The Future of Work
Sussex University, Future of Work Research Hub
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“Where lifestyle meets logistics”
Mundane working life: Future patterns

- Employment relations
- Digital work, embodied work
- Work, life boundaries
  - Time, space, social relations and activity
- Future workers
- Reading
Employment relations

The decline and rise of non-standard employment
Time, work and direct employment

- Capital-labour relations necessitated development of clock time (rather than bodily, seasonal or process time).
- Most labour management focused on maximising labour productivity (minimising temporal porosity of the working day).
- 20th Century characterised by direct relations of employment in most OECD countries.
  - Labour power sold on the market.
  - Labour retains indeterminacy (LPT) → productivity increases achieved through mechanisms of workplace control (management). Resistance possible – often related to time (pace, hours, schedule).
Time, work and non-standard employment

- Recently, rise in non-standard employment relations (self-employment, contracting, temporary work, zero-hours contracts).
  - Costs of non-working time (‘baggy’ time, in-between time) borne by individual worker.
  - Direct market relations exert pressure on worker to self-exploit.
Example

By the end of 2014 15% of the UK workforce comprised self-employed people.

Up 732,000 since the recession of 2008-09.
Digital and embodied work
Digital Work

- Digitally mediated work
- Rise of spot labour markets (e.g. Amazon Turk)
- Electronic monitoring makes visible previously invisible micro-organisation and pacing of work
- Surveillance within and beyond the workplace (biomedical, social)
  → Controlling and remaking working bodies.
Embodied work

- ‘Body work’, work on and with others’ bodies (approx. 10% of all UK jobs; more for women)
- Work as constrained by our physical capacities (strength, ageing, disability)
  - Workers’ bodies engaged in material interactions (even in ‘digital labour’) → the mess and dirtiness of working lives
- Workers’ embodiment commodified (aesthetic labour)
- Customers’ and workers’ spatial dispersion (and movement) constituting labour markets and work

- Conflict between clock time and bodily time
Work-life boundaries

Time
Space
Social Relations/Identity
Activities
Temporal Boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Variation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manageable work-life boundaries</td>
<td>Shorter</td>
<td>Pro-social</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmanageable work-life boundaries</td>
<td>Longer</td>
<td>Anti-social</td>
<td>Unpredictable</td>
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Spatial boundaries

- Technology → concentration of some work (including much production)
- Technology has enabled the physical dispersion of other work (especially white collar work), removing need for co-presence → unboundedness

- Understanding of ‘anytime anywhere’ work widespread, but idealised.
  - Work/life spaces may be unbounded, but not unproblematic
    - Spatial boundaries changing
    - But space continues to matter (e.g. migration)
Boundaries of Social Relations/Identity

- **19th/20th Century** - bounded sociality
- **21st Century** – decreasingly bounded
  - interdependence on friends/family for market relations;
  - workplace observation of non-work relationships (surveillance).
## Work/non-work activity boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drivers</th>
<th>Labour market structural context</th>
<th>Individual context</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work → non-work</strong></td>
<td>1. Doing unpaid work to achieve paid work (internships, profile development, networking)</td>
<td>2. Engaging in work tasks outside of the workplace (for income, identity or as a favour)</td>
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<td><strong>Non-work → work</strong></td>
<td>3. Commodification of reproductive work (previously in households / public sector)</td>
<td>4. Commodification of non-work activities (e.g. gaming, gambling, sociality)</td>
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Future workers

Employment relations, technology, time, materiality and boundaries
The click-worker

Digital labour markets (relations usually worker-employer-platform). **Digital labour.**

Formally ‘self-employed’ (pieceworker).

Control exercised by ‘ratings’ (these affect hierarchies of subcontracting).

Bidding driving down income.

Dispersed – any place (but concentrated in English Language countries).
The Uber driver

Digital labour markets (relations usually worker-customer-platform). **Material labour.**

Formally ‘self-employed’. Income controlled by platform

Dispersed, but within local market. Route set.

Long hours [Male full-time drivers/operatives work a median 45 (mean 46.5) hours per week. (ONS 2015)]
A 2016 online survey of 2,238 UK adults (16-75) found that in the last year 21% had used online platforms to seek work.

- 11% had succeeded in finding work.
- 3% found paid work via online platforms at least once a week.
- For most people this formed only a part of their total income.
- Over 50% engaged in selling online (e.g. amazon, ebay, gumtree)

(Huws and Joyce 2016)
The warehouse worker

Digital retail transformed retail/distribution → concentrating retail (n.b. removing ‘emotional labour’).

Removing all porosity: Physically Intensive targets (e.g. Amazon ‘picking’ 120 items an hour from ‘chaotic’ shelves). Health & safety.

Temporary work. Dismissed for missing targets, lateness etc.
The care worker


Many on zero-hours contracts. Non-contact time unpaid. Electronic monitoring and pay (to the minute).

‘Process time’ accommodated by workers’ unpaid labour.
The security worker

The monitoring of bodies. For example in Immigrant detention centres

G4S – World’s 2nd largest private employer: 620,000 employees (49,000 in UK).

Privatisation of policing functions,
Questions about working lives in the future

• How is labour temporally organised and managed?
• How is work materially and corporeally constituted? How do digital technologies change (or not change) this?
• Under what conditions do workers seek and achieve bounded working lives?
• In what ways are employment relations (and non-standard employment) interwoven with different temporal and spatial work arrangements?
Reading

Book length, occupational studies (a couple stretch that category) including interviews, observation and sometimes quantitative data.

Focus: service work
The end.

Or the start of the future.