

Managing the Educated Docility in the French Hypermarkets

How Do the Unskilled Retail Jobs Seduce the Working Class Youth?

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on changes of the workforce, this article deal with a cohort of young French workers who interrupted their studies between the end of the secondary school and the commencement of the university courses, in order to occupy at full time an unskilled job (UJ) in retail. Both this cohort and these jobs have undergone an increase since the mid 1990s, driven by the development of services and the orientation of education policies. Facing their recent overrepresentation in unskilled service jobs, this communication study the relationship between the management of a new workforce through productive restructuring of retail firms, meeting the hopes, values and representation of this category of young people whose insertion goes through an UJ. This paper illustrates the growing consideration by the retail industry for the specific resources of this workforce, stagnating in UJ during several years, where their practical intelligence allows them to be protected against the exacerbation of the branch's contradictions and tensions. The usage of this particular docility as a skill illustrates an educated precariousness jointly developed with the education revolution and the expansion of schooling.

Keywords: Management, skill, retail, restructuring, docility.

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Since the 1980s, OECD countries are marked by the emergence of the tertiary sector as the key economic area, the joint collapse of the labour market for young people and the expansion in schooling. This paper addresses this shift via a study of a group of young working class French workers who interrupted their studies between the end of the secondary school and the commencement of the university courses, in order to occupy an unskilled job² (UJ) in retail. Driven by the development of services, these jobs have undergone an increase since the mid 1990s (Rose, 2009). Even though an intermediate education level generally favours the transition to a skilled job (SJ), the studied cohort is overrepresented in unskilled service jobs through time (Béduwé, 2004).

The French retail sector is the most concentrated in European Union (Bechtikou, 2008): Whereas in 1980 the six main retailing food sector firms in France sold 28% of consumer goods, this rate has risen to 90% in 2005 owned by the five main firms (Appay, 2005). After an extensive growth during the 1990's, the turn of the new century signed the internationalization of the main firms. To generate new benefits in a context marked by a slowdown of the household consumption, added to the merger and buybacks between firms which led to an hyper-competition (Moati, 2001), dominant firms have to develop internationalization and externalization policy, coupled to a reorganization of work in France.

The paper addresses the following research questions: How do organizations succeed in joining the youths who are initially committed to their studies and to a part time job? Why does retail management tends to shift the workforce promoting this specific pattern, led to occupy a full-time position? For the latter, on the other hand, what are the subjective reasons for their installation and permanence in a low skilled, neglected and not so much attractive sector for the youths (Mansui, Minni, 2005)?

We focus on the retail sector as one of the main employers of this group of young people, by emphasizing the background, attitudes and work aspirations of our sample group. The object of this article is to illustrate the growing consideration by the retail industry of the specific resources of this working class educated workforce, studying the relationship between the management of a new workforce through the main retail firms, and the hopes, values and representation of this category of young people whose insertion goes through a non-skilled job.

² According to Chardon's definition (2002) considering the links between the educational training and the job: a job is considered unskilled when its access doesn't require any specific training.

I- A BLIND SPOT: THE INTERMEDIATE CATEGORIES

In spite of a certain diversity, the target publics of the integration policies developed these last three decades mainly aim at the youth without qualifications, who left the secondary school early, the vocational graduated students, as well as those who have graduated in higher education. Amidst these categories there is, however, an intermediate cohort of young people who are gravitating around the school level IV (Table 1) and who drop out school prior to an unskilled job. This group looks for employment in an environment where successive governments have failed to account for their integration. However, almost one young person out of two, mostly men, completes his secondary level studies and, each year, around 13% of students leave the secondary school without a diploma (Arrighi et al., 2009). Retail seems to be the friendliest sector for this cohort; the level IV ensuring greater employment stability. Furthermore, every year, almost 20% of students who leave higher education do not obtain a diploma (Calmand et al., 2009). These data are part of a difficult economic context in a period when higher education changes considering the Bologna Ministerial Conference 1999 whose purpose was to improve its efficiency by developing the “knowledge economy” as a priority of the European Union.

French Diploma Levels:

- VI: *compulsory education*
- V: *vocational diploma/vocational training qualification (CAP/BEP)*
- IV: *High school diploma/Baccalaureate (Baccalauréat)*
- III: *Two years technical degree (BTS/DUT)*
- II/I: *Engineering degree/Licence degree and up*

In this manner, every year, more than 150 000 youths gravitating around level IV leave the education system to enter the labour market (Table 2). This figure is equivalent to 20 % of the pupils of a generation as well as to the amount of young people leaving the school without qualifications each year and considered as performing poorly at school.

In spite of an increasing average diploma level, four out of ten youths occupy an unskilled job (UJ) during the three years following their schooling. From two thirds in 1992, graduate youths represented in 1998 three fourths of inexperienced young people constrained to obtain an UJ. After this period, one third of young people who hold an UJ occupied a skilled job (Bédouvé, 2004). To have an UJ during the first years of working life thus became an almost compulsory stage in the professional insertion of the youths (whether graduate or not), phenomenon that is emphasized with the development of UJ and of the place reserved for the youths in these jobs.

The stronger stabilization in the UJ of those who obtained a high school diploma creates a double exit effect at the expense of those without diploma. And if the diploma tends to favour the mobility towards skilled jobs, secondary school graduates have more chance to remain in unskilled jobs than CAP/BEP graduates (Level I-II). Hence, the need to wonder about the increasing number of youths who enter a sector which provides multiple jobs, but where superior professions are few seems to be primary (Mansuy, Minni, 2005).

Beyond the Ideal Typical Approach

Our focus on this forgotten category departs from an empirical verification. Among the employees of the retail appointed as “self-service employees³” (SSE) there appears a population with homogeneous characteristics. It consists of young men from this cohort, who are between 18 and 24 years old, who have completed their studies between the end of the secondary school and the commencement of higher studies without having obtained their diploma, who occupy full-time unskilled jobs. In general, they started as temporary workers, “summer work” which is typical of French students, or a student's job, configuration that remains marginal until 1990, in comparison with the English and North-American youth (Askenazy et al., 2012; Eckert, 2010; Roberts, 2011).

The blind spot cohort:

Gravitating around level IV diploma, including:

- High school, last year, not graduated
- High school, last year, graduated
- University, first years, (not graduated but from high school)

Other specificity: they shifted from school to full time job during the school year.

General Framework

The participant observations and interviews that were part of this research⁴ were performed between May and December 2009, in the Paris suburban areas, in ten hypermarkets employing between 350 and 800 workers and

³ In the hypermarkets, jobs are mainly divided between “traditional jobs” (i.e.: butcher, baker), cashiers and jobs located in self-service sections (aisles) as shelf stockers. Our paper focuses on the young employees from the latter.

⁴ Preceded by a participant observation for six weeks as a SSE, 30 interviews were performed with employees who were between 18 and 25 years old, complemented with 10 interviews with management.

owned by the second world retail group. This last decade, a context of crisis, household consumption decrease and restructurings related to an exacerbated competition strongly influence in the hiring and promotion possibilities⁵. Less than 20% of directors are women mainly occupying the co-manager position, thus confirming a historically present ceiling glass in the sector (Beau, 2004; Featherstone, 2004). In the studied food departments (dairy/grocery), the workforce is mainly male (90%) with an overrepresentation of educated young men in lower positions, a trend that has been progressively stressed for almost 30 years (Minni et al. op. cit).

The age makes the difference between the departments as well as within them. Older employees occupy so-called traditional jobs (i.e.: butcher, baker), while younger employees hold jobs in self-service sections. Within these departments, age is a work division criterion between a morning team made up of “old” people and an afternoon team composed of “young” people (respectively more and less than 30 years old), joining processes, values and practices. The afternoon team, which we will mainly study, is composed of this cohort of intermediaries grouped under the status of self service employees.

II- AN EVOLVING WORKFORCE

Since the mid-90's, UJs have been undergoing a recovery, which actually affects one out of five employees (Amossé, Chardon, 2006). Even if France have a relatively low percentage of young workers (under 25) in retail (20%) compared to US (30%) or UK (33%) (Carré et al., 2010), a diachronic perspective reveals the recent interest of the retailers for a specific cohort of young workforce to occupy entry jobs. In 2006, in a general context of aging workforce, employees under 30 years old represented 76% of the retail employees against 70% in 1995. Little by little Blue-collar workers and intermediate professions disappeared from the stores to achieve a polarization of jobs between employees and managers in stores confirmed by a similar evolution of workers over 50 years old (from 57% to 62%).

The comparison of the skills level and of the SPC (Social and Professional Category) along time (Insee, 2010) illustrates the rise of a new cohort. The general evolution of the skill level of executives and employees in all the departments sets a slow and homogeneous progression of the proportion of levels I to IV and a fall of Vth and VIth levels. The movement is similar in the

⁵ In January 2010, the last hiring on an open-ended employment contract (CDI) occurred, for the studied sections, three years ago, in the middle of 2007.

retail stores. However, two points are remarkable if the fact that in 1995, 80% of the employees of the sector had a V or VI level is considered:

On the one hand, the decrease of level VI managers from 21% in 1994 to 9% in 2007 (versus 10% and 7% all sectors considered) revealed the decline of the self made man facing new hiring and internal evolution requirements, thus benefiting level I and II managers rates, which increased from 20 to 34%.

On the other hand, more than 25% of the employees had a level IV diploma in 2007, versus 12% ten years ago (17% and 22% ASC), which indicates a more selective admission. In this manner, in 10 years, level I to III employees increased from 4% to 10% of the workforce. The average increase of the workforce education level in the sector confirms the appearance of new populations that comply with the new requirements of the work process.

Increasingly Younger, Graduated and Exposed

The sector has undergone an over-representation of level IV youths for ten years (Rose, op. cit). Among the young people working in the retail who left the education system in 2004, 35% have a level IV diploma (versus 24% ASC). Moreover, more than one third of retail IV levels were younger than 30 years old in 2007, versus 20% in 1994. Generally more exposed to part-time and fixed-term contracts of employment (CDD) due to their age, their education level constitute a hiatus. When, in all sectors, the relationship between diploma and remuneration is maintained, in retail stores, the remuneration level of IV levels is placed between level V and VI within the sector, and under the average salary of all sectors' VI levels. If these data can be explained by the fact that levels V occupy most of the time of skilled jobs - which are increasingly rare-, a key factor is based on the appointment of those with higher skill levels (HCE, 2008) for positions which have been long occupied by those who have CAP or BEP diplomas in this sector, without leaving room for them (Huddleston, Hirst, 2004).

So, how can this meeting between a workforce industry, which mainly provides unskilled jobs, and a more widely educated youth, which occupies these not related jobs with a stronger possibility of remaining in them, be understood?

Pushed and Attracted From School and Family Sliding...

Initially, the trajectories of the interviewed young employees reveal homogeneous ways of accessing to the job, each of them using their social capital (Bourdieu, 1980), resorting to their network of classmates, relatives and parents. Access to employment is mainly through co-optation, promoted by the company since mid-2000s⁶. More than half of the interviewed youths started in a part-time job, in parallel to their studies⁷. The others started by combining part-time jobs and fixed-term contracts; they made their debut with the aim of finding a full-time job. While the first ones have progressively transited towards their first full-time job, the second ones have made more efforts, despite their experience in services and UJ.

Money, employment opportunities and lassitude are the reasons invoked by 25% of those who leave higher education without obtaining a diploma. Furthermore, almost half of the active students reveal a perturbative effect on their studies, 75% work in a field not related to their studies (Calmand et al., op. cit). The professional world supersedes it, on the one hand, due to their failure at school; most of the youths have a *Terminale* (final year) level or *Deug* with the repetition of their last year. The reasons invoked are multiple but, unanimously, their parents and a delicate family situation contributed, through advice or command, to their search for a job. For their part, these youths do not hide the lassitude, the failure or lack of interest they feel towards education, which contrasts with an enthusiastic job due to its novel nature, but especially due to what is usually their first paid job. Ensuring them to pay their leisure expenses related to male post-adolescence and the mandates of suburban life⁸, this experience makes them want to reach an autonomy from which it could be difficult to be separated within this context.

Their relationship with studies favoured this transition, most of them intend to reach a «sufficient» school level, in a course «which leads to everything» or know that they will have access only to non-selective and scarcely demanding higher studies. Finally, those who are more skilled, who have achieved high school see a first degree university diploma, are more

⁶ «The hiring by co-optation is sufficiently positive for the experience to continue (...) our employees are the best ambassadors (...) Within six months of successful integration, the co-opter earns 1,000 Euros», *Positive!* (Carrefour's internal magazine), No.28, November 2005.

⁷ Students' agreements between 8 and 12 weekly hours.

⁸ Driver's license, car, gasoline, insurance.

identified in the company facing studies with uncertain professional perspectives or failure to enter selective training⁹. Among those who leave higher education with a IV level and without a diploma, 12% of them work in retail, most of them undergo a delay in access to employment or desertion (Calmand et al., op. cit).

To Organizational Attractiveness

If the switch to full-time work is related to several ways of external pressures, the organizational attractiveness quite as much contributes to the willingness to be employed, expressed from the hiring through a relaxed hierarchical relationship, very appreciated among the young. In contrast with the sporadicity of evaluations and acknowledgments at school (Burnod, Cartron and Pinto 2000), the interviewed youths highlight the confidence that was agreed beforehand by the co-optation of their friends and, above all, by the appreciation of the work done. The image of a friendly management breaks a traditionally coercive and distant hierarchy pattern. This confidence shown by the management towards the new employee prevails in the development of their relationship, made possible thanks to the reputation conferred to co-opters. A few months later, the stabilization and evolution promises validated by a first systematic statutory promotion of six months sustain their satisfaction at work.

A main part of the mobilization at work comes from the progressive gift of working hours to youths who usually make their debut with a student contract and initially describe their job as temporary. After remaining for a long term, this confidence favours their projection in the company, some of them foresee an evolution, however compensated by an increasing experience in a work teaching them that once hired, time becomes rare.

III- RESTRUCTURING THE RETAIL STORES

Restructuration and evolution of the work process in retail reach to a differentiated reactivity consisting in a reflection of the implementation of a just in time organization with a limited workforce (Durand, 2004). Depending on the employee status, this reactivity conduces to flexibility between equivalent hierarchical positions, to temporal flexibility and also to polyfunctionality between different upstream or downstream hierarchical positions. According to the majority of the employees, this reactivity is

⁹ This way of access to employment within the sector is different from that of the interviewed men and women coming from provinces and overseas, to whom these jobs are imposed through the ANPE or the ANT (national agencies for employment and insertion).

leading to a harder work because of its intensity. But paradoxically they describe their jobs as more interesting, less repetitive and allowing an autonomy feeling merging from the development of a triple constraint:

-1) The logistics constraint, the supply chain and its hazards: delays, shortages or events (i.e.: Christmas, Easter, start of the new school year) and deliveries in exceptional quantities due to failure in automation command/order programs and empirical limits of zero stock organization (Appay, op. cit).

-2) The « King customer » constraint (Cochoy, Neuville, 1999) and the idea that the customer have all the rights in the store, including to control the quality of the service. Whereas the main function of this policy is the control of the customer (Ritzer, 1999), his main collateral effect is to maintain the tension of work and its realization, constituting a new kind of downstream management. (i.e.: claim sheets available in stores).

-3) Finally, the division and the organization of work set into a flow under the double pressure of customers and merchandise. In their correlation, these constraints meet vertical¹⁰ and horizontal¹¹ answers of the organization of work, regulating the flow by tending it and ensure quality.

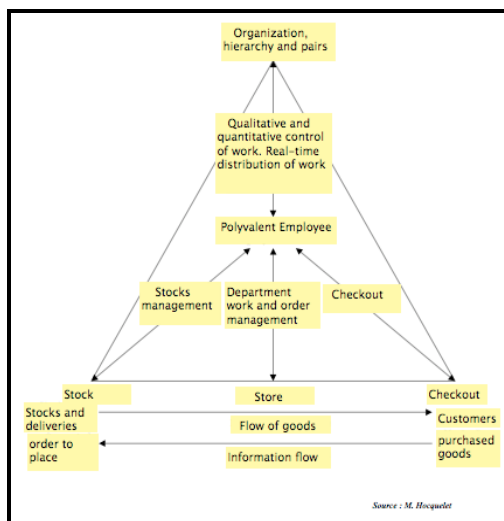


Figure 1. Triple Constraint

¹⁰ Most of the time, it consists on a visual control: the employee must be active and have, at least, to give the impression to work hard.

¹¹ Peers pressure is hardly considered as a constraint.

This triple constraint –logistics, customers, peers & hierarchy- conduces to the opacification of the relations of production. It gives birth to a paradoxical feeling of autonomy. The coercive control of the supervisors is diluted through team leaders and disappears from stores, substituted by this combination of constraints which has grown through implementation of the just in time organization with reduced workforce. This mutation gives birth to an intense flow of goods and customers. Employees have to adapt their tasks between the aisles and warehouse, and their schedules to the deliveries and attendance hours to create and maintain a lean production. Thus, the feeling of autonomy comes from the lack of direct hierarchical control and orders, whereas the ubiquity of goods and customers isn't perceived as coercive forms of control. As the main nature of control is a non-human (merchandise) and/or apart of the traditional representations of the organisation, it leads to a subtle and pernicious form of control. Opacifying the relations of production, it contributes to the limitation of direct hierarchical conflicts.

When the organization succeeds in naturalizing constraints for the employees, these constraints can be considered as independent of the organization, external to the firm. In the following part, we will explain how the Customer and Technologies of Information and Communication are contributing to the productive restructuring, facilitating market entry in the organization while making opaque the contradictions related.

Conditioned Autonomy

The combination of these constraints leads to the development of an artificial autonomy, promoting and intensifying work (Burnod, Cartron, Pinto, 2000; Askenazy et al., 2006). For fifteen years, many authors searched on this question suggesting the birth of a new critical paradigm of the organization of work through similar oxymoronic concepts: *Controlled Autonomy* (Appay, op. cit), *coercive involvement* (Durand, 2004), *forced cooperation, cooperation-coercion, coercive-autonomy* (Coutrot, 1999), including concepts inspired by La Boétie (1576) and re-appropriated by Herbert Marcuse through the concept of *repressive satisfaction* (1964).

We insist on using the concept of autonomy as the work does not have direct human control, and that supervisors and management are less and less involved in maintaining the flow: the postponement of constraint on merchandise and customer leaves only a minor role in reporting relationships as a tool of coercion and control giving to the employees the illusion to work freely than before (as the self service principles are sold for

five decades as a mean to shop being free). Thus, the contractual working time shifts to a time of effective work: unpaid breaks, reactivity, and attrition of the workforce while management is counting on the most zealous. Forms of direct authority tend to disappear. Most of the sanctions are replaced by a combination of constraints producing a growing sense of autonomy and responsibility. Finally, the reorganization of work devotes an ever-greater place to the social Darwinism: In front of the hierarchical flattening, the precarious margin (the most affected are SSE and cashiers) represents an increasing majority of the staff. The arrangements between employees have become a standard organizational willingness to develop increased forms of flexibility and find profiles (based on sex, age, family situation and the degree of dependence on employment and other social pattern and trajectories...) for each function while limiting the recruitment of qualified (and higher wage) work force.

Supervisors and managers have taken the advantage of the internal promotion. Their discourse is very close to the institutional one for good reason: most of them come from a working class background, leaving school without diploma. They are proud to have "climbed the ladder" and "taken advantage of opportunities that no other branch would have offered." For store management, the recruitment of department and sector managers occurs gradually from the "reserve army" of employees as a herd in which they extract the bests: most dedicated, those whose values are best consistent with those of the company. For some of the department managers interviewed, the selection starts even earlier. Indeed, several of them began by working for suppliers. Expected to range in various points of sale the products of their employer, they will gradually be racked hoping to sign a permanent contract. This population is a resource for store management. Paid by one or more suppliers, they benefit in the retail firm of greater legitimacy, having proven themselves in more intense and more difficult conditions than other department employees.

IV- CUMULATIVE SOCIALIZATION

A Sexed Transition To Adulthood

With the development of UJ, the class identity has been progressively eliminated giving rise to other ways of identity construction based on criteria such as age, sex or ethnic origin (Amossé and Chardon, op. cit). The observed young work teams are explicitly reflected in a post-adolescence

where games and ostentation dominate¹² (Nkuitchou-Nkouatchet, 2005) related to a virilism developed in the homosociality (Welzer-Lang, 2005) of the food sector, a male microcosm in a female universe. Working mainly in the afternoon team, the young men are marked by a socialization process where the peers reveal the unofficial uses of the places, hazing¹³ and advice regarding the management of time outside work¹⁴, which can be observed from their guided tour of the store. Their community of trajectory¹⁵ favours the development of empathy, as they organize common external activities and get worried about their colleagues' absence. To speak loud, shout, make noise, swear, refer to sex and to the lack of virility of the peers are standard behaviours established by senior workers, who work in the morning, within an industrial process and working habit.

Seduction and gallantry games are present but the few women of the team are particularly distrustful¹⁶ when realities or rumours of flirt changes the atmosphere within the teams. As, at first sight, the work organization seems to be more prescriptive, the enclave of the department constitutes a microcosm subject to influences exceeding the process. The teams can collapse by subdivisions and reconstructions as in the Norton's gang (Foot Whyte, 1943). This socialization also occurs in places and activities outside work. Workers prefer coffee to the rest room; each service frequents its assigned corner in the shopping centre. The petanque field, near the personnel parking, is the link among the employees of the different shifts, and even the store manager occasionally plays. Finally, discussions are about sport and sex involving third parties in a universe of shopping which is still mainly female. Customers, representatives and cashiers are opportunities to saunter or enjoy seduction games.

Representations, Values and Groups Structuring

In those under 35 years old, the popular ethos prevails: sport, sex, car and excesses of any kind. Each one has his nickname and a sulphurous reputation. The young men and the old men are linked by a working class

¹² For instance, each one of the young workers has an *Iphone* released a few months earlier, a very expensive telephone for employees who earn less than 1,000 Euros monthly.

¹³ Confinement in a refrigerated storage.

¹⁴ Especially regarding sleep hours during the week, by alternating days which start at 3 am and at 11 am.

¹⁵ In the same time, they are peers, former schoolmates, and sometimes neighbours and usually friends.

¹⁶ A female employee hesitates to give us her data for an interview, by threatening us with reprisals if we transmit them to other employees.

male *entre-soi*. Young men classify themselves as «kids» or «grown-ups». During replacements and inventories, the young ones intermingle more with morning employees through battles of goods and sexual allusions to workmates and employees. In contact with the old ones, young people regulate their rhythm and are initiated to resistance techniques consisting in taking additional paid rests. Considered as «suckers» by the old men, they give in to management requests, thus admitting being «pigeons». Being the butt of jokes about their bodies and trying to show their worth, some of them try to show their force by raising palettes bare handed in the store's aisles before the opening. Thus, in spite of a relatively high school capital, they show their commitment to popular values and workers' habits. (Duroy, 1996).

Beyond the extra-professional ties inherent to their trajectory, common sport practices such as football, tennis or petanque¹⁷ join generations of employees. By reaffirming strong links, these practices lead the young to compete and bet, sometimes concurring the loser to satisfy the manager's needs more willingly. Therefore, the sociability of the youngest men occurs in a hybrid order, between school, work, common friends, in a local social tissue located in the business customers' zone, usually similar to their hiring zone. In the absence of differentiation by the organization, these young men bet their status outside work whereas they show signs of support and mutual help facing the uncertainties of promotions and contract renewals, as well as of resistance, youths developing cheating ways to earn more¹⁸.

A World of Learning and Opportunities?

Work Process and Cycles

A first dichotomy between the morning and afternoon teams¹⁹ outlines the work process. Time and its setback revert, from the execution of a certain amount of handling operations (deadline) to a reactive presence, which consists of filling time (permanence) by doing the tasks given up in the morning, mainly dirty work²⁰ (Hughes, 1996). From the opening, customers' requests permanently act in the departments work nature. Therefore, the youths are one of the main adjustment variables, especially when they intend to evolve. Thus, while they occupy UJ, the studied young men show

¹⁷ French bowling.

¹⁸ By taking advantage of the fact that the manager leaves around 6 pm, they give their clock-in cards to the employees who work late to gain some working hours.

¹⁹ Working between 2 and 12 am, and between 11 am and 9 pm, respectively.

²⁰ Cleaning, zoning, emptying of tipper.

specific skills which management is far from ignoring, located between flexibility and docility. Reinforced by customer-orientated management, the empathy led to an individualisation of social relationships, contributing, with the lean production of the services through attrition and hierarchical flattening, to the opacification of hierarchical social relationships.

Thus, the "Golden Rule"²¹ overriding principle in the relation to customers, extends to all social interactions at work. For the firms, the renewal of employees is more essential than ever to facilitate the transformation of representations related to the work (Mathis, 2007) and avoid «resistance to change». Develop a sense of autonomy and responsibility linked to the customers and peers in case of delay or failure is one of the fighting conducted with employees, young people facing customers on the frontline. However, the employee status is the most affected by absenteeism and turnover, which seems to confirm that this approach makes it necessary beyond their use for productive purposes, the visibility and enhancement of relational skills in services (Soares, 1998).

The use of this young workforce is not a French specificity. Since the 1980's, in the presence of a workforce shortage, Wal-Mart has hired its directors among "*B and C grade students (...) new students (undergraduates), the first members of their families who attend secondary school courses*" (Lichtenstein, 2009: 80). In Europe, retail is the sector that has known the greater development and the second employer of the youth (16.3%) behind the hotel and catering business sector (22.7%) (AESST, 2007). In France, in 2007, 75.5% of the youths who were 15-29 years old worked in the tertiary sector, of which 17.5% worked in retail. According to the Employment survey (Insee, 2007), these last ones represented 35% of workers in food retail versus 21% in all sectors. Even though the workforce employed in the sector is historically young, the last two decades has known a «student reinforcement». Frequently part-time employed and replacing full-time employees in England (Lynch et al. 2009), the French student workforce first appeared in Checkouts before expanding to departments progressively, young men representing 40% of the 300 000 cashiers and SSE (Minni et al. op. cit, 2002). Constituting a "trainees' incubator" of remarkable

²¹ "Do unto others as you would not have them do unto you." This maxim is often called the "Golden Rule". Similar formulations could be found in most religions, philosophies and cultures of the world. This is the legal barrier that stands against the selfishness, and against those who feel they can achieve their full liberty as a trampling of others. In training provided to employees, we can also see these references, as well as a large sign in the lobby of the HM headquarters on which it is stated: « *A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. It does not depend on us, we will rely on him. It is not an interruption of our work, it is the raison d'être (...)* We had never seen anyone win an argument with a customer » signed Gandhi ...

“interpersonal skills”, the best ones are hired²². These skills appear to be useful both with customers and management. As shown by fast food student employees (Burnod et al., op. cit), we discuss docility at work, related to the workforce social features as well as to work organization. In this manner, the management, which greatly depends on economic demands translated into attrition of the workforce, distinguishes between “messy” and “tidy” employees, by privileging the autonomy of the last ones. Everyday meetings have been replaced by informal discussions with employees where, among anecdotes and confidences, the management performs an underlying control work, accompanied by friendly interactions of hierarchical neutrality that gives importance to the teamwork without authority (Shaiken, 1986). A real battle for controlling information favouring employee’s reactivity is fought everyday. The availability beyond the contractual work’s time and place, intrinsic to retail, is even more noticeable among the studied youth. With authority, by faking confusion or friendly service, the manager adjusts the permanent employees as tight as possible to the flow of customers, goods and staff attendance by having young men particularly eager for more work hours.

Flexibility on Demand

The transfer of unexpected events on these employees leads some managers to delay their evolution, thus by creating a reliable workforce reserve to alleviate increasing absenteeism and rotation. This flexibility demand is seen as a bargain, an enriching experience in the presence of the routine and the absence of education²³, the young men who maintain their idealized vision of work with credulity. When their managerial use as an instrument becomes evident, the young employees seem to internalize organizational demands, by attributing it to their wrong choices in their trajectories see to their dissonant personality. Once again, the management occupies an important place, by maintaining violence related to language which, seems to be natural, usual and integrated among peers. Moreover, symbolic violence (Bourdieu, Passeron, 1970) is present in individualized social relationships²⁴ generated by management which communicate last moment information, negotiate work time during private interviews and show traps for union delegates.

²² “Positive!” June 1997.

²³ The only training delivered to *gain customers* is considered as useless, it consists of a memory of the rules and courtesy formulas.

²⁴ Main managerial training, the *allies’ strategy* helps to identify the employees by delegating to the “allies” the management of the “enemies”.

Gradually relieved since the late 1990's from the essentials of goods management, managers today are basically devoted to workforce management. They impose few orders and delegate the performance of schedules to employees, as well as the management of absenteeism and other unexpected facts, potential sources of conflict, by using the employees' mobile phones to adjust their activity and obtain a real time organization of their presence. Within this context, open conflicts can arise, sometimes leading to spontaneous resignations and violence acts, feeding a local mythology told by employees and managers, in which "*instinct*" and "*guts*" prevail in relationships. The youngest ones show little direct and explicit violence, and prefer to say nothing and even defect. (Hirschman, 1990).

V- PARADOXICAL SKILLS

Docility...and Resistance

Despite of the fact that this workforce answers particularly well to work process demands in retail, emerging contradictions appears. Actually, the social and cultural capitals accumulated by these young men tend to develop ways of appropriating and bypassing work. Far from being entirely dedicated to a repetitive and constraining job, certain ways of dissidence reflect, on a day-to-day basis, a work relationship paradoxically separated from the company, especially when their work implies to invest financially or to involve their own image. Beyond the tasks to be performed, the job is related to appearance, dimension which the youth find very difficult to enter as they do not wish to "sell themselves"²⁵, and to the modification of their appearance or investment in work clothes. Being conscious of the fact that they occupy devalued UJ (Burnod et al., op. cit), by usually talking about this issue with irony (Rorty, 1990), they work to maintain their appearance in a frontline job so as to limit *infra dignitate* situations (Hughes, 1997). To avoid the wardrobe is another constant feature, most of them prefer to leave their personal objects in their cars or carry these things with them due to investment (padlock), trust (security) or practical (to leave the store quickly) reasons. There remains a common distance between employees and organization, each one linked to utilitarianist roles without preoccupying with services superfluous and expensive investments. Mainly, this distance can be observed in normative comments and criticism made by the workmates and the hierarchy on their appearance. These interactions lead to pejorative criticism among them regarding a job which "does not deserve" such body investment, by defending a popular cultural heritage which lacks legitimate capitals (Duroy, op. cit).

²⁵ Simulation being possible for the soul, it is less possible for the body.

However, this detachment contrasts with the mutual help characterizing young men teams. The complicity that in turn precedes and exceeds the professional framework is a foundation, which allows regulating and makes this docility at work permanent. If the workforce attrition renders cooperation necessary, affinity reinforces their enthusiasm and will. Thus, they're arguing about mutual help, services rendered to friends when they spend more time than expected and perform tasks exceeding their function.

Moreover, these last ones take the advantage of a feature of the popular youth, by keeping a sense of improvisation and repartee (Hoggart, 1957), an art of persuasion and negotiation used during their school education (Beaud, 2002). This component of their "interpersonal skill" is illustrated with customers and employees, thus allowing the exit from delicate situations (inventory shortages, unforeseen timetable changes). Connected with an intermediate study level, these features make a highly appreciated flexible habit which applies to the authority (Baudelot, Establet, 1993) in a market which gives importance to responsible and autonomous, as well as docile behaviours, thus defining employability and "educated submission" (Mauger, 2001; Appay, op. cit).

Visibility Relationships

Whether they are related to vertical or horizontal social relationships, in order to be considered or promoted, work and effort must be visible. Despite the rationalization measures applied these last years, the low measurability of individually performed tasks makes simulation possible. With the appearance of the store manager in the store appears moments of intensive rush in departments. As in the case of zoning²⁶, which leads customers to satisfactorily believe that aisles are plenty of goods, the presence of several employees who fill the shelves brings to directors the desired image consisting of a workforce in perpetual activity. Within a similar point of view, the customers' zone is correlated to the types of customers whose social features influence on the interactions with employees. Precise, threatening requests of high demand level lead to improvise solutions, even to lie with certainty in order to get out of a potentially conflicting interaction placing frontline employees between service and servitude. In the afternoon, the repartee that characterizes those youth is essential in the presence of customers with which inertial social relationships are developed, tedious customers that continuously threat the individual dignity when the service is not considered as satisfactory.

²⁶ Zoning consists of placing the products on the front of the shelf.

The search of blind spots both by the customers and the hierarchy is omnipresent, being the afternoon shift particularly distended and the conflicting interactions with customers anticipated. The stockrooms and the back yard allow jokes, games and gossips, in contrast with the required effective work and visibility. Fed up by the use of telephones to be controlled, employees lie about their position in the store, the work done and even their availability. Thus, the apparent and acknowledged docility is progressively contrasted with ways of conformity (Coutrot, 1998), simulation (Durand 2004), and apparent adhesion (De Gaulejac, 2005) in the manner of cooperation masks. The process forces the manipulation of appearances (Kunda, 1992) by mobilizing the only possessions which employees can bring from a task or a job to another (Leidner, 1993). Between customers and hierarchy, the only weapons available for employees are to smile and give the impression that they appreciate and dominate a job suffered in several aspects.

VI- BETWEEN DOUBTS AND DETERMINATION. PROJECTS, DECEPTIONS AND FEARS

Disappointments Time

Facing expectations and hopes generated by quickly promotion promises, the young employees evolve from a strong motivation into a certain lassitude. Subject to a job from which they first obtained acknowledgment and bonuses, routine progressively reduces their hopes in the career, lost aspirations giving way to a sad atmosphere in the work team. Not desperate to evolve, those who left the university show more effort, considering the obstacles as tests to be passed. In each trajectory, the investment and features appreciated in the everyday work stand out: overrunning the schedule or statutory tasks to compensate an absence or a significant amount of work. Rancour arises upon awareness of their main function as adjustment workforce contrasting with « old men » who slightly tolerate management. Through time, managerial orders persist, and everybody looks for ways to avoid them. The work is described as degrading. Solitude, fear of store desocialization, of « get caught » in an anaesthetic relationship along time, most of them highlight services demands which imply atypical timetable and availability, thus giving the unpleasant impression of an unstructured life.

Between Installation and New Projects

Most of the interviewed youths have similar and slightly precise “training” projects, which change according to events: resignations, newcomers, disappointment over stabilization and evolution promises. After some months in the store, their “temporary” workers speech arises again as a defence against their installation in a little gratifying UJ (Duroy, op. cit; Sayad, 1999). From a precise project at the beginning of their working life, the retail experience transformed their relationship with work; they now aspire to any less demanding and better paid job. Being caught in a job where it is difficult to win, many of them depend on their spouse - transfer, promotion - or the termination of their agreement, confirming to us without conviction that they look for a job elsewhere.

Exposing our survey intentions (Burawoy, 1979) aroused the curiosity of the young employees who place the diploma as a cause of frustration, reflecting failure and disappointment due to the voluntary or provoked abandonment of their studies. If they are the most skilled ones, their complexes and low self-esteem influence their speech with a thirst for acknowledgment and fear of opinions. The relationship with the business world seems to be limited. The strong corporate communication provides little information, by relegating the employees of one of the most important companies worldwide in a microcosm governed by their own rules. Store departments are enclaves, each employee calls his manager as the «boss», which translates the absence of relationships with superior hierarchical levels. Oral conversations must not cause a «short-circuit» in a hierarchical level. Notwithstanding the fact that they are little informed about the company structure, they are influenced by the managerial speech which opposes store and headquarters, sellers who suffer financial domination. Disappointed by increasing contradictions between orders and lack of means, the management undergoes difficulties when trying to mobilize employees without breathing space.

Installation and Rancour

Their progressive knowledge about the work and the lack of perspectives little by little lead them not to have goals related to the company. To aspire to a better job is necessarily related to trainings. After some years spent in the store and so much disappointment, the work done is named as «alimentary», thus featuring a deceitful insertion process parallel to a financial autonomy process: to buy a house independently of parents' aid and couple life. The abandonment of the parents' home turns the initial

speech on temporary work less credible. Their independence from their parents means an intensified salary dependency. In the same manner, the couple and, generally speaking, the household have a growing influence on the employee's decision who echoes a work division where employees working in the morning are of a higher status level. Marked by the family image in the workforce management as in the communication, the retail industry appropriates the domestic interaction regime to transpose it in the organization and naturalize arbitrary situations (Ferrerias 2007). On the one hand, appreciation and evolution go together with the industrial dimension of work, but also with the social status (single, in a couple, married, with children) legitimating the shift choice and the priority over the selection of holidays.

Divided among training, evolution and resignation willingness, they meet with rejections and postponements. Acts of injustice related to timetables and promotion lead some of them to expect a dismissal so as to take advantage of unemployment benefits and the education offered in parallel, and find time and motivation to look for a job elsewhere. However, except for serious fault, dismissal only depends on the arrangement with the manager, whose negotiation is very difficult for the youths.

CONCLUSION

This snapshot detailing the experiences of an increasing proportion of working class youth clarifies us their specific anchorage in service unskilled jobs despite of their intermediate studies level. The growing use of this workforce highlights the increasing contradictions between the logics of commercial, managerial and logistical rationalization, emerging in retail stores operating productive restructuring. This combination of demands finds a regulation in the interpersonal skills of the youths who show a particular adaptation to modern work ethics by developing sensitivity, hearing, cooperating and adapting to circumstances. Their common socialization beyond employment compensates a superficial work ethos. In the absence of training possibilities, and in the presence of an apparently simple activity, these popular-class youth's capitals are mobilized without being valorised.

At first fostered by a very gratifying work organization providing access to a relative independence from their parents' home, they give up their initial projects thus becoming dependent on a monthly salary. The entry to adulthood is done through a «temporary» job; see a dead end job that becomes necessary afterwards in order to comply with their

responsibilities²⁷. Under these conditions, if the young person could allow the necessary breaking-off to resume a qualifying education, the return to their parents' home would be less likely as it is usually the cause of transition between education and work. The labour market and the lack of graduate insertion policies compel an increasing portion of young working class workers of EOCED countries (Roberts, op. cit) to stagnate in UJ during several years, where their practical intelligence allows them to be protected against the exacerbation of contradictions and tensions. This particular docility illustrates an educated precariousness jointly developed with the education revolution and the expansion of schooling.

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²⁷ These young who has begun in an UJ in the retail paradoxically have the highest rate of mobility to a SJ and of stabilization in the UJ (32% and 28%) (Bédouwé 2004, Rose 2009).

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