation to facilitate his duties and values as a person who is not *just* a call centre agent. He is appropriating the organisation's rationality and power in ways that free other options for his present and his future – finding ways that give him options he would not otherwise have (Foucault 1988a, 1997a).

Taz contrasts this with his wife, who is a nurse in one of the hospitals in this town:

> She works the afternoon shift and she hates her job. The doctors are assholes and she just feels like she's getting shit on all day. She never knows how she's being evaluated and always worries that they're gunnin' for her.[275] There's one doctor that is always trying to catch her doing something wrong – a real prick. Here, it's different. Even if people are gunnin' for ya, the stats and the met/not-met are out there plain as day for us – the stats are the stats and they can't change 'em. We know how we're being evaluated. I've got it better than some of the others here, because I can see the queue [as he gestures to the computer screen displaying it], but even without it you know where you stand [because] you can see it on the printouts every month.
>
> We're all gonna get laid off eventually – y'know they're moving just about all the call centre stuff to India – but even so, I'm taking classes and [BigTech] is paying for 'em. I'll have a business degree in a year or so and as long as I can hang on to this job until I have that degree, I might just get another job at BigTech, or start my own business.

In the previous chapter, Taz tells how he is able to take advantage of the company's schedules – in a way similar to that described by Lonnie – to ensure he will always be able to pick up his kids from school and fulfil his parental responsibility while his wife is at work. He also describes that the regularity and apparent solidity of the gaze of the organisation and its examination practices provide something of a less-stressful job than that experienced by his wife. While she appears to have a less structured job, he perceives that its lack of consistent examination practices – at least in contrast to what he is familiar with at his job – makes for a much less satisfactory work arrangement! He also makes it clear that he is using the organisation's tuition reimbursement policy to fund his personal

[275] This is a slang reference to worries that the organisation might fire her or lay her off on account of some arbitrary performance criterion.

development for other types of work that, consistent with the aspirations of Aubrey, Sal and Syd in the previous chapter, will likely get him out of the call centre.

Taz is telling that the resources he is provided at work and his savvy over how to *use* those resources to make his workday easier, or at least more predictable, provide for a more satisfactory and more defensible present and a potentially more promising future for him and his family. In so doing he is, as Lonnie is above, drawn into a closer relation with the workplace – though a relation over which he seems to have some important authority. As above, while linked in to the organisation's power, and produced, in part through this relation, he is able to translate parts of the relation of power in ways that serve not just *BigTech's* organisational ends, but also personal ones that open new options for the future and contribute to the production of new subjectivity and knowledge. Doing so calls him into other relations than those experienced at work, relations that require him to make decisions for how to use the resources he is provided, and a responsibility to be aware of his own self and the Knowledge that surrounds and contributes to his production as a subject both at work and elsewhere (Rose, N. 1999c).

This self-manufactured confluence between work and home is not unusual. Ro and other nurses who are younger and have young children at home, say things similar to Lonnie at *DeliveryWorldwide* and Taz at *BigTech* :

> The part-time and mostly evening shifts we work here are actually good. I mean I don't always like leaving my kids at home with Dad, especially when they're sick, but this [job] lets me be at home when they're home and my husband is home when I'm at work. It's not a bad arrangement really. When I was a nurse for a local doctor both my husband and I had to be at work at the same time and day care costs and trying to rush home right after work were just terrible! This job is much better in that regard.

Lonnie's, Taz' and Ro's comments have something in common. The time constraints of their jobs actually provide them with resources they can *use* in the

creation of their family lives. They have all taken advantage of the highly structured nature of time in call centre work to be more than just a worker. They *use it* to translate Knowledge and power that facilitates their home lives.

Also, as noted above, many of the nurses at *MedAdvise* are nearing the end of their careers and can no longer comfortably withstand the considerable physical stresses and 12-hour long shifts common to ward nursing. The call centre provides them with a venue for continuing their career, but protects them from normal features of nursing that they can no longer tolerate. Graf, a six year veteran of the *MedAdvise* call centre, told:

> I was a labour and delivery nurse for more than 20 years. I can tell you that job requires a lot of heavy lifting. My back and my legs just couldn't handle it anymore. I'd go home and couldn't move for the rest of the day. It was hard just to get up and go to work the next day. I tried to do supervision, but I never liked the people problems. I mean, nurses are professionals and they have a lot of pride and self respect. Hospitals are more and more trying to do with less – there are lists of how long it should take to do this job and how long to do that job – like it's supposed to take a couple of minutes to go to the pharmacy and get drugs for a patient, and another minute or so to dispense medication to a patient – stuff like that.
>
> The head nurse is supposed to come up with schedules for the nurses based on those lists, and they start pushing nurses around like they're working in a factory![276] There was no time to spend with patients. I can tell you that most nurses just don't like that! And I didn't like to have to be the one to push them to do that.
>
> This job is different. We all depend on each other here. I've got 20 years in labour and delivery. Sally worked in a lab for like 15 years so she knows all the tests and stuff. Ro worked in telemetry[277] for a long time, and everyone else has their own expertise. We're all equals and can depend on each other and not have to push each other around. While I'd still be on the [ward] if my back could stand it, this is the next best thing to actually being with patients.
>
> Y'know, we still have to worry about stats and all, and some nurses could do a better job at that, but by and large, it's not so bad a place to work. Y'know. Even though we're supposed to average eight minutes per call for the month, you can take the time with a patient when you think it's necessary because there will be calls that take a lot less than that and it usually averages out in the end. Besides, no matter what I was doing in health care, stats and pressure to do more with less would be there. It's just become a common part of the work.[278]

[276] When I described scientific management and Taylorism to her, Graf was quick to agree that while she had never heard the terminology, it was readily apparent that Taylorism had definitely influenced health care.

[277] Cardiac procedures.

[278] This verifies the notion that the type of observations and theoretical attachments made throughout this report can be applied to other types of service work as well. I will address this again in Part 4 of the report.

Graf tells that the job fulfils a desire to continue nursing, but allows her to do so without the pain that accompanied the physical stresses of the job of ward nursing and which followed her home from work. It is not ideal, but a compromise she, and apparently other nurses, have made. Additionally, her knowledge that the business of health care is increasingly influenced by pressure to reduce costs, and that this pressure manifests itself in increasing rationalisation of work processes, schedules, and the like, allows her to conclude that this call centre is 'not a bad place to be'. The outcome is a willingness to accept the undesirable features of this workplace as ultimately acceptable, at least on account of what resources it provides to the worker to use at one's own discretion. These decisions by Lonnie, Taz, Ro and others are decisions that workers in TMTL, among other places, make and for which they are responsible, based on their knowledge of their own self and of the many contingencies that compete for attention in their lives (Rose, N. 1999c).

At *DeliveryWorldwide,* Sheila told of another part of the workplace's organisation and structure that she considers an advantage. Her orientation to maintaining consistently good statistics in productivity and quality have earned her several "Employee of the Month" awards from the call centre. This award comes with a plaque (of which she had a stack!) and a gift certificate redeemable at one of several local department stores – one of which is considered by her to be very high end:

> I can take my kids shopping at that store – a store we couldn't afford to shop in otherwise – and tell them that they're able to do this because I was a good worker, that when you're a good worker, you sometimes get special things that other workers don't.[279]

[279] However, Sheila resisted including the workplace into her personal life in other ways. In particular, she resisted company sponsored picnics, parties and employee get-togethers – things that would increase 'work centrality' in her own and her family's life (Hyman et al. 2003).

So Sheila uses her award as part of an object lesson to her children to pay attention to what is expected of them – what is their responsibility in the face of particular Knowledge of one's self and one's environment – then work to fulfil that expectation and sometimes to reap rewards for it. This life lesson for her children displays her orientation to the objectivising statistics of the workplace, and also alludes to her knowledge of 'how to produce good stats', but perhaps most poignantly, to an acceptance of responsibility for her own actions in the face of this knowledge (Rose, N. 1999c).[280]

She is not just a passive subject of the organisation's Knowledge and power, however. It is also the case, as indicated above, that Sheila actively participated in a quiet campaign to contest the organisation's effort to alter the way agents' quality is evaluated – she says she is a good worker, but by making that assertion she also demonstrates that being a good worker also includes occasional defiance and standing up for one's self in the face of organisational pressures – giving voice to the individual in ways that have definite impact on subjectivity production.

Sheila's use of the company's gift certificate exposes another feature of all of the examples provided above. While it is the case that these workers use the organisation's structures in ways that allow them to make themselves in other aspects of their lives – selves that fulfil their values and desires in everyday ways – it is also apparent that in so doing, the discipline and management from the workplace are translated outside of the workplace and into their personal lives – though not in

[280] While one could also argue that Sheila is training her children to be docile workers, just as one can assert that Graf is rationalising the workplace such that she is more docile in the face of its pressures, doing so would move toward a fatalist – lemmings to the sea – sort of conclusion. In contrast, as argued at several points in this report, Sheila and Graf are not simply allowing the organisation to tell them what they are, they actively participate in small campaigns that continuously challenge themselves and challenge the organisation such that it does *not* come to represent an ossified set of relations that dominate them and other workers. They are active participants in the translation of Knowledge and power, active participants in the production of their own subjectivity, even as they are faced with forces and power that they did not have a hand in creating.

predictable ways. Workers appropriate and alter the resources of their workplaces in different ways depending on their individual values, desires and goals and the contingencies they face as individuals. This is associated with the concept of 'tactical polyvalence of discourse' (Foucault 1990a, p. 98ff) – the idea that relations of power vary locally depending upon other constraints and conditions that may be present. It is also a reminder that there is no *necessary* future, no *absolute* outcome of lives and no *universal* trajectory of history, even in interaction with what appear to be very strong structures. The analytic provided by Foucault provides very useful tools for exposing and demonstrating these things.

b. Responsible Subjects and Subjectivity In TMTL

Lonnie, Taz, Graf and Sheila, among others, provide empirical demonstrations of how their organisations have affected their perspectives and options by creating workplace environments that both manufacture and steadily feed them with Knowledge about their selves, and that present them with options and perspective-shaping tactics that require them to make choices, choices that may open new options for them in some aspects while invisibly tethering them in others. However, as argued throughout this report, this manufactured environment and Knowledge, and these tactics, are not altogether the product of strategically planned acts by individuals. Instead they arise genealogically in a constellation of historical and local factors and contingencies, some long-standing and some emergent. This constellation of resources, which history and K/knowledge make available, interpretable and meaningful, requires individuals to act in contexts that arise in and from historical inertia, programmatically designed features, individual contextual

elements and serendipitous or accidental factors. The result is both an environment in which options for action are made available for individuals and in which unique options continuously arise.

Selecting from the former, the individual retraces the already established connections between resources and reifies the already-historical desires immanent in this constellation producing power in the organisation. Identifying and selecting from the latter allows an individual to fracture the existing constellation of factors and reorient it to make still other options possible both within and outside of its relations. The individual is thus not one hopelessly chained to an irresistible force, but rather one who is installed into this constellation with some ability, even an explicit responsibility, to come to terms with K/knowledge of the self and one's surroundings as produced both programmatically and through one's experience, and one's options, such that one freely makes decisions that contribute to the creation of one's self (Rose, N. 1999c, 1999d).

In his writing, Foucault resists any attempt at creating universals. However, he does make references to the distribution of general tactics and strategies across institutions and regions of society. In so doing, he gestures to the penetration of panopticism, hierarchical observation, normalising judgement and the like, across and through modern society (Foucault 1995, pp. 138, 144, 172, 210f, 228, 232, 248, 298). He clarifies that while there are similarities across institutions, the *specific ways* in which things like panopticism and the examination are enacted, differ (Foucault 1995, p. 236), often due to contextual factors like those encountered by Lonnie, Taz, Graf and Sheila.

The outcome appears in the form of technologies of the self – ways individuals come to have a knowledge of themselves and their contexts and to use

that knowledge in order to affect their own subjectivities (Foucault 1988d, 1994b; Rose, N. 1999c). Some of these technologies of the self are already channelled by the organisation – the individual just has to adopt and activate them. Others arise in the excesses produced inside the subjects' experience at work and also, as indicated above, outside of work. All of them, however, can be perceived as symptoms of a translation and adaptation of K/knowledge and power from one region of life or practice to another. This is consistent with Foucault's genealogical research as demonstrated in the 'middle period' of his work (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c; Foucault 1990a, 1995, 2000a, 2003). Contemporary studies of science, technology, engineering and society, and actor network theory (ANT), are beholden to Foucault's genealogical research, and utilise a similar perspective to demonstrate how the direct lines and tendrils of power affect and combine with the actions of individuals (in the vernacular of ANT to 'hybridise') to produce new blends of K/knowledge, technology, political practice, etc. (Kendall & Wickham 1999; Kitto 2003; Latour 1999a; Law 1992).

Doing so, however, calls upon the creative, even artistic, actions of individuals for realising the liberating potential in technologies of the self – to fashion one's self as an ongoing creative, even artistic, endeavour that does not take only the prepared Knowledge and options as the basis of how one should be and act, but that finds other ways to be (Foucault, Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983, p. 236ff; Haraway, Penley & Ross 1991; Quinby 1991). This does not suggest that one should deny Knowledge, but that one should act so as not to be dominated by it (Foucault 1994b, p. 15). The free actions of individuals within networks of power are, to Foucault, the source of such artistic options for the future. However, as demonstrated above, even in doing so, the subject is still in some ways affected by the power in the

organisations to which one belongs, or the discourses in which one finds one's self (Foucault 1988a, 1988e, 1993, 1994b; Fuller & Smith 1991; Greenbaum 1998; Kinnie, Hutchinson & Purcell 2000; Rose, N. 1999c).

Interconnections between various parts of these workers' lives allude to links in the relations that make power in both the workplace and the workers' home lives. However, these links are not appropriately seen as some sort of penetrating source of power that affects all. Instead, workers create, invent and adopt practices that permit, for example, the workplace to be linked with home lives in various ways, while still retaining authority over their home lives (Donzelot 1979; Foucault 1980b, pp. 188-189). That is, while workers are surely affected by the disciplinary and governmental structures and powers of the workplace, they are responsible for deciding how to manage and translate those things into their personal lives – if at all. The organisation does not attempt to control how the worker makes those accommodations. The worker is thus in a freely choosing, but always agonistic, relation with the Knowledge, power and 'truths' about one's self manufactured in the workings of an organisation.[281]

That these things happen is not as interesting as the ways in which actors experience them, and the roles that actors actively take in making links between work and non-work – in being disciplined and governed, but using their disciplined and governed status in ways that serve their personal aims through technologies of the self – in being a responsible subject for the company and of one's self as well (Rose, N. 1999c).

[281] From a more, but by no means canonically, structuralist point of view, this may also be perceived as evidence of habitus (Bourdieu 1990; Jenkins 1992) – "...a set of relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 16). Habitus orients to the reasonable subjective choices of individuals in the face of what appear to them to be objective conditions (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, pp. 129-130, 139-140). In terms of this project, habitus can be perceived as power arising from the historical experiences of the actors in situations similar to that presented to them in context.

Foucault permits one to recognise the interconnectedness of the relations that make up power – not only within the specific venue of research, but in other institutions and features of the social world that are also populated by members of the field being studied. That is, as described above, the fracturing and translation of power into other areas related to the field being studied.

2. Chapter Summary: Making the Most of What You've Got

What is described in this very brief chapter is that the power immanent in the relations of thought and artefacts, values and expectations, both at and outside of work, influences actors both at work and in aspects of their non-work lives that interface with it in various ways. While the boundary between work lives and lives when not at work is easily seen in the way the worker is enclosed, partitioned, disciplined, managed, examined and subjectified, the examples provided in this chapter show that the boundary is not altogether distinct. In fact, workers themselves facilitate these links between work and non-work facets of their lives, though much of the time choices to do so may not seem much like choices, as is the case when the responsible employee plans to leave one's house in order to be at work 'on time'. Consequently, the worker's subjectivity as an individual when not at work is influenced by structures found and experienced at work. Futures are affected, but not caused, through the workers' contact with disciplinary and governmental power in the workplace; such decisions and constraints make it such that society moves from the present and in the conditions and contexts that exist in the present, not solely from the inertial force of history, and certainly not from universals that control all for all time.

This can be seen as a means of making the most of what one is provided. After all, for many employed in tertiary labour, work is held in an instrumental relation to their lives outside of work (Batt, Hunter & Wilk 2003; Bowe, Bowe & Streeter 2000; Buchanan 2002; Cobble 1991; Hamper 1991; Kleemann & Matuschek 2002; Paules 1992; Terkel 1985) – a thing that enables consumption, education, recreation, family life, etc. or holds them over until 'a better opportunity' comes along (Buchanan 2002), and at any rate, not something that individuals always treat as an end in itself.[282]

This was certainly the case for most of the workers in these four call centres, with the main exception being some of the nurses at *MedAdvise* who, not denying the instrumental nature of work, also expressed a desire to continue their career even at a stage in their lives when they may no longer be able to withstand its normal physical rigours. Even with them, however, as for any worker in any job, the end of their shift was something that sometimes could not come soon enough.

"The simplest sociological view of the individual and his self is that he is to himself what his place in an organization defines him to be" (Goffman 1961, p. 320). This view – being a passive recipient of what one is provided – may facilitate the self-subjection of individuals in these call centres. If one perceives an instrumental relation with the work, one may very well see oneself in a position to

[282] At meetings sponsored by the local Economic Development Council (EDC) and Chamber of Commerce (CoC), managers, trainers and human resources personnel from call centres around the region mobilised a campaign, including print and radio advertisements, which attempted to promote call centre work as a viable career for young adults and retired persons (in fact, the near-retirement age wife of an official in the EDC worked in the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre, but was not an informant in this research). This was, in large part, influenced by what was considered to be a very high agent attrition rate among some of the largest call centres in the region. (Though, as noted in Appendix A, employee attrition was not considered to be a problem for the call centres participating in this study.) Little response was generated from this promotion. In addition, given the sociological definition of career – a series of vocational or other experiences that, ideally, provide to the individual an increase in vocational stability, earnings and status – call centre work can hardly be considered one on account that pay is generally low and the possibility for promotion in call centre organisations is small (Belt, Richardson & Webster 2000; Buchanan 2002).

simply fulfil the role already prescribed by the organisation as communicated through practices of enclosure, partitioning, disciplining, governing, examination and subjectification. As shown through vignettes of workers at work throughout this report, this occurs frequently. However, as shown by Lonnie, Taz, Graf and Sheila, it is not *just that* – workers can, and do, make more of what the organisation defines them to be. This is done by developing and activating technologies of the self that channel parts of the organisation into one's own life, and using them to satisfy needs and desires that originate there.

It is also the case that, because the workers are the ones involved in the development and activation of these technologies of the self, they can also 'de-activate' them whenever they might choose. This is what Taz plans to do when he earns his business degree, or Lonnie might do if he decides again that he wants to earn a nursing degree. Doing so continues to allow the individual to avoid being dominated by knowledge and power – even if it is knowledge and power that one has a hand in producing (Foucault 1994b, p. 15) – and to continue to have influence over one's own self and subjectivity. Indeed, as reflected throughout the chapters above, subjects are expected to take the responsibility to know one's self, (whether it be a Knowledge of one's self produced in the manufactured reality of the call centre or knowledge of one's self in other ways) and to act in terms of that K/knowledge.

3. Summary of Part 3: Secondary Adjustments, Resistance & Creation of the Self in TMTL

Chapters in this section of the report stand in contrast with those in the previous section. Where the chapters in Part 2 of this report document and illustrate

how workers are disciplined and governed in their conduct in terms of the organisation's program, technologies and strategies, chapters in this part of the report document and illustrate how workers develop, implement and deploy adjustments and resistance to the forces imposed by the organisation. Such adjustments and resistance contribute vitally to the production of a worker's subjectivity, both at work and out of work.

The concept of secondary adjustments is adopted here, in addition to the concept of resistance, in order to highlight how activities that are not precisely consistent with the organisation's rules, techniques, etc., but also not in direct opposition to the organisation or its components, can be very influential in deflecting or reorienting the forces from the organisation that produce its 'official' subjectivity and subjects while not overtly disrupting the organisation's programs. To use Goffman's own phrase, secondary adjustments are:

> ...practices that do not directly challenge staff[283] but allow inmates to obtain hidden satisfactions or to obtain permitted ones by forbidden means. These practices are variously referred to as 'the angles,' 'knowing the ropes,' 'conniving,' 'gimmicks,' 'deals,' or 'ins'. (Goffman 1961, p. 54)

That is, the more a worker knows about the organisation, the more resources he or she has at hand with which to recognise and take advantage of 'spaces left free' in the disciplinary and governmental aspects of the organisation. Taking advantage of this knowledge is more or less controlled by the workers and not subject to the authority of the organisation. The result are 'technologies of the self', which, as demonstrated in Part 2 of this report, can be incited by the organisation to produce good, loyal and self-subjecting workers. However, the variants described in this

[283] Thus, the institution.

chapter are different insofar as the worker is now more ‘in charge’ of how they are used.

In the commission of secondary adjustments, the worker adds, incorporates or deploys knowledge of the organisation, its goals, its ‘normal’ methods, and the individual’s values in ways that are not specifically authorised by the organisation, to gain some small satisfactions or to accomplish its goals by ‘other means’, which, in many cases also ensure some advantage to the worker. Typically this takes advantage of extant conditions, and in order to make local contexts and conditions sensible, tenable and practicable on a day to day basis, while at the same time not appearing to affect the overall goals of the organisation (Starkey & McKinlay 1998; Winiecki 2004b) – a sort of ‘hiding in plain sight’.

For example, when Hal, a team leader at *DeliveryWorldwide*, decides not to document a fellow agent’s ‘bad day’ in a quality evaluation, he does not destroy the method of producing quality evaluations, but rather uses his knowledge of factors such as the occasional frustrations brought on by malfunctioning equipment, or worker fatigue that comes with the end of the week, to *adjust* that method to accommodate features of the job that are unaccounted for in the official rules. Somewhat differently, when Lorene, an agent at *BigTech*, demonstrates her knowledge of contexts in which she could *use* a calibration test of the customer’s equipment, or a trip to the internal help desk, in order to gain a short break from a difficult call, she adjusts the normal purpose of those resources to, what might to a worker be, a *very necessary* and ultimately organisationally useful end.

When agents at the call centres use the mute button on their telephone to obscure epithets, jokes about the customer, or side conversations with fellow agents, they take authority over a resource, diverting and using it for their own ends.

Similarly, dialling one's phone into an empty connection, not hanging up after transferring a call, 'bouncing' or 'flashing' one's phone, or otherwise fooling the ACD into seeing a worker as being on a call when in fact he or she is not, are appropriations of resources of the organisation in order to create and/or use small and ephemeral but sometimes treasured spaces within its enclosures without drawing the ire of the organisation. While knowledge of the technology and the rules of the organisation are required in order to make these adjustments possible, so is knowledge of when they might be risky to one's position. 'Bouncing' calls only at certain times, 'flashing' only on occasion – and both only infrequently – and not being in an unauthorised ACD mode for very long, are all tactics that experienced agents know and adopt in order to enjoy the unauthorised space so produced and provided. The worker takes control of his or her knowledge to make this possible – knowledge that is considered apocryphal or even illegitimate in the organisation's discourse but which can be very useful to the worker.

That is, while secondary adjustments provide for, in some cases, unauthorised satisfactions, they are still a product of the relations that produce Knowledge and power, relations instituted by the programs, technologies and strategies in the workplace. The workers find gaps *produced in those relations* and use them in the commission of secondary adjustments. Thus, secondary adjustments are made possible by the relations of technologies, rules, policies, etc. *and* the experienced knowledge of those relations and resources by workers.

When 'properly' practiced – that is, when an agent is savvy to the organisation's rules and employs knowledge of those rules when engaging in secondary adjustments and resistance – Hal's, Lorene's and other actions are effectively invisible to the organisation, and on account of that invisibility afford

them with the freedom to commit them without producing any evidence of the adjustment. The organisation goes on 'seeing' what it has been designed to 'see' and producing the subjects it is programmed to produce. From the perspective of the organisation, the relations that make up the surveillance and examination system appear not to have been changed. Yet, from the perspective of the actor who commits those adjustments, one sees that those relations have indeed been changed.

More public acts – Manny's sarcastic remarks to the *DeliveryWorldwide* supervisor, Kylie's and Stevie's confrontations with customers, flex nurses at *MedAdvise* challenging rules delimiting the distribution of time off and the ability to trade or take another nurse's shift, all of which were supported by some co-workers – similarly demonstrate the worker's knowledge of rules and how they can be bent, skirted, etc. It is also the case that some of these actions demonstrate resistance on one hand and a curious sort of compliance on another. For example, Stevie's angry remarks of a customer attempting to reduce his freight bill both opposes what he thinks the customer is trying to accomplish and at the same time exposes her defence of the company! Kylie's insistence to a customer that she *is doing her job* reflects both her frustration at challenges from outside the company, and a heated accounting that she is, in fact, doing what she is supposed to be doing when disciplined and governed as an agent of *DeliveryWorldwide*![284] Also, by mobilising an effort to ensure that quality administrators have local call centre experience, the team leaders and agents at *DeliveryWorldwide* find a way to officially install a particular subjective, and thus informal and inappropriate, knowledge of the work into an official status in the organisation – thereby ensuring that this knowledge is not only

[284] Except, that is, for the outburst to the customer!

propagated into but actually *built in* to the organisation's *dispositif*, its apparatus for producing Knowledge.

In all of the examples provided in the previous chapter, agents show that they can, through secondary adjustments, manage to apply both official and unofficial K/knowledge of themselves and the company in developing and deploying technologies of the self. Such technologies permit them to incorporate their values and experience-based knowledge into everyday practice in the workplace, and in so doing take responsibility for their own subjectivities. These technologies of the self arise in the relations immanent in the workplace; thus they are always local and 'in' these relations (Bain & Taylor 2000; Barnes 2004; Foucault 1990a, p. 95; 2001; Goffman 1961, pp. 304-305; Knights & McCabe 1998; Taylor, P. & Bain 2003; West, C. 2001, p. 141; Winiecki 2004b). These agents, these 'cyborgs', are thus able to speak on their own behalf – at least in some quarters and in some ways – to affect the way they are produced as subjects by the organisation.

In some cases the subjects are also able to realise the full vision put forward by Smith, Haraway and Townley and affect the apparatus itself (Haraway 1990, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Smith, D. 1987a, 1990b; Townley 1994). The workers are able to make their knowledge, their voices and actions heard and felt in the organisations and in so doing affect it as well as themselves. These voices and their authority to alter the workplace are heard when one applies an ethnographic and Foucaultian analytic to the issue in order to amplify these voices otherwise hidden in the invisible 'spaces left free' of the discourse.

However, it is also the case that agents in the four call centres participating in this research have appropriated and translated parts of their organisation's structure into their personal lives. That is, while workers are not in a relation by which they

are dominated by their employer, and have some freedom to act in ways that affect their own subjectivities, they also fracture the power immanent in the workplace and freely adopt and use features of this power – which, perhaps ironically, in some cases they adjust to or resist while at work – in creating lives and subjectivity for themselves when not at work. While as shown in Part 2, in many cases these technologies of the self are 'channelled' by the organisation for its own gain and its own production of subjects and subjectivity, sometimes it is the worker who digs this channel between work and home life for *his or her own* gain and personal subjectivity production. Regardless, the subject is made responsible for K/knowledge of one's self and the organisation such that the results are made to be of one's own doing. In other words, workers bring together K/knowledge of the organisation, self and others, and its deployment in context, in order to continuously affect their own subjectivity. While these technologies of the self are shot through with traces of disciplinary and governmental doings imposed from outside the subject, workers are not *dominated* by those forces (Argyris 1952; Bain & Taylor 2000; Beirne, Riach & Wilson 2004; de Certeau 1985; Deetz 1998; Knights & Odih 2000; Lyon 1993; McKinlay & Taylor 1998; Miller, P. & O'Leary 1987; Taylor, P. & Bain 1999, 2003; Taylor, P. et al. 2002). In that sense, the worker applies, modifies, invents and deploys local rules as he or she deems necessary in order to account for contextual situations that resist easy classification and treatment by the organisation's rationality (Foucault 1990c; Starkey & McKinlay 1998).

These are technologies of the self and instances of self-disciplining or self-governing forces. However, rather than being solely initiated by the organisation, such discipline and governance also come from *inside* the worker and his or her knowledge of the self in ways that are not, in the first place, affected by the

organisation. The result is a region of working life that is somewhat subterranean or ‘under’ the visible relations of force that make up the organisation, but which is always in an agonistic relation with it.

Thus, power produced by these relations, both as they are initiated by the organisation and responded to by workers, affects the subjectivity and subjectification of workers. The power produced within call centre organisations, then, affects workers in ways that they translate from working practice to their non-work lives – but workers have some say over these translations and these relations through which this fractured power is channelled and activated. Thus, the subject is a composite product of forces directed upon his or her body and mind from the organisation, through physical enclosures, technologically-enforced pacing, various forms of training, examinations, managerial advice, etc. *and* forces directed upon the organisation and upon the subject by one’s self. As these forces and the contexts in which the forces and counter-forces are deployed vary, so does the subject – the subject is an ongoing product of power and K/knowledge both outside and inside the individual employed in TMTL. Subjects are not dominated, but have ‘free’ authority and responsibility to use K/knowledge and power in ways that locate, open and use ‘spaces made free’ in the discourse for their own ends, in both the workplace and at home (Rose, N. 1999c).

In the next, and final, Part of this report, I will summarise and synthesise the observations, arguments and formulations made throughout the preceding chapters, and draw conclusions for the study of ‘how we are now, as subjects in TMTL’; what studies are appropriate from here; and what we may face in our futures as citizens and labourers in societies characterised by TMTL.