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## E(a)ffective Precarity, Control and Resistance in the Digitalised Workplace

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## CHAPTER 10

# E(a)ffective Precarity, Control and Resistance in the Digitalised Workplace<sup>1</sup>

Phoebe V. Moore

### 1. Introduction

‘What makes you tick?’  
– Claude Shannon (1961)<sup>2</sup>

Digitalised methods to calculate an increasing range of activities and expression at work are evidence that management aims to control what has been called affective (Hardt 1999, Dowling 2007) and emotional (Hochschild 2012 [1983]; Brook 2009, 2013) labour. Emotional and affective labour are, of course, neither new nor limited to digitalised work, and the long history of undervalued labour has been observed and critiqued by several feminist scholars over time. What is new is the trend in uses of technology to control areas of unseen labour through newly digitalised workplaces, with the use of location and sensory devices that threaten to capture and control our every movement, sentiment and thought, thereby blurring the categories between work and life themselves. The danger in granularity where the qualitative

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work of qualified workers becomes quantified is the rise of barbarism, where there is no outside to the vulgarities of capitalism, where there is no culture nor civility or dignity, but only brutal, corporate-driven commodification and abstraction of labour. The Enlightenment held the promise of reasonable lives for all, but modern times have demonstrated that this cannot be taken for granted. Adorno warned that ‘to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric’ (Adorno 1983, 34). Adorno was not warning against writing poetry, but highlighting humanity’s primary condition of barbarism; he stressed later that the most important project after such tragic brutality must be to ‘restore an unbarbaric condition’ (2005, 50) where the ‘sole adequate praxis after Auschwitz is to put all energies toward working our way out of barbarism’ (2005, 268).

The present edited collection highlights the ‘hard times’ we now live in. While I am not explicitly likening these ‘hard times’ to the Holocaust in the way Adorno notes, I argue that workplace surveillance, at its most extreme, is a form of barbarism in what are, at the very least, significantly unreasonable times. This chapter looks at workers’ attempts to disrupt the new forms of the employment relationship that are being created in digitalised and potentially barbaric workplaces, where monitored and surveilled work, in gig-like conditions, has rendered people’s lives almost unbearable (Akhtar and Moore 2016).

Building on Blackman and Venn’s call to assess the ‘capitalization or economization of affect and emotion through teletechnologies’ (2010), this chapter looks at employee responses to being asked to use self-tracking and invisibilise management technologies at work to improve health and productivity through affective labour, taking note of everyday forms of resistance to this invasive level of control. New forms of work quantification that involve electronic tracking of affective and emotional labour are capital’s latest methods of capturing surplus value in unstable conditions of agility, but the examples of workers’ resistance in the empirical findings outlined here reveal weaknesses in these methods.

## 2. Precarity and Gig Work

Postmodern, radical studies of the laws of value postulate that there is an ‘outside’ of capital that cannot be quantified, and which thus creates possibilities for emancipation (Negri 1999, 86). Federici argues that primitive accumulation continues today, and that there is no longer a conceivable ‘outside’ of production relations whilst we live in a capitalist hegemony (2004) and our newest technologies are instrumental to its pursuits. However, new worker monitoring technologies quantify the qualitative, revealing previously unmeasured aspects of the labour process, like mood, fatigue, psychological wellbeing and stress. This makes workers permanently visible to management, and renders the sites of everyday resistance facilitated by worker-to-worker communication penetrable by management, meaning it is increasingly difficult to identify anything outside capital (Moore and Robinson 2016). New procedures and

pursuits exceed scientific management's studies of physical movement, since concrete labour is increasingly subject to abstraction as new ways to identify and calculate previously unseen labour become apparent, and more subject to commodification in the process. This employer prescription eliminates any possibility for negativity by highlighting wellbeing (Davies 2016; Cederström and Spicer 2015). With this realisation, and

[E]ven if the measurement of this new productive reality is impossible, because affect is not measurable, nonetheless in this very productive context, so rich in productive subjectivity, *affect must be controlled*. (Negri 1999, 87)

Quantification, as pointed out by Jarrett (2015a), recognises unseen labour as productive, not as an exchange worthy of consistent or useful reward, but to locate profit for capital.

Precarity is the purest form of alienation, where the worker loses all personal association with the labour she performs. She is dispossessed and locationless in her working life, and all value is extracted from her in every aspect of life. Because precarious digitalised workers are constantly chasing the next 'gig,' spatial and temporal consistency in life is largely out of reach. Precarity is symptomatic of the fall in wage share of value added as Fordism gave way to financialised accumulation, the rise in self-employment, automation (Frey and Osborne 2013), the fall of the dotcom bubble and repeated global economic crises. In the UK, statistics in 2016 and 2017 indicate that rises in employment and economic growth are dependent on self-employment such as is seen in gig economy work. More than 900,300 people worked on zero-hour contracts in 2017, a rise of 20% from the figure for 2016.<sup>3</sup>

In the gig economy, also called the demand economy (AFL-CIO, 2016), a range of new online platforms have emerged where people buy and sell labour using digitalised interfaces. The sharing economy, or work in the 'human cloud,' includes such platforms as Upwork, ODesk, Guru, Amazon Mechanical Turks, Uber, Deliveroo and Handy, which are called 'online platforms' in the Digital Single Market European Commission terminology. Huws (2015) and Cherry (2011) label this type of exchange and work as 'crowdsourcing,' and Huws defines it as 'paid work organized through online labour exchanges' (Huws 2015, 1). Crowdsourcing has facilitated companies' outsourcing of labour and introduced new platforms for freelance and self-employed work and this trend is rising internationally. The platform economy relies on self-employed contracts, and as such its workers have no access to regular employment benefits such as health care or maternity leave. Workers have very little legal protection, and platforms are designed to reduce employer liability. Taken together, these features of gig work can put a great strain on worker's minds and bodies, leading to emotional anxiety and panic. Gig workers must be prepared for constant change and disruption to their lives, and they must consent to make personal

changes, to always be on the move, and to always be trackable. So work, identity and life blur in conditions of digitalised precarity. Workers are often in a position where we cannot log out or switch off. Gig workers ‘struggle to be left alone rather than to be included, a type of refusal that would have looked strange to their Fordist predecessors’ (Fleming 2015, 83).

In gig work, subjectivities are required to be resilient to instability, and subjects are expected to take full responsibility for personal wellness, rather than associate stress and illness with poor working conditions. In sum, gig work is conducted as a process of social reproduction of capitalist labour relations within the context of the reproduction of accelerated capitalist subjectivities of competition (Dalla Costa and James 1972, Jarrett 2015a, 2015b, Haider and Mohandesi 2015, Kofman and Raghuram 2015, Weeks 2011). Affective work reaches below, behind and above the corporeal. Measuring unseen labour is a form of control by means of the ‘modulation of affect’, carried out by both recording and trying to control bodily capabilities – in our study, by providing self-tracking devices, and thus ‘varying the resistance of a body’ (Bogard 2010).

In digitalised and gig work, the inevitability of machinic developments takes precedence, even over clients. Pinning to the corporeal, affective gig labourers do not engage in creative production using their own affective capacities. They are engaged in a type of affective repression by which the required subordinate performances corrode their own psychosomatic and bodily wellbeing. Attempts to regulate and modulate affect, and to externalise its costs, are part of this process. Affective labour is, by definition, innumerable and outputs are potentially only seen as ‘disembodied “exhaust”’ (Smith 2016). Nonetheless, in gig work, every moment of our labour is captured with increasing intensity, not so that it can be remunerated, but because worker collapse could result in resistance and reduce the ‘bottom line’.

Lorusso (2017) refers to precarity as a form of Derridean ‘hauntology’ and Fisher’s *Ghost of My Life* (2014) because precarity is not ‘fully part of the present’ but rides on an ‘anticipation shaping current behavior’, and to the dream that present activities will lead to something better, a goal oriented vacuum of constant anxious striving given the failure of the present to become what we hoped. From an autonomist viewpoint, precarity is a systemic capture of the hopeful movements of exodus of the 1960s/70s, when resistance often took the form of ‘refusal of work’, by the ‘slacker’ or ‘dropout’ (Shukaitis 2006), with refusal to submit to Fordist work routines (Brophy and de Peuter 2007, 180–181). Capitalism has pursued this exodus into the field of life beyond work, and captured escaping flows by expanding labour into these spaces (Mitropoulos 2006, Neilson and Rossiter 2005, Federici 2008, Frassanito Network 2005). It has also appropriated radical ideas, introducing a wave of flexibilisation and selling it as liberation (Berardi 2009), blurring work-life boundaries in the process. In effect, capitalism followed the fleeing workers into the autonomous spaces of the qualitative, and restructured these spaces

along quantitative lines, to bring the workers back into capitalism. Continuous appropriation manifests capitalism's continued capability to re-invent itself when faced with resistance (Berardi 2009, 77).

### 3. Affective Control and Resistance

Beller predicted that the development of capital was not likely to proceed without the development of technologies for the modulation of affect (Beller 1998, 91). Affect enables or disables our power to act (through the body), and its power lies in its singularity and universality (Negri 1999, 85). These ideas prefigure and inspire the Deleuzian distinction between active and reactive forms of affect or force. Affective labour is the internal work that takes place before emotions are expressed. It is linked to the biological aspects of work, whereby:

Labour works directly on the affects; it produces subjectivity, it produces society, it produces life. Affective labour, in this sense, is ontological – it reveals living labour constituting a form of life (Hardt 1999, 99).

Corporate colonisation of unseen labour is endemic in post-Fordist management and post-bureaucratic techniques precisely because affective solidarity would lead to the most difficult form of resistance to stop, since affect already encompasses all-of-life.

Hardt and Negri (2000) depict affect and immaterial labour from a post-Fordist perspective as providing possibilities for resistance, collective subjectivities and formations of communities. The emphasis on control of affect in management strategies can be seen to be tied up with labour control and social reproduction of capitalist subjectivity and relations of masked coercion (Hartmann 1979). When workers become conscious of affect, or their power to act, they also become conscious of their ability to impact one another and to challenge abuses at work (Moore 2015). One control method that is explicitly designed to modulate and regulate affect is seen in health care worker training (Ducey 2007). Gregg (2010) outlines the blockages to any affective communication induced by email and pseudo office intimacy garnered by such activities as Secret Santas and other games that prevent affective relationships. Cognitive behavioural therapy and related psychology highlight the role of emotional and affect regulation for stress management at work, and one group has provided the tools titled 'Affect Regulation' (Psychology Tools 2017).

Firth defines affect as a 'necessary part of social and ecological assemblages, which passes through the unconscious field' (Firth 2016, 131). Negri (1999) expands on the 'unseen' aspects of affect and posits that the use value of such labour cannot be quantified in contemporary conditions in the same way that work was controlled during previous eras, because such labour exists in a

‘non-place’, the immaterial. But affective labour has become a ‘moral’ obligation imposed by corporate power.

Affective labour is not directly ‘inside’ capital, but neither is it a straightforward ‘nonwaged reproduction of the labourer, added to labour’s use value’ (Clough 2007, 25). Rather, in real, affective subsumption, work happens constantly, and is both nowhere and everywhere. Work becomes all-of-life. Indeed, ‘capital produces its own outside from inside the viscera of life, accumulating at the level of the preindividual bodily capacities and putting preindividual bodily capacities to work’ (ibid). The absencing of management and individual responsibility in gig work is a method of controlling affective resistance by putting affect to work and reducing labour power, thereby reducing the possibility for consciousness of labour’s exploitation.

#### 4. Affective and Everyday Resistance

Many signs of resistance to the worst effects of digitalised affective labour are emerging, from everyday forms to trade union organising. Active resistance includes workers’ hacking or appropriation of apps; sousveillance where people ‘watch the watcher’ by using their own methods to gain access to information they do not normally have by carrying out information and sharing jamming; using personal devices at work; situational leveraging where, for example, people may ‘steal’ breaks and mask them as work; or simply dragging their feet. Cases have also emerged in which workers use self-tracking for resistance and self-protection. In one case, a project worker without a fixed contract used self-tracking to protect himself from unpaid overtime. He tracked time spent on projects to prove he was being underpaid and to ensure his employer’s compliance with the European Working Time Directive. Ross talks about other forms of direct action in the context of exploitative digital labour, naming ‘pervasive sabotage, chronic absenteeism and wildcat strikes’ (Ross 2008, 7).

From a labour process perspective, technology *itself* has not caused the conditions of precarity. Rather, the use of data from technologies, and the invisibilisation of power relations, has intensified age-old practices of scientific management and related worker control. But worker organising and resistance has begun to reveal the revived agency in labour power as a response to the latest incarnation of Ricardo’s machine question. For solidarity to fully emerge amongst digitalised workers, class consciousness in the Marxist sense is necessary. Some have claimed, however, that class has fundamentally changed vis-a-vis concepts of labour. Virno (2004) wonders whether the multitude is too centrifugal to hold a class consciousness ‘of its own’. Standing (2011) has asked whether a ‘multi-class’ configuration that identifies precarity is even necessary, since it is identifiable in other ways. Work ascribes worth to our species-being (Sayer 2005), and people find dignity and self-worth within labour. Technology

and social media has been a medium for social uprising and resistance (Gerbaudo 2012), and digital activism's 'firebrand waves' have been escalating since the early 1990s (Karatzogianni 2015). Fishwick argues that critical subjective connections in the labour process are crucial for resistance, where

[C]ontestation in and around the production process is central to the formation of the working class as a political subject. Not only does it create objective conditions of shared experience, it also allows for a collective subjective interpretation of these experiences that extends beyond the workplace and permits the articulation of coherent and salient political interests as a class (2015, 215).

Ross notes that the expectations placed upon the precariat are a 'warmed over version of Social Darwinism' (2008, 36). It is easy to see how this operates in practice, as the value of social performances is *entirely reduced* to managerial metrics.

Lordon's *Willing Slaves of Capital* looks to the work of Spinoza and Marx to ask why people continue to serve capital and have not overcome it, given its abuses. Affect and its power to act can be triggered by both the positive *and* the negative (which is often overlooked in the literature on affect). A 'last straw' can trigger the multitude, when institutional power, in the Spinozan sense of 'pouvoir', can no longer contain people's 'sadness', and our inter-affectations and enlisted conatus will drive us to revolt. Lordon shares Spinoza's point of 'indignation', where political affect is brought to bear. Joy, desire and passion (and unseen labour, as I argue) are classically appropriated by capital. Lordon asks whether the social reproduction of capitalism could be appropriated to reproduce subjectivities of resistance, where 'collective human life reproduces itself', he says, and 'the passions that work to keep individuals subordinate to institutional relations can also, at times, reconfigure themselves to work against those same relations' (Lordon 2014, 138–139).

Attentive stress and disposability are intensified by unrealistic expectations fostered by a quantified, machine-like image of human productivity, and further intensified by permanent indebtedness, leading to a sense of permanent inadequacy (Gill 1995). Tracking and monitoring technologies appear to provide objective data on human capabilities, but this claim elides their social context. They measure only users, creating an illusion that the precarious worker – constructed by the affective and social field of which these technologies are a part – is identical with humanity, the defining point of human bodily capabilities, and the point from which we should start – an outer limit of 'human nature' which restricts political and social possibility. While to some degree measuring emotion, feeling, and bodily responses, dividing and distributing work with new technologies at a granular level involves the capture of affect *stricto sensu* – the very social and psycho-structural underpinnings of



affective responses. Such technologies only measure variance within the range defined by precarian affect, providing an illusory, pseudo-objective view of what might be possible outside this range.

Worse still, the ideology of the quantification of all of life and work perpetuates the image that the mind controls the body, and thus, from a Spinozian perspective, serves to contain the body's power within a mental frame largely constituted by neoliberal ideology and subjectivity (the managerial self, quantified productive performance, magical voluntarism). Butler's (2004) work on *Precarious Life* looks at the body as containing mortality, vulnerability and agency (26). While this text is not about resistance as such, her recognition of the shared 'vulnerability of life' (Lorey 2010) and her call to leftist politics to aim to orient our 'normative obligations of equality and universal rights' around our corporeality and vulnerability (ibid). Perhaps now is the time for the precariat to identify itself (ourselves) and identify a real alternative, an alternative that does not prey on insecurity but builds solidarity, a constituting of the political without the requirement for a single leader, a rhizomatic formation of activation, without requiring a class identity in the orthodox sense.

Precarity is now used in academic and public discourse to reference the abandoned worker, the vulnerable, the person whose life is tied up with ongoing risk and stress. At the international level, discussions are ongoing about forming a new labour convention based on tackling violence against women and men. At the 'From Precarious Work to Decent Work'-ILO 2011 Workers' Symposium on *Policies and Regulations to Combat Precarious Employment*, trade unionists, ITUC, the Global Union Federations, workers' groups, and trade unionists met to discuss the symptoms of rising precarity noted by the Occupy Together movement, escalating unemployment and underemployment, and the crisis of democracy and collapsing economies in the West. The documents produced from these meetings outline the problem and highlight strategies for viable responses, including how to organise and enable informal forms of solidarity and resistance among workers. The Labour arm of the ILO, ACTRAV, composed the *Symposium on Precarious Work* in 2012 to look for ways to mitigate the fact that 'people everywhere, it seems, are suffering from precarity as a result of economic and financial crisis, and weak Government policy responses to these' (ACTRAV 2012, 1). What these actions didn't predict was the dramatic rise in gig work which has become ubiquitous in many cities.

In the early 2000s I talked to a range of precarious digital workers about their experiences of work at the Fab Lab centre in Manchester. The emerging picture was one of overwork and stress, which contradicts dominant images of the freedoms of creative and digital labour:

I have dealt with unreasonable expectations and impossible management cultures in full time work... I would like less stress and more freedom to work on what I want, as this is where the real 'innovation' happens.

I deal with constant overwork and funding problems.

The main problems are the economic recession, people losing control over their lives.

Play? At the moment it is all work.

Near deadlines stress is a real problem, and whatever the ergonomics, sitting for 12+ hours a day is bad for your health and posture.

We need realistic expectations. You can work 80 hours a week for a while, but you must remember that it won't do you good in the long term.

These quotes from IT and creative industries gig workers reveal a set of persistent recurring problems, including unreasonable performance expectations, and pressure (through incentives and self-conception of capability and necessity). There is a growing acceptance that jobs require flexibility, volunteering, and the extraction of surplus value, and this means that an emerging form of self-perception keeps precarious gig workers in a 'condition of animated suspension' (Berlant 2011, 256).

## 5. Pushing Back in Hard Times

### 5.1. *Everyday Forms of Resistance in Gig Work*

Mags Dewhurst is a same-day medical pushbike courier for CitySprint UK Ltd, and Chair of the Independent Workers of Great Britain. I asked Ms Dewhurst about some of the changes she has witnessed over the five years she has done this work. Dewhurst replied that there has been a rise in technology such as handheld computers (XDA/PDA like Palm Pilots) and apps, both in the courier industry and food delivery. These technologies have digitised what used to happen on paper, and are used primarily for the collection of signatures to authorise pick up and collection of parcels. However, the related devices also allow companies to GPS track all couriers' movements in real time, as well as monitor the process of collection and delivery at every stage. Dewhurst stated that:

[Y]our every move and action are tracked in a digital audit trail. This is quite different from the days when couriers used to work off paper and rely solely on the use of the radio (Walkie Talkie) to receive jobs. Now everything is digital there is much less freedom and [a] much higher amount of control, thus meaning we are much less 'independent', even though our contracts say we are totally free and independent.

I asked Dewhurst what, in her view, is the biggest threat to workers' rights, in this context. She noted that bogus Independent Contractor (IC)/Subcontractor contracts are prevalent in gig economy work. She told me that the rise of digitisation, automation and algorithmic management have risen, stating that 'used in combination, they're toxic and are designed to strip millions of folks of basic rights'. I asked which rights are being stripped in her context of work. Dewhurst replied, 'All of them. The only bit of legislation that protects me would be the equality act, but that would only protect certain characteristics and would be hard to win anyway. Holiday pay, NMW [national minimum wage], sick pay, pensions, parental leave, redundancy, tax and in [national insurance] contributions... is removed via IC contracts'.

Mags and her colleagues, in response to the pressure they face in gig work,

Built a branch of the IWGB UNION [Independent Workers Union of Great Britain] (IWGB). This is the mechanism we have found most effective for creating change – as it helps consolidate a fragmented community and gives people hope and strength in numbers and through collective fights. So far we have won three major pay rises of 20-30% at London's big three courier companies; CitySprint, Ecourier and Absolutely Couriers. We also won at Gophr a small app company but they recently backed out of the agreement. We are also in the process of challenging our IC status in the courts at four of the big courier companies. We've also had limited success with the Deliveroo strike in August. Although we didn't manage to stop the new pay structure coming in, we helped the workers escalate their strike, created loads of positive publicity and helped to shine a big light on the gig economy and exposed the contradictions inherent in it – which are all present in the courier industry as well, obviously.

I asked what more could be done to organise and reform work, and what is stopping people from doing it? Dewhurst indicated that the difficulty with unionising gig economy workers is that it is hard to get access to workers who are constantly on the move because their work is scattered across large areas. Dewhurst noted that 'if we can't get legislation to force companies to let unions in from the off, which is highly likely, then unions need to try harder'. She noted that a problem is that unions often have a very negative attitude that only serves to prevent action. Dewhurst related that she often hears big unions complaining about anti-trade union legislation and a lack of participation, and blaming the government for why they are not winning. In her mind,

[T]his is the wrong attitude and is a recipe for inaction and is defeatist. If this is the attitude, of course nothing will happen and of course you won't convince anyone to take action. What was great about the Deliveroo strike was that it was autonomous: the drivers did it by themselves,

we merely assisted once it got going. It exposed the failings of government, business, and the unions!! Now slowly, the big guys are waking up and gearing up but I doubt much will happen. As ever we will rely on workers to have the courage themselves to take action and force change and that is where the real power lies.

One warehouse operative, Ingrid (not her real name), who has worked in one warehouse in Britain for 11 years, provided information to me about a new worn device that was rolled out in her workplace in February 2016. All warehouse work-floor operatives were unexpectedly required to use the hand-worn scanner. The current researchers asked what the workers were told the devices would be used for. Ingrid replied that management told workers that the devices would provide management with information about any mistakes made and who in the warehouse had made them, so that they can be given help not to do it again.

In practice, however, Ingrid indicated that the technology has been used, not only to track individual mistakes, but also to track individual productivity and time spent working and on breaks. Workers were told that management would hold individual consultations on the basis of the data, but this had not happened. Instead, at a specific interval in the months that followed the devices' implementation, workers were told that people would be fired within days, and it transpired that data from devices were part of the decision-making process for who to dismiss. Ingrid was not clear how the data were interpreted however, as seen in her response here:

Recently they sacked 2 or 3 people, and they decided this based upon who did least work. Maybe it was in May, when things get a bit quieter at work. They sacked 3 people: one of them was lazy, so I understand why. But the other 2 were very good. A week before the sackings, the management said 'everyone be careful, because we are going to fire someone from the temporary staff'. So everybody speeded up.

Ingrid indicated concern that the data accumulation was in fact, being rigged. In one case she and co-workers suspected that specific people were given easier tasks during a period of amplified monitoring. While warehouse operatives are permitted to join trade unions, Ingrid indicated that she is not part of a trade union and that she is not aware of any membership in her workplace. In any case, no consultation was held with relevant trade unions nor with workers before the technology was integrated. Ingrid stated:

We're aware that the tracking might be used to put pressure on us to work faster, and it might be used to sack people. But lots of us feel that we don't care anymore. Because physically we just can't do any more.

## 5.2. The Quantified Workplace Experiment and A(e)ffective Resistance<sup>4</sup>

From 2015–16, one group of professional workers in an office in the Netherlands carried out an experiment they called the ‘Quantified Workplace’ project (hereafter labelled as QWP). Up to 50 employees were given the option to obtain a FitBit Charge HR Activity Tracker, and in the end around 35 took them. Some employees ordered different sizes which did not arrive, and this and other problems led in the end to about 25 participants being engaged at various points throughout the year that the project ran. The company contracted a data analyst, Joost Plattel, who set up individualised dashboards and RescueTime for participants. Volunteers for the project received workday lifelog emails asking them to rate their subjective productivity, wellbeing and stress.

Findings from interviews showed variable responses to the research questions. The highest rates of increase in coded categories were in autonomy, desire for coaching and support, and concern for privacy. People’s perceptions of whether the QW project had an impact on behaviour change decreased by 48% from month 3 to 8 of the project. While at the beginning of the project, participants were not sure of the need to set goals for personal involvement in the project, by the end of the project, the number of responses indicating that it would be good to set goals increased by 27%. Workers’ sense of uncertainty about the project decreased by 70% by the eighth month. This result, however, is not reflected in the level of engagement with the project (see Table 1).

Importantly, the project ran during a period of change management as one multinational company absorbed a smaller company that had been a tight-knit group of real estate and work design consultants. The smaller company

Themes	Interview 1		Interview 2		% Change between 1 and 2
	Frequency	% Responses	Frequency	% Responses	
Perceived behaviour change	7	3.43%	12	3.96%	15%
No perceived behaviour change	5	2.45%	11	3.63%	48%
Difficulties in using tech	13	6.37%	24	7.92%	20%
Good to set goals	9	4.41%	17	5.61%	27%
Not important to set goals	5	2.45%	3	0.99%	-60%
Goals met	0	0	17	5.61%	-
Stopped using tech	9	4.41%	20	6.60%	50%
Unsure about project	41	20.10%	18	5.94%	-70%
Continuous tech use	8	3.92%	14	4.62%	18%
Not continuous tech use	7	3.43%	18	5.94%	73%
Concerns about performance management	5	2.45%	2	0.66%	-73%
Impact on sense of autonomy	2	0.98%	9	2.97%	203%
Positive engagement w project	25	12.25%	5	1.65%	-87%
Impact on motivation	13	6.37%	5	1.65%	-74%
Desire for competitive element	2	0.98%	6	1.98%	102%
Desire for coaching	2	0.98%	15	4.95%	405%
Impact on workplace relationships	9	4.41%	34	11.22%	154%
Increased self-awareness	25	12.25%	36	11.88%	-3%
Effect on subjective productivity	14	6.86%	16	5.28%	-23%
Concern for privacy	3	1.47%	21	6.93%	371%

**Table 1:** Interview findings: ‘Quantified Workplace’ project.

suggested and led the project. The project was part of a move toward a more agile workplace, as I was informed by the manager running the project. The project manager indicated that his intentions were to help workers adapt to an agile working environment, where change was to be expected and red tape reduced, and to see to what extent employees' self-awareness, stress, wellbeing and 'wellbilling' (the amount of revenue an employee generates for the company), was impacted during the period of transition (interview October 5, 2015).

In this context, workers were expected to transform affective and physical aspects of themselves, through becoming healthier, happier and more productive with the use of intensely investigatory devices. The company was interested in comparing subjectively and objectively measured productivity, this being linked to health and activity tracking and 'billability'. I was not given access to the data gathered by the company on whether improved activity led to higher productivity and billability. However, the project did fit with the company's moves toward working anywhere, in a gig-like scenario, which was encouraged at the time that the project merger was put in place, and also led to increases in teamwork; and efficiency. Furthermore, the merger was a significant *change* for all who had worked in the smaller company since all participants in the QWP had been employed in the smaller company. So, their experience of change and affective labour were measured by the processes put into place by the QWP. Workers were expected to manage any emotional or affective impacts as the company went through a merge and acquisition process. My interviews with participants demonstrate acts of resistance that involve exit from the project because of concerns about privacy, concerns about digital devices' validity, and concerns about the corporate surveillance that a project of this type engenders.

Responses in the first interviews demonstrate scepticism about the validity of the FitBit is readings, and desire for more device intelligence:

A big question for me and for a few others as well, is uh, how reliable the FitBit is.

[...] This thing [FitBit] might be more intelligent than just recording my data.

One respondent in the second interviews indicated frustration:

I don't get any answers, I just fill in my things, but I don't get an answer if it is good or not, I just want to know if I [am] good and just start working.

One comment in the first interviews indicated that employees originally thought there would be more 'complaints about privacy'. However, in the first interviews, only three comments indicate concern about what personal data management were viewing, though this increased to 21 in the final interviews. Most

participants were cautious about corporate privacy practices. In the first survey, 66% agreed that ‘consumers have lost all control over how personal information is collected and used by companies’; 62% disagreed that ‘most businesses handle the personal information they collect about consumers in a proper and confidential way’; 43% disagreed that ‘existing laws and organizational practices provide a reasonable level of protection for consumer privacy today’.

One response to the question ‘How/have your thoughts about the Quantified Workplace project changed?’ stated,

I still [have] and even [have] more doubt [about] the project. And I don’t wear the Fitbit very often. And when I will wear it, it is for myself and to see how active I am.

After monitoring my workplace behaviour over a couple of months I found out that it didn’t change a lot. It confirmed my thoughts, which I had in the beginning. It is better to change your behaviour based on your feelings rather than a device.

I learned not very much from it.

Nine interview responses indicated FitBit abandonment, either for a period or altogether in the first two months. Some used the FitBit for almost the entire project, while others engaged with it for less than one month/occasionally. FitBit use decreased significantly throughout the project, reflected by the monthly total average step count recorded from all employees. There was a 30% drop in average steps recorded within the first three months, a 50% drop within six months, and a 75% drop by the end. These results demonstrate explicit resistance to the QWP, calling into question the effectiveness of this kind of project where affective and emotional labour are managed in a period of agility.

## 6. Conclusion

Digitalised work unites the body and mind under the sign of mind, as techniques of managerial (mental) control, what Rose (2001) terms the ‘politics of life itself’. The difficulty, however, is that this politics does not speak to ‘life itself’, any more than Fordism or medievalism. What it speaks to is a particular *quantitative, spatial representation* of life. Emphasising empowerment, Hardt and Negri (2000) illustrate affect and immaterial labour in the post-Fordist climate as providing possibilities for resistance and formation of communities. The emphasis on affect in management strategies can be seen to be tied up with labour control and social reproduction (Hartmann 2002, cited in Carls 2007, 46). As a tool of resistance, affect functions in this system as a structure which enables or disables our power to act (through the body). One can contrast an instrumental relationship, where the body is ‘used’ by the mind to pursue rational goals, with an expressive relationship, in which bodily or affective forces express themselves in the world, through the mind. Work in the digitalised

contexts occurs in an intensely instrumentalised relationship between workers, clients and often invisible forms of management.

I conclude by assessing the possibilities for affective resistance in digitalised work. Affect is the 'power to act that is singular and at the same time universal' (Negri 1999, 85). This prefigures and inspires the Deleuzian distinction between active and reactive forms of affect or force. Affective labour is the internal work that takes place before emotions are expressed, and involves both the possibility for subconscious labour power that could lead to resistance, but also the potential for subconscious affective self-repression. It is linked to the biological aspects of work, whereby:

Labour works directly on the affects; it produces subjectivity, it produces society, it produces life. Affective labour, in this sense, is ontological – it reveals living labour constituting a form of life... (Hardt 1999, 99)

For Spinoza, affect was an intensely embodied concept which refers to the active ways in which bodies affect one another and co-produce social life (not always in conscious ways). The full positive realisation of affect means that the 'power to act' is enacted, and solidarity is immaterial, becoming also conscious and corporeal. Thus affect transcends what is immediately conscious. For this reason, affective resistance is a serious threat to systems of workplace operation such as interface management in the gig work context. Simply put, affective solidarity would lead to the most difficult form of resistance to stop, since, akin to invasive management techniques of technological control that infiltrate all aspects of life, affect already infiltrates all-of-life.

Simondon (1958/1980) discusses transindividuality as a link to emancipation by describing technical objects as having an infinite number of possible uses when they are individualised, but he notes that their convergence is the point at which they are useful and become a system. He looks at the case of a 'made to measure' car, indicating that only non-essential parts are contingent and work 'against the essence of technical being, like a dead weight imposed from without'(18). Simondon defends the human as the organiser of the technical, stating that automation is never perfect nor complete and always contains a 'certain margin of indetermination' (4). He states that 'far from being the supervisor of a squad of slaves, man is the permanent organiser of technical objects which need him as much as musicians in an orchestra need a conductor' (4). In a similar way, people can recognise their individual existence without becoming atomised or hostile, and realise instead that our interrelations are what strengthen us and prevent us from abdicating and delegating our humanity to a robot (2). Marx observed during his lifetime the ways in which early industrialisation turned 'living labour into a mere living accessory of this machinery, as the means of its action, also posits the absorption of the labour process in its material character as a mere moment of the realisation process of capital' (Marx 1858/1993, 693). He adds: '[machinic] knowledge appears as alien' and 'external' to the worker where the worker is 'superfluous' (brackets



added) (1858/1993, 605). In this text, Marx identifies the machine in the labour process and describes its capacity for quantifying, abstracting and dividing labour; he comments that ‘the worker’s activity, reduced to a mere abstraction of activity, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movements of the machinery, and not the opposite’ (1858/1993, 693). In this way, Marx identifies agency, and even authority, with the machinery, where ‘objectified labour confronts living labour within the labour process itself as the power which rules it; a power which, as the appropriation of living labour, is the form of capital’ (1858/1993, 693). The means of labour, Marx wrote, is transformed, controlled and absorbed by machinery. It is very likely that workers are beginning to resist both traditional forms of management and machinery itself (see Moore 2017).

Digitalised work, in the contemporary context of agility and precarity, ultimately demonstrates that machines are now more than ever before the symbols for ‘the ordering of life itself’ (Merchant 1990, 227), accelerating the labour process to the cliff edge of what is possible to endure, and dragging workers with them. Workers’ responses to the digitalised aspects of gig work, as well as their explicit disengagement with the quantified workplace company-led project outlined here, demonstrate awareness of the tensions surrounding new control mechanisms, the ongoing struggles in the contemporary labour process where agility is a key meme, and the urgent need for a review of all-of-life management strategies. This chapter explores where and how resistance emerges to this brave new world of all-of-life work, where monitoring and tracking of unseen labour may become ubiquitous. Future research must look at the risks this poses for workers, and at forms of resistance that emerge against modulation and control methods in the quantified workplace.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> A version of this chapter has been published in Adam Fishwick and Heather Connolly (2018) *Austerity and Working Class Resistance: Survival, Disruption and Creation in Hard Times* (Rowman and Littlefield 2018).
- <sup>2</sup> Comment made while testing first wearable computer invented and designed by Claude Shannon and Edward O. Thorp at MIT, to be used for casino roulette (Thorp 1998).
- <sup>3</sup> Data source: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/apr/23/number-of-zero-hours-contracts-in-uk-rose-by-100000-in-2017-ons>
- <sup>4</sup> Lukasz Piwek provided data analysis support for this project.

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