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REFLECTIONS ON PEOPLE'S WORKING VERSUS NON-WORKING TIME AND CONNECTIVITY: SOME EXPERIENCES FROM BRAZIL[1]

REFLEXÕES SOBRE TEMPO DE TRABALHO, TEMPO DE NÃO-TRABALHO E CONECTIVIDADE - EXPERIÊNCIAS BRASILEIRAS.

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ABSTRACT - This paper aims to discuss the use of working and non-working time and introduces the concept of "cognitive surplus" to debate how people can employ part of their free time connecting with others to support activities of common interest. With examples from Brazil, we advocate that internet connection can be a powerful tool for people to communicate, share and build information collectively, and suggest valuing free time similarly to the way it is done with working time. However, on the negative side, connectivity also encompasses a feature of social control mechanism through an increasing use of the "information panopticon", and "big other" phenomena which could affect human action through a machine dominance over important activities in people's lives, in and out of work.

KEYWORDS – Working and non-working time; Cognitive surplus; Information panopticon; Man-machine relation.

RESUMO - Esse artigo objetiva discutir o uso do tempo de trabalho e não-trabalho e apresenta o conceito de "excedente cognitivo" para debater como as pessoas podem utilizar parte de seu tempo livre conectando-se a outras para apoiar atividades de interesse comum. Com exemplos brasileiros, advoga que a conexão

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à internet pode ser uma ferramenta poderosa para as pessoas se comunicarem, compartilharem e construírem conhecimento coletivamente; ademais, sugere-se valorizar o tempo livre da mesma forma que se faz com o tempo de trabalho. No entanto, no polo oposto, a conectividade também engendra uma característica de mecanismo de controle social por meio do uso crescente do "panóptico da informação" e do fenômeno *Big Other,* que podem afetar ações humanas por meio de um domínio da máquina sobre atividades importantes na vida das pessoas, dentro e fora do trabalho.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE – Tempo de trabalho e não-trabalho; Excedente cognitivo; Panóptico da informação; Relação homem-máquina.

Introduction

Since the Industrial Revolution, there have been several discussions about the relations between men and machines in the working environment. Along time, technological advancement has posed some changes to that relation, being, perhaps, the recent degree of virtual connectivity through internet one of the most impactful. Our interest, then is to raise some topics related to working and leisure times, having connectivity as the common ring to both. Therefore, the aim of this essay is to discuss changes in working and leisure time, seeking to identify some impacts of working time reduction or flexibilization over people's remaining time as well as the use of information and communication technology in and out of work.

We begin next section discussing a survey about official working time reduction in Brazil, in opposition to which an qualitative study is presented, seeking to understand such reduction impact over people's lives; next, we refer to a study carried out at Volkswagen in Brazil to understand the real effect of the reduced working time for the employees; then, we introduce the concept of cognitive surplus (SHIRKY, 2011), which shows the possibility of combining people's free time and connectivity, via social networking, in actions for mutual benefit; after that, we propose a look at the monetary valuation of free time, in particular of the free time we are bound to lose; further, we explore the concepts of "information panopticon" and "Big other" (ZUBOFF, 1988, p. 2015) which bring an opposing perspective by showing a negative side of connectivity in people's lives; at last, we follow with our conclusions and suggestions for further research. As an exploratory paper, this study aims to raise questions of research interest rather than to provide answers, hoping to find fertile room for discussion, improvement, and opportunities to develop some field work later on.

Reduction of working time and impact over free time

After the Brazilian Constitution of 1988, which established a maximum limit of 8 hours daily and 44 hours weekly for

working, there has been evidence on reduction of formal working time. However, analyzing official figures (IBGE) that show a dropping in the number of people working over 45 hours weekly – from 43.9%, in 2001 to 33.6%, in 2009 – Campos, from IPEA, has carried out a survey with 4,000 respondents, revealing that, effectively, working time has not been reduced, since 45% of people stated that the portion of their time dedicated to work has actually been increased, with negative effects over the other dimensions of their lives, such as the time spent at home and with family, activities with friends, religious events, education, leisure and sports activities, or political events. (CAMPOS, 2012).

For this author, the divergent results of his research in contrast to the official statistics are given by the change in the nature of working, whose temporal limits have become subtler, so that working and no-working time crosslines are diluted and cannot be picked by broad figures but emerged strongly in the qualitative study. Some signs of that penetration of working into the leisure time is what he calls 1) remote working or "teleworking", with use of smartphones, tablets, laptops, computers, etc.; 2) people that remain in readiness or on the watch to respond to any call from the employer; 3) people that should be trained or qualified, wherever they are, to perform work-related activities.

One of the direct consequences of the working time intrusion into free time is the fact that only 20% of people manage to do another regular activity during the week besides working – and those who can cope with it, use at most one hour per day (CAMPOS, 2012). He questions the myth of technology as a promise of democratization of information and of a leisure enabler which would overall contribute to more freedom and to the full exercise of citizenship. As he put it, technology can spare time for work execution, but it simultaneously invades people's everyday life and their free time, as shown by the above examples. One of the problems is precisely the time lacuna between real life and regulation of changes by the authorities, since technology moves and is transformed at a high speed, in a pace that the state, who should regulate such activities, is hardly able to keep up.

Further to the social effects of the work penetration into people's leisure time, there are also harmful effects to their health. Campos (2012), using data from the Ministries of Health and Social Security, pointed out that in the last decade there was an expressive growth of work absences driven by psychical disturbances – depression, panic, stress, anxiety – in fact, "mental health" is the item that has raised mostly in the leave request forms, and to some extent the cause can be credited to the free time invasion. He adds that companies can accelerate the working rhythm, generating extra tension to employees, which corroborates the fact that currently the official working time is just one possible dimension of analysis.

Regardless, an important aspect revealed by the survey is that, despite the problems brought by the work extension –

tiredness, stress, psychic harm to individual and his or her family – only 20% of the respondents consider changing jobs, feeling relatively happy at their current work. The author raises the question on the effectiveness of working hours reduction, its replacement by palliative actions such as compensatory time off and he claims the need for a debate not only on the government sphere, but also with other important social actors to discuss how to solve that tricky time equation so people can manage to include, in 24 hours and in a balanced manner, the working time, the physio-biological pause, the commuting time (a great villain, particularly in large cities), as well as some time to spend in social activities.

We could suggest that people are not fully aware of the turmoil in which they are immersed, and they tend to see this as normal, a reflection of the *Zeitgeist*, intrinsic to "modern times". In fact, it is undeniable the acceleration of the day-by-day activities promoted by technology advance, and it is also patent the acceptance of that rhythm by the people as they seem not to perceive the negative impact to their health and the harmful consequences to their social life. We shall turn back to this point later.

The reduction of working hours at Volkswagen Brazil

Cardoso (2007**)** relates the effect of working time reduction from 44 to 40 hours weekly at Volkswagen do Brasil. Her research reveals that the use of the additional free time was mostly employed to study and to carry out activities at home. Overall, the television was mentioned as being the recurrent leisure instrument. When people went out, shopping malls were highlighted as the most common entertainment destination. The research pinpoints the lack of neighboring free options for leisure activities such as parks, clubs, and communitarian centers. The author carried out a comparison to working hours reduction at the same company in France and concluded that in both countries there has been a process of automation of the operations, and at the same time, more work to be done in less time by the workers, which led to an additional level of stress and an invasion of their free time, since some people would need to carry work to do at home, beyond the company's time and gate limits.

In that regard, Custodio (2012) advocates that the social time is marked and controlled according to the working time, which leads to some rationalization of other moments of life. For this author, the time that dominantly prevails is that of the machines, whose owners are the "masters of time" so that the use of automation and all technology advancement applied to production has not been converted into people's emancipation. Relying upon Aznar (1995), she claims some possibilities for free time use, such as leisure, tourism, culture, political activity, art, sports, another sort of job, or simply doing nothing, and then questions to what extent that could occur without salary changes or employer's profit reduction. Her reflection remits

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> to the principles of the new organization for working force management, which is based on the dissemination of the flexibilization ideology overall: the production is flexible because the market is unstable; the working force is flexible because they must be constantly adapted to the use of new technology and to the idea of the minimum factory; the labor legislation is flexible because each one must be his self-manager; time is flexible because freedom is subjective; however, only two items cannot be flexible: capital accumulation and profit. (CUSTODIO, 2012, p. 104)

The two studies provide some real dimension of the changes described in the first section. Their view translates a relative traditional thought opposing man and machine as a result of the Industrial Revolution transformation, like that claimed by Lafargue (2011), for whom the machine has perfected and expedited men's work, however that improvement has not been translated into more resting time for workers, but rather as a sort of competition and a demonstration of men's weakness, which to some extent has been further enhanced by technology development.

In a more recent study, Han (2015) provocatively raises the topic about the current society as a burnout society that apparently has adopted the machine speed and timing in their day-by-day activities. In that perspective, we would now live in overconnected times in which the factory, once associated with the image of a prison (FOUCAULT, 1995), has now given place to smart office towers, banks, airports, fitness studios, shopping malls and genetic labs, conveying a full spectrum of overproduction, overperformance, and overcommunication. Paradoxically, this frenetic rhythm of activity would be leading people to be reduced to *animal laborans*, mere working animals with restricted capacity to have a contemplative, deep, and sometimes necessary, negative feeling towards certain situations, since the primary objective is always to keep going (HAN, 2015).

The monetary valuation of free time

If the overall time has been molded from the working time frame, and we receive our salary for the time spent in the job, who should respond for the time we end up missing every day stuck in traffic, for instance? In a response to that provocative question, Dowbor (2013) proposes imparting monetary value to the non-working time we lose because of others' actions which are beyond our control. For this author, "assign economic value to free time will be a practical manner to charge the economic agents for the time they have us lose, as well as a way of rescuing the right to the time said to be non-economic. Submit the corporations to our human objectives, instead of being pushed by them onto a senseless rushing– that is what would, indeed, make sense". (DOWBOR, 2013, p.153).

Dowbor (2013) presents some examples that clearly illustrate that time which is usurped from people, a time they could use for some of the activities mentioned by Aznar (1995), even if it means doing nothing, simply. The long waiting to which we are at times forced in the bank

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queues or in the telephone customer service is a direct consequence of the time-converted workload passed on from the service providers to their users; in other words, as he puts it, there is a reduction in the number of employees, leading to a longer waiting time; therefore, such companies improve their overhead costs, transferring to the defenseless citizens the liability for the additional time lost. In an attempt to calculate the monetary valuation of wasted time in São Paulo, Dowbor (2013) estimated that one hour spent in traffic in the city would be equivalent to R$ 21 million (approximately US$ 6.5 million). If we add on to the account the waiting times just mentioned, we are likely to have that amount doubled.

As we can see in the above examples, the common citizens may be forcefully giving away their precious free time and someone else is profiting from it. In such cases, it may be worth making use of regulation agencies such as PROCOM (Foundation for Consumers Defense and Protection) and ANATEL (National Agency for Telecommunications) seeking to ensure the service level for which the population pays so that the time spent in such activities is minimal, as established by law. It is essential, therefore, to promote an ample discussion with the population that helps clarifying those points; after all, if we cannot charge for our free time, through these actions we ensure at least we may be happier using it as we please, imparting the highest value to it with no harm of losing it to the bank, the traffic, or the telephone company.

Cognitive Surplus – Time and Connectivity

Shirky (2011) introduces the concept of cognitive surplus, through which some people can make use of their spare time in a constructive way to perform creative actions instead of purely consumerist activities. He advocates that the expressive growth and reach of this phenomenon occurred with access to communication technology, particularly Internet, which allowed for the connection and engagement of people in networks throughout the globe. He underlines the number of people connected to the Internet as being above 2 billion, with an estimate of adding up an extra billion three years after. In Brazil, according to a CGI survey (2015), half of total households or 33 million homes and more than 106 million people have Internet access. Most of them is connected through one of the 160 million active smartphones. The percentage of young people (16-24 years old) connected is as much as 83%.

For Shirky, this network communication made easy, associated to free time, would be the main elements of cognitive surplus for the use in public activities and volunteer work aiming to both individual and collective wellbeing, thus contributing to the exercise of full citizenship. He claims that the possibility of global connections allows for the instant contact among people with common interests, increasing their perception about the reach of both individual and group participation. In other words, through the web one can start with a small, reduced

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group and reach for millions of people, each one giving a relatively small contribution donating nothing but their free time and knowledge dedicated to a useful cause to others. A valuable case provided is that of Wikipedia, a collaborative, multi-language, and free encyclopedia which, as Shirky points out, Robert McHenrie, editor in chief of Encyclopedia Britannica once called "public restroom" but is currently an unquestionable success story with its over 30 million available articles in 270 languages, out of which 800 thousand written in Portuguese. It is an example of how people are gradually leaving the role of passive audience of television programs and looking for quite more interactive and rewarding activities, as in the example presented below.

The "Solidary Rapunzel" group

Solidary Rapunzel (in Portuguese: *Rapunzel Solidária*) is an NGO founded in Brazil with the aim of raising hair donations to wig making for women that lost their hair in cancer treatment. As pointed out by a volunteer member, internet is a very powerful tool, given its multiplying effect: currently, Solidary Rapunzel have more than 130,000 clicks in their Facebook and Instagram pages; they have received over 27,000 hair donations not only from all over Brazil, but also from other countries in Latin America, Europe and even Japan. Since its foundation, over 1,030 kits (wig and accessories) have been sent out completely free of charge – an average of 28 every month. It is a successful example of an initiative which, using Shirky's conceptualization, leads to a common good, reaching for a particular group.

Such actions, although of a restricted scope, if multiplied would certainly impact positively into other groups, making a difference in their lives. In any case, they may serve as inspiration for other in-depth initiatives that may get to public reach and have extended social benefits, without having to wait for the state hand to act upon it, but once formed the group, perhaps only to regulate it, if need be. In a world in which the individual values prevail over the collective ones, in which the culture of "run for your life" is the dominant theme, it is difficult to see such initiatives of wide reach as they are usually not promoted by the great communication groups, since they do not generate commercials, increase GDP, or convert into financial gains, being so circumscribed to small groups.

The Information Panopticon

Despite this benefit of connectivity, the "other side of the coin" would be an increasingly use of the "information panopticon" (ZUBOFF, 1988). That author describes in detail the setting of company at which the activities and tasks of a group of employees were determined, controlled, and evaluated no more by their supervisors in person, but remotely by the system, and, as a result, it led to a high degree of impersonality in the working relations, culminating in the dismissal of some employees because they did not hit the service targets established by the system. In a recent study, the same scholar observed the amplified reach of that surveillance

mechanism, which she calls "Big Other" and, through powerful data collection and manipulation, now covers not only the working environment, but every human stance, being enough just to be online, like the approach carried out by Google. Moreover, she alerts (ZUBOFF, 2015, p.85) for the "institutionalizing logic of accumulation that produces hyperscale assemblages of objective and subjective data about individuals and their habitats for the purposes of knowing, controlling, and modifying behavior to produce new varieties of commodification, monetization, and control".

Similarly, Gouveia Júnior (2015) recognizes the benefits of communities created through partnerships and the high level of resources made possible through the web 2.0 in Brazil, thereby fostering a cooperative culture by critical individuals that are open to develop and share meaningful content freely. In this sense, the power to generate and share information stops being "divine", or restricted to a few, and literally gain critical mass. However, the same author highlights the fact that large internet companies are increasingly carrying out a complex hidden surveillance of user habits, thus somewhat reducing the effect of the common power of individuals since there is a much stronger power "above" storing and monitoring all such cyber activities. For Han (2017), this approach is by far more sophisticated and efficient than the society under permanent control as conceived by Orwell's Big Brother concept, since it acquired the features of a "digital panopticon" through internet, smartphones, and Google Glass, apparently conveying limitless access to massive information and "free" communication power to those that fully adhere to the "system", but implying, at the same time, that they inadvertently disclose every single step of their lives for permanent scrutiny. Different than Orwell's Cold War-associated regime, however, the neoliberal system is translated by friendliness: instead of being prohibitive, protective, or repressive, it is overall prospective, permissive, and projective. (HAN, 2017).

Conclusions and suggestions for further research

In the scope of our proposition, we discussed about time and some of its impact over people's lives. Working time is certainly the pendulum that regulates the swing of the other social times: with family and friends, and for religion, school, and leisure, just to name a few. The portrayed examples show that, despite the time of "liquid times", it is still possible to convert the work flexibility into something beneficial for people, not only on an individual but also on a collective basis.

We noted that there has been some amplification of the working time to the detriment of the non-working time; however, we also identified some mechanisms that one can make use to better take the remaining time so that it is really a free time. Apparently one possible consequence of flexibilization, particularly associated with connectivity, is that people are not only doing work at their free time, but they are doing personal tasks during

working time, thereby somewhat reverting the flexibility to their benefit. That would, however, require some empirical work to confirm the breadth and depth of such practice.

Since Negroponte (1996), with the proposition of media convergence, the economy of connectivity has generated a distinct process of work flexibility – quite different, for instance, from the reengineering logic proposal which was popular some decades ago (DAVENPORT; SHORT, 1990). The present technology-driven flexibility has generated new types of employees, with people giving another sense to their life in a way that differs radically from the mechanic of work centrality that has oriented the baby boomer generation.

Today, there are other working possibilities which seem to be looser and more creative, attracting adults from low to middle age. The new positions reflect the materialization of the idea of a job converted into some independent and profitable business. Uber seems to be a relatively known example – despite the criticism that it is like modern slavery disguised of entrepreneurship – but the reality of business models using connectivity has gone beyond the transportation sector, for instance with the new financial service dynamics provided by the "fintechs", online start-ups that offer a platform for financial services such as international money transfer, mobile payment an asset management as an alternative to the traditional banking system (DAROLLES, 2016).

We can see some flexibilization of the time usage, but not of the time *per se*, in view that time cannot be extended, reduced, or modified. In other words, besides being able to release people from performing certain activities, allowing them to dispose of their time in a different way – such as the example of the washing machine as highlighted by Chang (2010) – technology also facilitated the communication between individuals, wherever they are. In this sense, the technological progress made people instantly available to each other by mobile phones, internet, and then by the combination of both though the smartphones, which enabled shortening distances and bringing people together in virtual gatherings, having a nearly limitless reach.

However, despite the massive presence of technology in people's daily life and activities, through their computers and smartphones, as well as the recognition of such benefits, some areas are still seen as highly sensitive. There keeps on being mixed feelings about the human-machine relation (NOMURA et al, 2015), in which, on the one hand, some see these technology advances on service to mankind, like the example provided by cognitive surplus, while others, to a certain extent, see machines and artificial intelligence as a threat, particular in the working environment, where at times that relation are seen as unfair, with machines and technology replacing men as workforce as well as entering, unnoticed and uninvited, into other instances of human life. At the eyes of the "minimum state", which claims

the market precedence above all, as the stone-graved neoliberal book reads, this is perhaps simply a full exercise of individuality and freedom; nevertheless, the intricate ethical issue is that people are not made aware that, by staying permanently connected "freely", they can also inadvertently be producing "evidence" that might be used against them, with no established regulation to protect their rights.

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