

## **Algorithmic Alienation: Work and Employment in the Era of Artificial Intelligence.**

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*Helena's work is one of the many low- skilled jobs reliant on artificial intelligence. Helena is a warehouse worker who for most of her working day walks down warehouse alleys with a scanner following instructions for what specific items to pick. Her activity is limited to following the guidelines and a continuous scanning of bar codes of products, shelves, and containers (which once they are full are expedited to the other part of the warehouse). For her whole shift, Helena relies on the scanner, which not only controls her, but also assesses her performance, monitors her activity, and breaks and updates live. Artificial intelligence also monitors the work of another four thousand workers, controls stock and shelving, deliveries, and notifies customers. [description of duties of a warehouse picker from the pilot study; respondent's name was changed]*

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The main objective of the project is to study the workplace changes provoked by the implementation of algorithms and verify the thesis that states that algorithms serve a dual function: Not only do they allow for greater efficiency, ensuring optimal control of the workforce; they also **shape the subjectivity of the workforce and foster new types of workplace involvement mediated by the digital environment**. In other words, this project explores how algorithmic management contributes to the changes in how the workforce engages with work, a topic that so far has not received the same sustained attention as the optimisation thesis. This project researches algorithmic implementations, workplace dynamics, and the context of algorithmic work to delineate this new form of organisational change.

Empirically, I deploy the theory of workplace subjectivity to analyse the algorithmic management cases in organisations that represent three industries: logistics, warehousing, and personal transportation. These industries, I argue, epitomize Western work in late capitalism in several key ways. First, all of them deploy algorithmic technology to recursively feed data on work and automatically adapt that work flow to more efficiently abstract work. Second, they rely heavily on casual labour, employing workers under precarious contracts and disposed of when they do not yield as required. Third, the combination of algorithmic technologies and precarious employment enables the global just-in-time circulation of employees. The central part of the analysis focuses on the subjectivities of workers who during their everyday duties are reliant on technology, which usually stores information relevant to assessment, provides instructions, monitors development, and supplements the assessment and completion of the worker tasks.

Using empirical material, the project aims to develop theoretical tools for the interpretation of how the popularisation of algorithmic technology incites transformation within the selected three domains of the workplace:

- (1) influencing the way in which subjects of control operate (study of workers);
- (2) affecting the organisation of the workplace in which new use of algorithms occurs (study of algorithms and their use)
- (3) the project also examines the algorithmic workplace in the market context and legal regulations, looking at the elements relevant to achieving the competitive advantage (study of context).

The goal of this project is to put forward an alienation theory that will demonstrate that to view algorithmic technology in the light of the subjectivity model means, in effect, to see it increasingly in terms of a new type of workplace engagement, as reflected on the labour market and in the new patterns of business growth and regulation.