Original citation:
Pettinger, Lynne (2017) In the zone or in the shit : (extra)ordinary affects at work. In: Jordan, T. and McClure, B. and Woodward, K., (eds.) Culture, Identity and Intense Performativity: Being in the Zone. Innovations in the humanities, social sciences and creative arts (4). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. ISBN 9781138185920

Permanent WRAP URL:
http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/85987

Publisher's statement:
This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in Culture, Identity and Intense Performativity: Being in the Zone. Innovations in the humanities, social sciences and creative arts on 2017-01-20 available online: http://www.routledge.com/Culture-Identity-and-Intense-Performativity-Being-in-the-Zone/Jordan-McClure-Woodward/p/book/9781138185920

A note on versions:
The version presented here may differ from the published version or, version of record, if you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the 'permanent WRAP URL' above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk

warwick.ac.uk/lib-publications

In the zone or in the shit: (extra)ordinary affects at work

Lynne Pettinger

Introduction

> 'What does she enjoy most about her job? "It's a bit abstract," she says, "but when you have a very busy service that's running well and you take a tiny step back and you can 'hear' how well it's going…"
>
> "The machine is purring, everyone's engaged and confident." Rowley nods. "It's the sweetest feeling."' (Fox, 2013)

In this interview with 'family restaurateurs' Ruth and Rowley Leigh, the metaphor of the machine stands out, used to describe the mundane achievement of smooth, machine-like collaborative work (and consumption). Everyone knows what they must do and how to do it (they are capable, as well as 'engaged and confident'). The chefs must be cooking well (there are no delays, no complaints). The bartenders haven't spilled a drop or smashed a glass. The waiting staff are (metaphorically) on top of their tables. The reservation system is working, and customers arrive and leave on time. There is no interruption. No complaining customer, no clumsy bump at the service doors to mess up the tidy presentation. They play their part in putting the restaurant space in the zone. The zone - as machine - is more than an individual experience. It is produced collectively, it's 'abstract' and 'sweet'. This chapter explores the zone in non-privileged forms of work in neoliberal capitalism, including waiters, sales assistants, , fishmongers, machinists and software programmers. It considers the temporality of the zone, its collaborative nature and the materiality that makes it possible. Studying 'the zone' and questions of flow provide the means to think about the relations of working bodies to political and economic spheres. The idea that 'affective practice mobilizes, recruits and stabilizes brain/body states' (Wetherell, 2012: 159) and that affect involves a complex engagement between bodies and the technologies they encounter (Ticineto Clough, 2007: 2) underpins my consideration of BITZ in the range of different kinds of work considered here; such theories of

affect suggest that individual bodies don't have clearly demarcated boundaries but are interconnected.

What kinds of affects are part of BITZ? BITZ is not like being lost in time in the way that a daydreamer is, but lost as a machine is: running like a dream. The BITZ worker is smooth and free of tawdry feelings (of tiredness, worthlessness), not hampered by practical considerations (of the shopping that needs picking up). The affective and machinic assemblages that make BITZ possible differ between work environments, but always involve a heterogeneous mixtures of bodies and devices that make work possible. This means that the zone is not a neutral space where politics doesn't matter.

Mark Banks explores the zone in relation to modes of organising creative work. Creative work is understood as an immersive activity that can usefully be compared to sport and music. However, without attention to differences within creative occupations, nor attention to 'non-creative' occupations, the politics of the zone - a politics of intensity and of subjectivity (2014: 242) - are not adequately connected to a question that seems to me to be fundamental - the politics of work. I engage first in the politics of work by making this chapter not about creative labour and its similarities to sport and music, but about other kinds of work where bodily competences are consciously acquired in order to make possible 'unthought' skilled work. I do this so as to consider the kinds of conditions under which the machine can 'hum' (Banks, 2014: 243).

In this chapter I will consider BITZ alongside Being In The Shit (BITS). BITS is also part of the lived experience of doing work. Someone might fall in the shit when a telephone rings and interrupts the flow of creativity, when technology breaks down or when a human body that feels pain from working too hard has to stop. But in this chapter, BITS, like BITZ, is also a question of work and of the atmospheres generated in work: of the spread of panic and other worrisome affects. BITS is a familiar state. Too many customers, too many deadlines, the panic: being in the shit rather than in the zone is a shift in atmosphere as well as in action, in Kathleen Stewart's terms

> 'An atmosphere is not an inert context but a force field in which people find themselves.
> It is not an effect of other forces but a lived affect - a capacity to affect and to be affected

that pushes a present into a composition, an expressivity, the sense of potentiality and event. It is an attunement of the senses, of labors, and imaginaries to potential ways of living in or living through things' (Stewart, 2011: 452).

Unlike the zone, BITS doesn't have a heritage in positive psychology (although imagine the title of the self help book!) It's a colloquial term familiar to many English speakers that invokes the sense of loss of control, of being submerged, of being inundated with stuff and not being able to find an exit. During my PhD research (and so in an earlier era of technology to that present today), I worked at a major UK chain store (e.g. Pettinger, 2006). The shop opened for the Boxing Day sale at 6am. At 7am, the EPOS till system went down. The shop was in the shit: we, the staff - poorly paid temps mostly - were in the shit. Till staff had to handwrite receipts. I was enlisted to entertain the queue. Customers were angry and irritated. I had a Christmas booze and sugar hangover, and had got up at 5 for work. I was not at my funniest. At the time, I interpreted this story for what it could tell us about customer service and emotional labour. Now, I'd want to draw more attention to the hidden practices of technology that push poorly paid workers into the shit in this way. IT so often comes with a promise of easing work, of simplifying processes and practices, of freeing workers from routine and dull forms of labour (like hand-writing receipts). But this kind of story hides other effects of technology: the way they render the user stupid (Fuller and Goffey, 2012), the way they cause work as well as save it, the ways they go wrong and how this can generate all manner of catastrophe. Contrasting being in the shit with being in the zone provides me with a useful way of addressing three key themes and their relations: temporalities, corporealities and infrastructures.

Friction-Free Capitalism and the Zone

To my mind, BITZ must be considered in relation to contemporary capitalism: the '3rd spirit' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005) of globalized, high tech multinational accumulation where flexibility and creativity are privileged. Banks (2014) relates BITZ to the formation of working subjectivities in contemporary capitalism with creative and cultural work especially ripe for positive psychology's message of 'flow', where exemplary entrepreneurial and creative workers seem especially talented, and especially able to enter the zone; and where creative workplaces make the zone possible by being lively, engaged spaces. Banks provides two interpretations of

these claims. The first considers BITZ in Foucauldian terms, as the production of subjectivity that is a 'manufactured means of ensuring obeisance to a prevailing model of productive selfhood, one that also invites workers to co-write the scripts of their own subordination' (2014: 249). Here, BITZ is tied to neoliberal capitalism's desire to constantly generate novel commodities, and ability to harness value from multiple sources, including the lifeworld of the creative worker. Banks also considers whether the Zone can be considered a '*necessary* temporal concession' (248, italics in original) that makes possible authentic cultural production. The creative worker needs spaces of exception to routine work in order to be creative – BITZ is this kind of exception where 'creative ecstasy' and 'self-exploiting surrender' (Banks, 2014: 249) are entwined.

Locating this analysis within accounts of neoliberal capitalism gives more understanding of the politics of work. Indeed, accounts of technologically sophisticated *California Ideology* capitalism provide a complementary set of refrains to those of the 'flow' of the individual creative worker. This is the idea(l) of seamless, friction-free capitalism, in Bill Gates' (1995) terms: a techno-libertarian world where fibre optic cables permit the free flow of information at supersonic speed; where new (and so improved) software can send information back to the factory *just in time* to make more yellow jumpers; where unwieldy human interventions can be managed out and clever technology steps in, and where markets are free of state intervention. 'Machinic globality' (Lovink, 2009: 88) invokes a fantasy of seamlessness: market 'imperfections' are removed. An idealised 'friction free' technological infrastructure enhances possibilities for BITZ, especially in those forms of high-tech work performed in workplaces redesigned by management consultants. Other forms of work may entail 'the zone', the point here is that the idealisation of capitalist growth embodied in the idea of friction free capital finds a co-conspirator in the idea of the zone: both push towards a fantasy where human mess and interruption is minimal, and hence where the production of value is enhanced. Further, seamless operation relies on a worker seduced or entranced by the urge to labour, willing to be a cog in the machine, and on consultants who persuade managerial staff to re-engineer work process around new, perhaps unproven IT infrastructures.

With this in mind, BITZ implies that working activity and working subjectivity are captured in smooth production processes, that peak performance is the starting point for the good worker,

that illness or error or feelings or ethics other than those derived from the premises of neoliberal markets can't matter. The promised freedoms of IT echo the refrains of BITZ. In both cases, work is friction free; there is 'flow' within individual psychologies and flows of capital. Both play up machine metaphors, both promise the uninhibited, uninterrupted production of value. Further, the affects and atmospheres engendered involve comparable forms of denial of the politics and pains of working bodies. Can a worker be hungry in the Zone? If production shifts, friction-free, from Taiwan to Vietnam, what happens to those who lose their jobs? Who gets to feel good? The affects of technology – the promises it brings of macro-level economic development – are caught up in claims (claims that seem to me to be ironic) about the zone as an 'epitomic, optimal fusion of the productive mind and the labouring body; an exceptional temporality where ordinary human capacities are transcended to produce excellence beyond convention' (Banks, 2014: 242). Temporality is central to understanding the zone (Woodward, this collection) and worth considering in depth.

Temporalities

Accounts of industrial work often focused on the working day, and on the passage of uniform clock time. The politics of work time that emerged concerned the length of the day, the quantity of work expected, tensions over productivity and whether working bodies can keep pace with the line. Debates as to whether worker's fatigue should be measured in time and motion studies, and maintaining the production line without interruption were important to understanding work time. Against such linear ideas of time, Akhil Gupta argues for defamiliarising the familiar west by considering 'the "*partiality*" of the self-representations of the west' (1992: 191) that privilege linearity. An essentialist dichotomy between linear time (industrial, advanced, western) and cyclical time (natural, ritualistic, eastern) is part and parcel of a modernity that legitimises ideas about the triumph of technology over nature (Gupta, 1992). But what of the continued present of rhythms, cycles and concrete ideas of time in the west? These weave in amongst linear time, as in the daily routine of a commuter (Gupta, 1992). Human bodies, working to cyclical time (sleep, wake, toilet, work, rest, eat) are 'problems' for industrial society to overcome - to impose time discipline, to prevent interruption. Indeed, Wilk's (2009) fear of interrupting the flow by going to the toilet suggests that commitment to

work is deeply embodied.

Within this account of kinds of time, BITZ and BITS can be usefully read in relation to other temporalities of work: the end of sleep (Crary, 2014); the extension of the working day for some workers (Gregg, 2011; Schultz, 2015); the 'empty labour' where workers fill work time with personal tasks, whether because they are resisting pressures to work harder, they need as stress relief, or because they don't have enough work to do to fill their working hours - which they may or may not be happy with (Paulsen, 2014). When workers 'endure' empty labour because they want more work than they are given, then I imagine them as encountering a version of the strange experience of time that we find in the zone: time that feels different -not timelessness (Woodward, this collection), but time that drags. Between the zone, the shit and the drag of daily work, we might start to think about work time as never being 'standard', mundane or routine. Gupta's work hints at a reading of the zone as a transcendent form of time operating within industrial time, invoking a 'reincarnated' worker who is beyond time and body. The zone is an incarnation of working life that pushes at normal linear and cyclical experiences of time, that relies on the effective infrastructures of capitalist production in order to exceed them (creatively) in order to suit the production of value. This encourages us to think about what coexists or creates conflict with; what precedes and succeeds, the zone and the shit.

Attention to temporality also tells us about BITS. Life is regularized around clock time. It is lack of time that generates BITS. I knew about this paper 6 months ago, and probably I knew I wasn't going to give myself enough time to write it peacefully. BITS is where time runs out, the crisis wont be resolved and some managerial response will emerge, perhaps some kind of punishment (a loss of the bonus for the team, perhaps, an angry email from the editor and the loss of their respect). I am in the shit now as I write this. The deadline is soon (less than a week away), there is a pile of other urgent university work to do that presses on my mind, I have a cold and have had it for a week: my brain is fuzzy and my cough won't stop. BITS means being overwhelmed with work that cannot be done in the time and space available by the body that is supposed to do it. Deadlines, demanding customers and a sense that the tools at hand - existing skills, colleagues, the spaces of work - are not enough to get the work done. There is a kind of urgency to BITS, a different kind of affect to the serenity implied by BITZ. We can rail

against the iniquities of contemporary work where panicked responses like `I'm in the shit, but what can I do' are normal, or we can access a anti-procrastination apps to guard against our own time wasting (is it my fault I'm in the shit now? Certainly, responsibility is assigned to me when work is individualized). And we can certainly blame managers and colleagues for dropping us in it through their own inadequacies, or their unthinking transmission of implausible targets. Work is organized in such a way that means any target or deadline carries with it the chance of falling in the shit. Duration, tempo and sequencing are can be seen in the abstract as part of BITZ and BITS. Are they visible in accounts of doing work?

Atmospheres and work spaces

In Dawn Lyon's recent work on fish markets (Lyon, 2015; 2013; Lyon and Back, 2012), a sense of the atmospheres and temporalities of work (and consumption) is clear. Filmed from a balcony above the main fish market at Billingsgate, London, Lyon's film (a speeded up series of still photographs) shows the movement around the market hall of those who set up stalls, and then those who come to shop (mostly fishmongers and restaurateurs). As time ticks on to 12pm, the pace slows and the cleaners come out. In what sense is the market, and the fishmongers working in it 'in the zone'? The Zone here can only happen between opening and closing hours and hence has a limited duration. It relies on busyness, especially the flow of customers. It is about speech and action combined in the active pricing, preparing, selling and packing fish. Temporal intensity, deeply embodied craft, a flow uninterrupted by awkward customers, or hygiene inspectors (or ethnographers trying their hand).
Lyon's descriptions of the craft skills needed to handle and sell fish - from weighing by eye to assessing quality by feel- speak to the time pressures in this working environment, and simultaneously to the embodied skill of fishmongers. Tempo matters: fish are time-sensitive because they lose value as they age; customers too are time-sensitive, because they have cafés and shops to open. Hectic, frenetic, active work is needed then for the market to be sustainable. Lyon's work offers three interesting insights to the topic at hand: that the zone is perceptible to those outside it, is demarcated by clock time, and that the bodies of non-workers (customers, fish) are relevant.

We could consider Billingsgate's atmosphere with reference to 'buzz' or 'vibe'. A buzzing atmosphere is in some ways analogous to BITZ, and draws attention to the importance of

shared atmospheres rather than individual flows. It has a comparable relationship to time: both are within rhythms of daily (working and consuming) life. Both need an account of duration as well as time, and of place as well as space to be understood. By shining an ethnomethodologist's light on 'café life in motion' (2008: 6), Eric Laurier illuminates the temporalities of everyday life in a way that assists my account of the mundane Zone. Laurier begins by noting that the experience of a place is temporal. A café is considered empty when there are no customers (even when there are staff), and the nature of that emptiness tells us something about the place (is it too early for customers? is the café empty at lunchtime because it's bad?) (2008: 7).

Individual experiences are affected by temporal sequencing: the 1st customer is visible in a way the 37th is not. One customer doesn't make for buzz, but at some point there is a critical mass when the hectic pace of coffee making and drinking could generate buzz. Most customers call in on their way to work and so how staff work and the buzz in the café are affected by the rhythms of working life. When the queues become constant, the staff remain behind the counter and switch to an assembly line production to speed up the service (Laurier, 2008: 10). Laurier says that, at around 8am, '"The place is buzzing". The café becomes audibly busy.' (2008: 11). Buzz can be sensed. The affective register here is interesting: the zone/buzz has to be felt, but not so much that the noticing distracts from the experience of experiencing the situation. Buzz goes as the café quietens, and so only makes sense as part of the sequence of quiet-buzz-quiet. Like the zone, the specificity of the 'buzzing' atmosphere is tied to particular kinds of skilled work in particular kinds of set up.

Routines

What is the place of routine work in the zone (and the shit)? We get a different perspective on the zone when routine work that obviously involves encounters with machines is considered. Whilst cafes and markets are assemblages of bodies and machines, the power and significance of the machine in factory work is inescapable, and forces attention to working routines.

> 'It was evident to me, before my first workday drew to a weary close, that my clicking career was going to be a grim process of fighting the clock, the particular timepiece in this situation being an old-fashioned alarm clock which ticked away on a shelf near

George's machine' (Roy, 1959: 160).

Donald Roy's *Banana time* is a classic study for sociologists of work. I first thought about it when considering things that are not like BITZ: it's a piece about boredom, and it is impossible to be bored in the zone. When I re-read it, I thought about the temporality of routine work, where the seamless organization of working bodies and machines might merit interruption.

Roy is tired and bored of his machine job. It's a means to an end for him, and the end is a PhD on life as a blue-collar worker. He is one of four 'clickers', cutting holes in plastic or leather to make consumer goods. Working in the same room is a 5th worker, one of two black women who are present at different times. They are scarcely visible to Roy and his 'old codger' colleagues other than as the objects of banter between men. Roy realises that time passes better if he makes a game with himself of the work. He races himself, sets targets and the like. It doesn't sound quite like he manages to enter a state of flow, and the potential for joy in this work is limited. Then, as he tells it, he notices that his workmates have already generated a complex play of interactions that help time to pass. Breaks (for bananas, banter and horse play) make the time fly. At 'banana time' Sammy steals Ike's banana. A bit later, Ike opens the window so Sammy gets cold.

> 'The twelve hours of "click, ---move die, click, --move die" became as easy to endure as eight hours of varied activity in the oil fields …. The "beast of boredom" was gentled to the harmlessness of a kitten.' (Roy, 1959: 160)

Then Roy screws it all up: he pushes the banter too far and people are upset by it. The ritualistic interruptions are over and the friendliness is gone. The days drag for everyone. Martin Parker, seemingly as little enamoured of Roy as I am, notes the 'managerial' nature of Roy's conclusions - games prevent labour turnover (2013: 124-5). It struck me how the play achieves one of the elements of BITZ – feeling outside clock time. Crucially, this zone is not the outcome of an individual finding the zone, but part of the collective experience of work. Thinking with ideas of atmosphere gives us a new perspective on what happened when Roy made his error: he brought new feelings to the room, and tension made time slow.

Parker (2013) discusses Roy's paper alongside an analysis of the artist Tim Etchells' exploration of ordered work routines with set rules. The art work involves gallery assistants (IAs), already in

an ambiguous position between customer service and art work, being given rules for moving around gallery space by Etchells. The gallery assistants were already on the payroll and 'part of the machinery at Tate Liverpool' (2013: 126). Assistants were given rules within which they can 'play'. They sat on chairs and were asked to do a '3 hop move' every 15 minutes, ending up facing a different way according to the colour of the dot on which the chair legs were placed. One of the interviewees, Jude 'thinks she performs the piece in a "rigorous" way. When there are no visitors in the gallery, other IAs come over for a chat, and this annoys her a little because she is "in the zone"' (2013: 128), focusing on her art/work/performance. Parker is not especially concerned with being in the zone, but his interpretation of the overlaps between creativity and routine work are interesting. 'We cannot say that one involves repetition and the other makes difference, or that one is constrained whilst the other is free' (2013: 133), he says. Rules and freedoms are not oppositions. Roy and his colleagues are creative; Jude and her colleagues follow orders. For both, stability and predictability make the zone possible and there is constraint and freedom.

Setting aside the obvious ways in which Roy and Jude don't fit the 'peak performance' idea of BITZ, I have learned something from attention to them. One such thing is the way BITZ is an unsustainable experience. It is a pocket of time, in Kathleen Stewart's term. This is not something that's given, but is generated by sets of happenings - for Roy the participation of his colleagues, and for Jude, the rules she can get lost in and the audience for her performance. 'Zones' in each case are particular moment brought about by certain assemblages that make it possible for someone to be captured by a moment. Colleagues and other bodies matter, and this deserves some attention.

Corporeal collaborations

A precondition for the zone is for a worker to have learned the 'habituated bodily action' (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2009: 8) that doing work relies on: rhythm, timing and an awareness of sensation. Woodward (2015 and this collection) stresses BITZ as being about bodies - even about the transcendence of bodies. Woodward stresses the lack of conscious thought, the elision of mind and body, so that:

'Musicians seem to merge with their instruments, as do swimmers with the water and athletes with the sports equipment they use' (2015: 120).

For this to be possible, workers need to have become skilled in the sensory practices of their work via a combination of formal and informal learning processes (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2009: 5). O'Connor suggests that embodied proficiency for glassblowers involves being able to anticipate what is coming next, attending to the temporality of work rather than its spatiality:

'I could not find quite the right way to handle the situation and therefore crassly mimicked what I had seen in the demonstration... gauging this spatially with my vision not temporally with my body.' (O'Connor, 2007: 134)

Skill here means accepting the temporality of what the material needs, which can't come from observation, but from bodily intention. Doing craft work echoes Banks' argument about doing cultural work which expects

'the immersive, kinaesthetic engagement of the worker into the productive tasks demanded of her habitual acts of (re)production that enable the worker to become fully absorbed in her work and to undertake it 'without thought' – while remaining alert to its particular intellectual challenges and demands.' (Banks, 2014: 257).

Such similarities imply to me that creative/cultural work is not as different to other work as it might appear. Is this the case when we think about work that involves other people? Where customers and colleagues are present?

Beefeater is a chain restaurant in the UK. I might be the only vegetarian waitress they've ever employed, and I might have made a joke about that if customers asked me for a recommendation. Banter created the chance for a good tip. My, mostly female, colleagues and I knew the zone when we felt it, though we didn't call it that. None of us had heard of positive psychology. We knew what it took to work a busy Saturday; to keep 'buzz' going, to turn tables, not to get complaints and not to get 'hairdryered' by David, the macho manager. Gendered dynamics of customer service are common to capitalism and mean the zone is gendered. Each of us relied on the others staying at peak performance as much as they could. The skill – and it is a skill – was in anticipating and planning: could you see in what order you had to do things so as to keep all your tables happy? Could you get six's starters out before you had to clear four's mains? Sometimes you explicitly thought it through, other times it just emerged. It was best when you could see something you hadn't noticed, but it didn't throw you, you could just

adapt. You needed others around you keeping things going too, so you could rely on the right drinks being delivered, or the mains arriving on time. Knowing the routines was a basic requirement if the restaurant was to be in the zone. You had to do it with a smile on, in the hope that your apron would swing with the growing weight of tips.

Anticipation and alertness makes sense of the zone of waitressing work. The trained skills of waiting staff – of carrying 2 or 3 plates in one hand, or prioritising the needs of different tables, of emotional and aesthetic labouring – involve a complex set of bodily competencies, most of which are tacit and scarcely valued as skill. But there's no room for a beginner if you want to BITZ, and the zone is clearly a collective production where the interdependence of customer, co-workers, cooked food, order technologies and ambience entwine. Years later, I haven't forgotten my shame of being the one to drop us in the shit by forgetting to fill the bread oven after my customers had been served but before another waitress' table had their turn. Fellow waitresses got shirty on behalf of their own tables. And the manager had worried that I shouldn't be moved from bar work to waitressing because (polite version) my head was in the clouds. By moving away from thinking about BITZ as an elite activity, I confront the assumption that BITZ is confined to the actions of individual. Tales of restaurants make possible a conversation about where and under what conditions the door to the 'the zone' is opened and about the zone's atmospheres.

Bodies and other materials

Collaborative work with colleagues is of great importance elsewhere too, and considering it forces attention also to the materiality of work environments. Büscher (2007) studied bodily coordinations between team members during practice scenarios to understand
how emergency services respond to crises, arguing

> 'People fine-tune their grasp of material affordances, and their own and their fellows'
> human capabilities through everyday, hands-on interaction with tools, technologies,
> materials, environments and other people' (2007: 4).

Citing Ingold as saying 'knowledge of the environment undergoes continuous formation in the very course of [our] moving about in it' (Büscher, 2007: 12), Büscher shows crisis workers mirroring each other, paying attention to both the changing situation and to (often unspoken) agreements about how to work, checking with their peripheral vision to see what others are

doing. The presence of others has a material effect on the work one person can do; so too does the ecology of the work space and the technologies and objects that are part of it. In an account of music work, I have considered the importance of working with materials and other humans (Pettinger, 2015), so that, for example, rehearsal and performance produce a band that is a collective, relies on skills of hearing as well as playing. This work too draws on Tim Ingold's ideas about the relationships between human bodies and tools. Tools and objects are materials that carry a certain vitality, that ask for responses and actions from the person using them. Skilled work for Ingold is not a matter of

> 'imposing preconceived forms on inert matter but of intervening in the fields of force and currents of material wherein forms are generated. Practitioners, I contend, are wanderers, wayfarers, whose skill lies in their ability to find the grain of the world's becoming and to follow its course while bending it to their evolving purpose' (Ingold, 2011: 211).

This way of thinking about the kinds of comfortableness with skilled work that BITZ expects is productive. It tells us about how materials offer potential for a worker to do work well. It follows, then, that skilled practice can be interrupted – when practitioners cannot find that 'grain' to work with, when errors or breakdowns occur.

Errors and falling in the shit

Doing something well does not only involve a simple enactment of skilled corporeal action. Highly skilled and trained workers such as space scientists know how to do something – and they need to be able to do it at the critical moment when failure would be devastating (and expensive (Egan, 2013)). Imagine being the one who knocks the multi-million pound device? Skilled work incorporates the potential for falling in the shit. What if one of the hairdressers Holmes (2015) studies left the dye on too long, or cut the client's hair too enthusiastically? Errors bring the risk of falling in the shit. Accounts of skill suggest that highly skilled workers who have acquired competency never regress into incompetency. But is it possible that a space scientist, or a waitress, or a programmer can be skilled in their job- but be in a state of 'not being able to do it right now'? Against what many accounts of craft work assume about craft becoming pre-conscious (e.g. Sennett, 2008), Ingold says that training through repetition doesn't result in a loss of concentration or awareness. The skilled worker must always be responding to the environment, with 'rhythmicity and concentration' (Ingold, 2011: 61). As

Berner (2008: 320-1; 324) says, skills are not finite bundles of things that are grasped but related to specific events: knowledge is situated and bodies learn the 'ways of the hand'.

Software designers and engineers talk about the zone (e.g. C2.com, 25/12/2014, accessed 13/2/2016), and considering this kind of work helps to understand the interplay between BITZ and BITS. Chaos monkeys, cardboard programmers and rubber duck debugging are used to produce 'resilience' in systems or to chase out error. Cardboard programmers provide a nice inversion of assumptions about what counts as peak performance: that this is a good state. Imagine you're a programmer in the zone, typing away, the code is falling from your fingertips. It's smooth, you're on fire, you're the king of C#[1]. But it doesn't work. The zone is a bad place: it caught you up and you went wrong. You need to debug. What do you do? You need a cardboard programmer, a rubber duck, or a mate, to look over your shoulder as you talk him (and let's not be shy about the gendered assumptions we're making here) through the code. The zone put you in the shit. Stepping back, interruption is needed. It's surprising to think that cardboard programmers and similar strategies are thought of as unusual. That could only make sense in a context where work was individualized, even competitive, so that looking for assistance from others seems weird and weak. The chaos monkey programme used by Netflix and some other tech companies inverts that assumption. It regularly tests the 'resilience' of software by deliberately introducing errors. The idea is that error becomes normal and so repair becomes normal, and easy: 'We have found that the best defense against major unexpected failures is to fail often' (Bennett and Tseitlin, 30/07/2012). In addition to thinking about software and IT as occupations, it is also worth thinking of them as dimensions to infrastructure, and working infrastructure is key to BITZ and not BITS. Interruptions, such as technological failures, make the zone impossible. The challenges they bring to skilled corporeal labour mean they also bring the risk of falling in the shit. Berner (2008: 319) cites Marit Paulsen's account of factory production work 'the anxiety comes ... when the machine makes a fuss – your feel it in your heart'. The machine that makes a fuss generates panicked responses and concerns about how to get it fixed. So having a working knowledge of a machine means also having an emotional encounter with that machine, and a supple, skilled body able to respond to it. So far I have considered errors and interruptions in relation to micro-level work practices. What of the broader infrastructures which affect how these can operate?

<u>Infrastructures</u>

The machine assemblages of work that I have discussed in this chapter: the human bodies and artifacts, their relation to architectures, technologies and non-humans more generally, are also crucially composed by infrastructures. Whilst infrastructures tend to be taken for granted (until they fail), 'belonging to a given culture means, in part, having a fluency in its infrastructures' (Edwards, 2003: 19), that is having corporeal competences (e.g. in how to open the door of a train, operate a ticket machine). I'm referring to refer to infrastructure rather than materiality in order to make two things clear. First, to end the invisibility of some kinds of material objects central to doing work well but too often take for granted in studies of work, especially in accounts of the zone which privilege the worker's inner state. This is akin to the method of infrastructural inversion advocated by Bowker and Leigh-Star (2006). Second, to attend to the relationality within the assemblages of work and its processes. It is this relationality that underpins my argument about colleagues, corporeality, technology and temporality that render the zone or the shit as felt – but analysable - timespaces. For Edwards, infrastructures are bridges between the micro levels (e.g. of particular technologies) and macro accounts of modernity (here, of neoliberal capitalism). So the expectation that, say, new software will facilitate some form of work, that the software will become essential to how the work is done and will require a skilled engagement is both part of 'friction-free capitalism' and the flow of work within an organisation or setting. The socio-technical material objects that working bodies use are important not only for how they make possible 'the zone' (or 'the shit') but because of their connections with and dependence on broader systems, including the internet, roads and transport. To put it another way, infrastructures are not only interesting when seen at big scale. Further, infrastructures do not always work effectively. Sliding from being in the zone to being in the shit may be the result of human error that trips some feature of the infrastructure, or of some breakdown in the technical machinery.

As Graham (2012) and others note, infrastructures are most noticed when they breakdown. Infrastructural breakdowns, interferences and subsequent repair work are ordinary practices, but also carry with them the conditions for falling in the shit. Trentmann suggests people are good at finding new ways of ordering behaviour, especially when they're used to disruption, indeed 'disruptions reveal the flexible side of habits and routines so often imagined as stable

and stubborn' (Trentmann, 2009: 68). His examples concern the big infrastructures of daily life: access to water and power. At work, people panic when systems fail but deadlines can't change, and managers, customers or clients are unlikely to be forgiving.

Software systems that work, but that break easily, or that have unexpected consequences hint at how infrastructures affect the conditions for being BITZ or BITS, as when new 'rationalizing' tools are introduced in healthcare on the expectation that they can be applied in chaotic situations (Berg, 1999). Here, the privileging of IT, the reliance of medical and administrative workers on IT infrastructures, and the specificities of micro-level work practices entwine. In line with Edwards (2003) account of infrastructures, attention to the macro level at which infrastructures seem to be manifest needs also micro level attention to skilled bodies and broken objects. Studying urban spaces in the global South, Simone suggests that other people as well as material objects take the form of (and are useful as) infrastructures:

> 'The distinction between infrastructure and sociality is fluid and pragmatic rather than definitive. People work on things to work on each other, as these things work on them.' (Simone, 2015: 375-6).

Infrastructures channel and constrain forces. As a means to think about work, about the zone and the shit, this is helpful insight. Infrastructures make possible specific kinds of engagements and impacts, specific relationships, effects and affects. As collaboration affects another experience, so does a hesitation. If I helped another waiter clear a table, or if I hesitated when I could do something, then I risked my own fall into the shit (and I was a skittle who can bring the whole set of pins down). This reading of the socio-materiality of infrastructure provides a link between the materiality of work environments and the corporeality of body work.

Conclusion

In this paper, I've drawn out some stories that are in some way about a part of what might be called BITZ, in order to tease out some of its dimensions. For me, this was a process not of building an argument but of working something out. From a position of not being at all certain that BITZ was a thing, I followed Stewart's methodology of gathering apparently unconnected things into meaning, noticing especially mundane instances of the zone, how the zone might be

interrupted, and when interruptions might mean falling in the shit. In this chapter, I've thought through The Zone by considering the themes of temporality, corporeality and infrastructures, in each case attending to how each of these themes can be read as affective, as related to the lived experience of doing work. This discussion has been positioned within an account of capitalism as primed to seek out instances of flow within people, and between people and work processes. In any consideration of doing work, how work is organised always matters. Here I've thought through research into paid work in public settings. My examples have been drawn from diverse settings, not usually considered together. In particular, I've thought about customer service work, manufacturing work and software engineering. This has heuristic benefits in broadening the scope for thinking about contemporary work beyond long established occupational hierarchies. It also makes possible paying attention to interconnections between work. Software and service are two significant sources for the extraction of value in contemporary capitalism, and so their mutual entwining is worth particular attention -as when the software engineer designs a mobile order-taking tool for waiters to take straight to table, with all implications for the politics of daily working lives that are entailed. One possible future is for wearable technology (called, with no irony, 'Humanyze') designed to track mood, micro-variations in effort, how someone sits in a chair and/or holds a conversation and feeling (Parramore, 2016). The Zone - as a friction-free state of flow and peak performance - is a seductive idea for management 'gurus' influenced by positive psychology, and such measuring and auditing of worker commitment, affective states and activity may be considered desirable. New scope for performance-management into the Zone, and for responsibilising anyone who falls into the shit emerges.

Endnote

1 C# is a programming language developed by Microsoft.

References

Banks, M. (2014) 'Being in the Zone" of Cultural Work', *Culture Unbound*, 6: 241-262. Linköping University Electronic Press. http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se

Bennett, C. and Tseitlin, A. (30/7/2012) 'Chaos Monkey Released into the Wild'. http://techblog.netflix.com/2012/07/chaos-monkey-released-into-wild.html accessed 22/2/2016.)

Berg, M. (1997) *Rationalizing Medical Work: Decision Support Techniques and Medical Practices*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press,

Berner, B. (2008) 'Working knowledge as Performance; on the practical understanding of machines', *Work, Employment and Society*, 22 (2) 319-336.

Boltanski, L. and Chiapello, E. (2005) *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London: Verso.

Bowker G and Leigh Star S (1999) *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Büscher, M. (2007) 'Interaction in motion: embodied conduct in emergency teamwork'. In: *Proceedings of the 2nd Congress of the International Society for Gesture Studies*. ISGS 16.

C2.com (25/12/2014) *Mental State Called Flow*. Online. Available http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?MentalStateCalledFlow (accessed 13.2.16).

Crary, J. (2014) *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, London: Verso.

Edwards, P. N (2003) 'Infrastructure and Modernity: Force, Time, and Social Organization in the History of Sociotechnical Systems'. In *Modernity and technology, Eds. Brey, P., Feenberg, A. and Misa, T*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 185-225.

Egan, M. (2013) 'Engineering Vibration: The Sensual World of Science' *Sensing Change* conference, University of Nottingham, March.

Fox, K. (2013) 'What's it like to run a restaurant with your family?' http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/may/18/family-food-partners-business . Accessed 22.2.16

Fuller, M. and Goffey, A. (2012) *Evil Media*, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press.

Gates, Bill (1995) *The Road Ahead*. New York: Viking.

Graham, S. (2012) 'Disrupted Cities: Infrastructure Disruptions the Achilles Heel of Urbanized Societies', *Disaster, Infrastructure and Society: Learning from the 2011 Earthquake in Japan* 3:12-26.

Graham, S., & Thrift, N. (2007) 'Out of Order: Understanding Repair and Maintenance', *Theory, Culture & Society*, *24*(3), 1–25.

Gregg, M. (2011) Work's Intimacy. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gupta, A. (1992) 'The Reincarnation of Souls and the Rebirth of Commodities: Representations of Time in "East" and "West"', *Cultural Critique*, 22, 187-211

Hockey, J and Allen-Collinson, J (2009) 'The Sensorium at Work: The Sensory Phenomenology of the Working Body, *The Sociological Review*, 57 (2): 217-239.

Holmes, H.(2015) 'Transient Craft: reclaiming the contemporary craft worker', *Work, Employment and Society*, 29 (3) 479-495

Ingold, T. (2011) *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. London: Routledge.

Laurier, E. (2008) 'How Breakfast Happens in the Café', *Time and Society*, 17(1), 119-134.

Lovink, G. (1009) *Dynamics of Critical Internet Culture An Archive of Content Production (1994-2001)*, Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.

Lyon, D. and Back, L. (2012) 'Fishmongers in a global economy: craft and social relations on a London market', *Sociological Research Online* [Online] 17.

Lyon, D. (2013). *Video: Billingsgate Fish Market*. [Online video].

Lyon, D. (2015) 'The everyday rhythms and atmospheres of Billingsgate fish market'. Atmospheres Conference, Morgan Centre for Research into Everyday Life, University of Manchester 2015.

O'Connor, E. (2007) 'Embodied knowledge in glassblowing: the experience of meaning and the struggle towards proficiency', *The Sociological Review*, *55*, 126–141.

Parker, M. (2013) 'Art as Work', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 6(2), 120-136,

Parramore, L. S. (2016) 'Happy All the Time' *Laphams Quarterly*, HTTP://WWW.LAPHAMSQUARTERLY.ORG/SPIES/HAPPY-ALL-TIMELAPHAM'S QUARTERLY - SPIES VOLUME IX, NUMBER 1. Accessed 22.2.16.

Paulsen, R. (2014). *Empty Labor: Idleness and Workplace Resistance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pettinger, L. (2015) 'Embodied Labour in Music Work', *British Journal of Sociology*. 66(2) 282-300.

Pettinger, L. (2006) 'On the materiality of service work', *The Sociological Review*, 54, 48-65.

Roy, D. (1959) '''Banana time'': job satisfaction and informal interaction', Human Organization, 18, 158-168.

Schultz, J. M. (2015) 'Winding Down the Workday: Zoning the Evening Hours in Paris, Oslo, and San Francisco', *Qualitative Sociology,* 38: 235 - 259.

Sennett R (2008) *The Craftsman*. London: Penguin Books.

Simone, A. (2015) 'Afterword, come out, you're surrounded. The between of infrastructure', *City* 19 (2-3) 375-383

Stewart, K. (2011) 'Atmospheric attunements', *Environment and Planning-Part D*, 29(3), 445-453.

Ticineto Clough, P. with J. Halley (eds.) (2007) *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social,* Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.

Trentmann, F. (2009) 'Disruption is Normal: Blackdowns, Breakdowns and the Elasticity of Everyday Life. 67-84 In Shove, E., Trentmann, F. and Wilk, R. *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life: Practice, Materiality and Culture*. Berg, Oxford and New York.

Wetherell, M. (2012) *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding.* Sage, London.

Wilk, R. (2009) 'The Edge of Agency: Routines, Habits and Volition. P143-154. In Shove, E., Trentmann, F. and Wilk, R. *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life: Practice, Materiality and Culture.* Berg, Oxford and New York.

Woodward, K. (2015) 'Being There in the Zone: Sex Gender and In/Visibility' Chapter 7 in…..