Sharing as a Postwork Style: Digital Work and the Co-Working Office

Abstract

Evocations of the 'sharing economy' claim disruptions through digital technology. Style is put forward to focus on subtle changes to the form and content of work through digital sharing. Digital sharing is a postwork style with ambiguous implications for worker identity and expression. Digital technologies share work through distributing the workplace beyond fixed location and by enrolling individuals as workers through processes of communication circulation. These styles of sharing challenge fixed spaces and times of work with utopian and dystopian postwork possibilities. This argument is supported through practices of shared digital work constituting co-working offices in Manchester, Cambridge and London.

Key words: sharing, digital work, co-working, postwork, style

Introduction

The explicit pairing of sharing and economy provides an opportunity to shift the theoretical framing and empirical focus for 'economic' activity. The popular invocation of the 'sharing economy' encompasses a diversity of for-profit and not-for-profit activities that broadly aim to open access to 'under-utilized' resources. Such economic activity, termed 'sharing', is mooted as distinct from other forms for the ways that it is facilitated through digital technologies (e.g. Cockayne 2016; Martin 2016; Richardson 2015; Schor *et al* 2015). This article considers the relationship between these digitally-enabled practices of sharing and changes to how work takes place[1]. Specifically, sharing is put forward as a *style* of working with digital technologies. Style is understood as a manner of undertaking activity that occurs without explicit and determining instruction or plan but is nonetheless somehow distinctive because of its constituting *form* and *substance*. Formally, digital technologies alter the organization of work through shared workplaces that (re)arrange and (dis)assemble as working activity is distributed beyond the boundaries of the 'firm' (Flowers 2008; Ettlinger 2014). Substantively, work involves practices of sharing through digital technologies, where individuals are enrolled as workers through their participation in processes of ('informational') communications circulation. These stylistic attributes of digital sharing are significant because they have ambiguous parameters and agency. It is uncertain how styles may transgress, appropriate and be appropriated over space and time (Butler 2000; Hall et al 2016).

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[1] The geographical focus is primarily on (urban spaces in) the UK, although the argument may extend beyond these sites.

Style therefore enables an understanding of how digital sharing is *postwork*. The ambiguities of how styles shift and are taken up captures the sometimes overt, sometimes indiscernible modes in which the sharing of work seeps into the sharing of life with digital technologies. Whilst deployed differently (c.f. Weeks 2011; Srnicek and Williams 2015; Mason 2015), the term postwork broadly emphasizes these changing spaces, times and purposes of work in economy and society, in part brought about by digital technologies. Conceptualized as a style, such postwork activity is ambiguous; it follows no single moral or political route map. Rather than inherently forwards or backwards-looking, the postwork style may be separated from or taken up in opposition to any founding radical gesture (Gilroy 2002), and is thus traced through differing vectors. One movement is towards a postwork dystopia, signifying the end of the institutions that delimit a formal job, and associated securities, as found in accounts of the problems of 'gig work' in the on-demand economy and fears of job loss through automation (Frey and Osborne 2013; 2015; Ford 2015, Bissell and Del Casino 2017). Another vector follows utopian possibilities in the postwork mode. Rather than stopping to mourn the end of traditional working institutions, work becomes 'an invocation of the possibility of freedom', a space and time for invention (Weeks 2011: 145), that is enabled by alternative mechanisms for distributing income (Srnicek and Williams 2015).

To examine these ambiguities of digital sharing as a postwork style, I focus on the co-working office. Co-working offices are workspaces enabled by digital technologies and sometimes producing 'born-digital' businesses (GLA 2014). Rather than being populated by a single company as in a 'traditional' office model, they are sites shared by different individuals and small businesses, including but by no means exclusively 'tech' start-ups. This work is thus 'digital' in that it occurs through software, hardware and connectivity affording the possibilities of smaller, self-organized producer units. I draw on ongoing ethnographic research conducted in co-working offices in English cities as an illustrative instance of digital sharing as a postwork style. The ways these shared sites become working space through digital technologies indicates the distributed constitution of digital workplaces and therefore the subtle and complex performances of worker identities. The article comprises two main sections. I show in the following section how sharing might be understood as a digital style through first the form and second the substance of working activities through digital technologies. This is then followed by a second section discussing how, as a style, digital sharing might be framed as postwork through a focus on the co-working office. In this second section, some brief UK context on these sites is provided, before the focus turns to an examination of their constitution as workplaces through the postwork style of digital sharing. The article concludes with some implications of digital sharing as a postwork style.

Digital sharing as working style

This section examines how digitally-enabled practices of sharing might be understood as a working style. By drawing on British cultural studies (Hall and Jefferson 1975; Hebdige 1979), it is possible to find in style at least two insights for an understanding of the culture and politics – the modes, dispositions and movements – shaping 'the working class' that are useful for conceptualizing contemporary practices of work through digital technologies. Firstly, style concentrates on the subtleties of what constitutes working identities. From Clark (1975: 178-179) we find that style might be related to but not entirely subsumed by working practices, and rather involves processes of 'transformation and rearrangement' of such work activity 'into a pattern that carries new meaning.' Thus style enables an understanding of work culture that diffuses beyond fixed locations and practices of doing work, which is significant given the changing geographies of the workplace through digital technologies (Richardson 2016). Secondly then, style offers an insight into how cultural and political expression or movements connected to work might come about. In this regard, Clark (ibid. p. 184) gives a sense of the 'evolution of style' as a struggle for modes of collective articulation beyond existing parameters of recognition. Here then it becomes possible to see how attention to style might offer clues as to senses of shared worker expression within the context of trends towards increasingly self-organized and atomized work through digital technologies. To unpack this, I consider sharing as style through a focus on its formal and substantive appearances. Firstly the organizational form of digital work is examined that distributes senses of collective workplace beyond geographical proximity; and secondly substantive content of digital work is considered in which workers are constituted as such through their participation in practices of communications circulation.

Distributed workplaces: sharing as the form of digital work

This sub-section outlines how sharing can be understood as a style of digital work by focusing on the formal renderings through which such working activity takes place. This involves emphasizing changes to the organizational structure of work through the distributed workplace. Here the shared form of the digital workplace is given through participation in the 'network' (Hassan 2003); modes of connection that may or may not involve 'geographical' proximity (c.f. Boschma 2005). In other words, the formal arrangements of digital working space produce a workplace that is shared through potentially displaced locations and syncopated rhythms of working together. The workplace does not have to be conceived as a bounded entity with a unity of time and fixed insides and outsides. This shared form of work beyond firm location takes place through the opportunities afforded by digital technologies for connectivity that geographically distributes work through both 'global' and 'urban' space. Taking global space first, the workplace is shared through the prevalence of 'platforms' that intensify the distribution of workers through labor market intermediaries (LMIs) (Coe and Jordhus-

Lier 2011) as vehicles conveying both local and global conditions of employment within 'subcontracted capitalism' (Wills 2009). Building on the long running export of information processing services (Mullings 1999), an archetypical example of a 'digital' LMI is Amazon's mechanical turk which is able to 'leverage the crowd' to flexibly match labor supply and demand (Bergvall-Kareborn and Howcroft 2014: 214). This crowdsourcing enables businesses to obtain labour externally to undertake 'tasks that could alternatively be performed internally by employees' (*ibid*.).

As well as distributing working activity globally through these platforms, digital technologies also organize urban space as 'shared workplace'. One dimension of this is the 'on-demand' economy which similarly utilizes 'digital platforms' to provide connections to a service or commodity through a mobile application or website (Cockayne 2016, 73). This extends the diverse 'workplaces' of the city by coordinating the activity of workers in highly spatially and temporally specific parcels of work through 'last-mile logistics', for example through Uber and Deliveroo. Workers are able clock on and off with degrees of flexibility over time and location. Another dimension of digital sharing as the formal rendering of work in the city lies in the enhanced possibilities for mobile workplaces. Building on the trends towards 'teleworking', 'telecommuting' and the 'home office' (Steward 2000; Avery and Baker 2002; Greenhill and Wilson 2006; Johnson *et al* 2007, Laurier 2004; Mokhtarian et al 2004), the office is understood as a 'plural workscape' for the ways that it can be produced at distributed sites (e.g. airports, cafes, trains), each of which exhibit varied 'task-space relationships' (Felstead et al 2005; Hislop and Axtell 2009). Rather than an expectation that workers will stick to 'fixed places of work' (Vilhelmson and Thulin 2001), the demands of mobility on and off the paid job require that the office be 'always on' (Wainwright 2010). Despite the lack of geographical proximity, these emergent digital workplaces in the city are shared through forms of cooperation and coordination across space and time that enables (potential) supervision over and completion of purposeful activity. Significant here then is the way that the formal organization of workers distributes digital work culture beyond fixed location, and thus produces and is produced through the shared substance of work, discussed below.

Communication circulations: sharing as the substance of digital work

This sub-section considers how sharing can be framed as a style of digital work through the substantive activity of communication circulations. The doing, or the substance, of digital work occurs through the sharing or distribution of types of often 'electronic' or 'coded' communication across more or less open channels of connection. In such activity, the 'value' is realised not so much in the content of the communication that is being shared but in the sharing process itself, and by

extension the capacity to generate such circulation. To begin to unpack this shared substance of digital work, I examine firstly the enrolment of individuals as workers through networks of communications circulation, and secondly the means through which such sharing takes place. Firstly, individuals become 'workers' through their interactions with and elaboration through digital hardware and software, which are increasingly 'continuously connected' (Wilson 2014). This becoming-worker involves human-technology co-productions in which workers are held to think like computers and act through 'machinic operations and gestures' (Crary 2013: 59; Hardt 1999). The high volume of office correspondence enabled by instantaneous electronic mail is increased through the above noted possibilities for and demands of sharing the 'workplace' on the move (Saval 2014). Such expanded opportunities for connection intensify acts of checking and responding to (or ignoring) notifications of communication so that this becomes habitual (Bissell 2015). Here being 'at' or 'doing' work becomes synonymous with engagement in and interaction with these processes of circulation through communication.

Secondly then within this context, the capacity to mobilise channels of shared communication that constitute the digital workplace becomes significant for realising 'value'. Whilst the 'surface' content of such 'communication put to work' (Berardi 2009: 86) might be heterogeneous, the ability to write and distribute these encoded packages across the network can be understood as increasingly homogeneous. So on the one hand there is a proliferation of digital media content production such as blogs, 'ubiquitous' photography, and music (Banks and Deuze 2009; Hand 2012; Leyshon 2003), much of which is given through 'free labour' (Terranova 2000, 2004). The circulation of such content produces a collective working environment; building on existing 'in-house' corporate workflow management systems through ICT (Aalst and Hee 2004) but also departing from them through the inducement, production and programming of task packages through digital platforms (Langley and Leyshon 2016: x) for independent 'out-workers'. On the other hand, the means through which such communications are circulated involves its 'reduction' to data that can circulate through an apparently increasingly limited number of channels (Hui 2016[2]). The diversity of expressions produced by workers are codified and constrained into data points that accrue value via the number of times that they engage an interaction. The qualities of shared 'expression' are valorised through the quantities of their 'impressions' or 'likes', to draw on the vocabularies of social media platforms. This results in demands to increase opportunities for impressions, so that sharing shifts from 'organic' circulation onto 'promoted' content. Importantly then, in this shared substance of digital work there is 'continual

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[2] Hui (2016) provides an overview of philosophical debates concerning the substance/content of 'the digital' as (flows of) information, and the relationship of such information to objects.

interactivity' (Hardt 1999: 94) that affords a proliferation of potentially connective events between workers but these do not necessarily amount to a narrative of collective worker identity.

Taken together, this section has briefly examined how sharing, both as a form of organising and as a substantive activity of digital work, can be understood as a style. Style enables an examination of how sharing through digital technologies might involve the organization and selection of working location, together with the doing and circulation of communications as the 'stuff' of digital work. Digital sharing as a style of work therefore emphasises the distributed nature of working culture performed through seemingly 'continuous' communications between apparently atomised workers. I next go on to consider how such a framing of sharing as a style opens up the ambiguous postwork possibilities and problems of working through digital technologies.

Postwork styles and the co-working office

Understood through these formal and substantive parameters, it is possible to see how digital sharing challenges the spatial and temporal boundaries of the workplace to become 'postwork'. The formal rendering of sharing through digital technologies extends work into life by distributing the space-times of the workplace beyond the firm. The increased opportunities for workplaces outside institutional locations (such as 'the factory' or 'the office') require a degree of worker self-organisation, and thus according to Virno (1996, 13-14), produce new kinds of 'professional qualification'. That is, the skills involved in fixing the workplace amidst the aleatory parameters of the network also function as the tools of the trade once that site of work appears; forms of 'urban training in traversing the crossroads of differing opportunities' (*ibid.*). In short, these social practices of making work appear, of building the 'institutions' or structures for work to take place, become working activities once 'on the job'. This collision between 'working' and 'socializing' is intensified in the substantive activity of digital sharing in which work occurs through manners of communication that are felt beyond the boundaries of formal employment. The circulation of content results in the limits of productive labour becoming uncertain, and according to Berardi's (2009: 86) assessment of such 'info-work', produces both an 'investment of desire' and experiences of 'anxiety, incertitude and constant change'. From Berardi then, the ambiguities of the postwork style come into view, where digital sharing might promise a life beyond work whilst simultaneously eradicating the possibilities for their separation. To consider how the style of digital sharing produces these uncertain possibilities of social space and time beyond the institutions of work, in this section I focus on the co-working office. Firstly, I provide some UK context on co-working offices and secondly I examine the ambiguities of such working space through a focus on the shared form and substance of work.

Situating the co-working office

Co-working locations are constituted by the sharing of (work) space by individuals and small businesses who are working alongside, but not necessarily with, each other. In English cities, there are a variety of different models in operation, some of which are intended to drive business growth, such as 'incubators' and 'accelerators' (GLA 2014), whereas others are more 'survivalist', aimed at sustaining businesses, occasionally through forms cooperative management models (Berner *et al* 2012). In London, a 2014 mapping exercise for the Greater London Authority (GLA 2014) found 132 such co-working spaces, arguing that they play a vital role in helping start-ups and small businesses. This support might be situated both within the high demand for affordable office space in the city (noting that provision of co-working space is itself 'big business' (e.g. McLachlan 2015)), but also within two aspects of a wider UK context. The first is the record numbers of self-employed people in the UK, representing 15% of the workforce, which is claimed to mean that 'shared workplaces are becoming more important' (Deane 2016: 6). The second is the UK government's support of the growth of the 'digital economy', which is focused primarily on cities and therefore increases pressure for 'suitable and affordable workspace' (TechCity UK 2015: 27). Such economic growth is purported to involve both 'born-digital' businesses (such as videogame development) as well as the disruption of 'traditional sectors' (TechCity 2015: 18), as is claimed regarding the 'digital platforms' of the sharing economy that are 'revolutionizing the way we interact with the world' (BIS 2015: 1).

Co-working sites then seem to combine these two shifting dimensions of the UK economy, bringing together self-employed workers with digital changes to economic activity. I want to consider two questions that are raised by co-working offices that illustrate some of the postwork ambiguities of sharing as a style of working through digital technologies. One relates to the shared form of work, the question of why people self-organize to work in these offices. For if digital technologies are purported to enable people to work anywhere then why is it that people end up in the co-working office? This first question might in some ways be answered by the second, which concerns the shared substance of work, or what people are *doing* at these sites that produces them as co-working offices. If workers in these spaces are not organized around the same set of business objectives, but rather have their own independent (business) needs, wishes and desires, how does the office occur through shared working practices? Responding to these two questions requires returning to the ambiguities of sharing as a postwork style. The issues of why and how people share these co-working offices - of the form and substance of activity that constitutes them as shared working space - indicate the uncertainties and complexities of the spaces and times of digital work. Put simply, co-working spaces open up the question of what digital work is through how it takes place.

These spaces illustrate how work occurs and is 'made visible' in diverse ways with and through digital technologies (Suchman 1995). Digital hardware and software enable workers to quickly set up to do their 'own' work, but also necessarily connect and negotiate with other workers who are simultaneously engaged in working the space. These differences between 'co-workers' might be generative, producing 'sometimes dissonant, sometimes harmonious' resonances (Ducey 2007), but simultaneously can result in conflict, deferrals, and withdrawals of activity that occur in an excess that is not of the order of productive work. Thus the co-working office illustrates how the postwork style of digital sharing is neither strictly 'after' work in the temporal sense, nor 'beyond' work in a spatial sense. Rather, these offices pose the question of what counts as work where the sharing enabled by digital technologies might turn into or undermine working activity. In what follows, I draw on interview vignettes taken from ongoing ethnographic research in such offices in Manchester, London and Cambridge UK. These provide illustrative color to the discussion, offering an opening into the postwork complexities of shared experiences of digital work associated with these space. I consider first *why* digital work is shared at co-working sites, suggesting that their appeal lies in their formal constitution as a bureaucratic structure beyond domestic space but that nonetheless retains informalities that challenge the boundaries of work and the rigidities of bureaucracy. Second I explore *how* digital work is shared at these sites through access to the circulations that constitute purposeful activity but that nonetheless are subject to attempts at their reduction or regulation.

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Finding form at the co-working office

"*When we first started at the Hub [co-working office], part of the reason was cabin fever, so working at home for six months. I was living in a flat as well. My room was my sitting room, my bedroom and my office, and after a while that got a little bit much. So moving to the Hub [gave] that separation between work and life a little bit.*" (Rob, co-worker, London)

Co-working offices provide shared form for the postwork challenges and possibilities of the distributed workplace through digital technologies. I show here how these sites simultaneously respond to and perpetuate the sharing of the digital workplace, firstly by offering elements of an imaginary of bureaucracy that concentrates independent workers but that secondly occurs without the provision of structured roles for practising bureaucratic space. The experience of Rob illustrates the first point: co-working offices enable workers to organize space and time for 'work' that might be separate from their 'home' life. Rob had started a digital marketing company some four years ago in his early twenties, and he and his business partner would work from their respective homes when not meeting clients. As is indicated by Rob's comment, 'home' was hardly a spacious working environment given property prices in London. The desire to come to 'the office' then indicates that

the potential to fuse 'public and private selves' through digital work is not an 'unqualified good' (Kreiss *et al* 2011: 249). Concentrating distributed digital workers, the co-working office seems to offer an antidote as a physical location *and* an imaginary for 'office work'. Despite the ability to do the same work at home, 'the Hub' co-working space to which Rob would go is a different 'place' from his flat both in that he must travel across London to get there – it is 'geographically' distinct - but also for the ways working activities are organized at the office – it is 'culturally' distinct. In relation to the latter distinction, the office - or 'bureau' - connotes a bureaucratic performance governed by a rational ethos of service apparently distinct from that which manages the home (Kreiss *et al* 2011: 249). Evoking Weber's (1978 [1925]) formulation, bureaucracy arose as a system of rule-based functioning for society organised around principles of impersonality, transparency and predictability that would do away with the hereditary peculiarities of the feudal system.

In this first sense then, the co-working office is shared by workers seeking to find form and structure amidst the potential 'peculiarities' arising from the distributions 'work' time and space through digital technologies. However, the picture is made a little more complex by Rob's indication that part of the attraction of going to the co-working office was the social opportunities it provided:

"The Hub was brilliant for getting out, it was brilliant when we were small - there was two of us - kind of having some colleagues when we really had none, so it kind of felt like we were all working together, but we weren't. Although people interact with the communities to differing degrees, but then also it was a great source of work and, actually, we still get some work from contacts, and we still work with some of the people that we met back there.." (Rob)

Rob's comment here leads to the second point: the co-working office provides some form for sharing, but this might not be *formal enough* to mitigate some of the problems of distributed work through digital technologies. From Rob's description, the bureaucratic performance of the co-working office manifests as one lacking an authentic 'back stage', to pick up on Goffman's (1959) vocabulary. People appear to be working together in the co-working office but there is nothing directing or coordinating their work together.

For example, going to The Hub meant that Rob had 'colleagues', people with whom to share the workplace. Yet at the same time, he suggests that these aren't real colleagues because they weren't all 'working together'; they did not have designated roles that structured and connected their work together in the office. Instead, they were individual businesses or small companies who worked on different businesses but in the same space. These workers exemplify understandings of 'peer production' enabled by digital technologies which means that 'individual agents can act [...] without the need for formalisation of their role' (Benkler 2004: 342). This sense of different interests and

agendas in co-working office were heightened by the ways workers come and go from the space, forms of mobile work practices undertaken by Mike, a co-worker in his forties in the tech industry who had recently moved from London to Manchester:

"What I would do, basically, I would work [at Google TechHub] maybe three or four days a week, about four hours a day and then the rest of the time I would just rotate through a succession of places with good wi-fi and decent coffee. And now up in Manchester I'm kind of doing the same thing. I'll be [at Central Working] three days a week, the rest of the time I'll just mosey about the Central Library and now I'm actually at a place called Pot Kettle Black, which is a great little spot, so it just rotates through."

From this perspective then, the co-working office is a play at bureaucratic form; it is a site for socializing with some minor work benefits such as building up business contacts.

This looser sense of workplace organization mirrors wider shifts in corporate design since the 1990s in which the office becomes a conduit for communicative exchange, facilitating worker creativity through 'free' play (Saval 2014). The intention in this shift has been to make (corporate) office workers more mobile within the workplace, to maximize 'association, interaction and shared work space' (O'Neill and McGuirk 2003: 1761) in order 'to boost innovation and invention' (Thrift 2006: 290). As O'Neill and McGuirk (2003: 1758) noted in the CBD of Sydney at the turn of the millennium, this shift in office design was undermining divisions of 'home and work spaces, and between public and private spaces.' Understood as extending this trend, the co-working office simultaneously finds form for work beyond home but also challenges conventional typologies that separate the domestic and public spheres. Thus, the ambiguities of digital sharing as a postwork style emerge in the form of the co-working office. The distributed 'postwork' form offered by digital technologies that encourages work beyond the 'workplace' produces the co-working office through worker concentrations that mimic bureaucracy yet undermine the separation of professional from personal roles on which bureaucratic organization is premised. The next section considers the shared substance of working activity, or how work takes place, in this postwork style of the co-working office.

Searching for substance in the co-working office

"We've always had this trade-off between individual members who want to be able to just use the space freely and organisations who might want to have control of more of the space." (Jonny, co-working space founder, Cambridge)

Co-working offices are constituted through the shared substance of working activity that provides postwork opportunities and difficulties when the edges of productive work become uncertain through

digital technologies. This sub-section examines how shared work gets done in the co-working office, firstly by considering the role of circulation to produce shared purposeful activity in the space that secondly occurs through attempts to reduce or regulate the means through which such networking takes place. Jonny's assessment of the challenges of running a co-working space exemplify this tension between 'open' and 'closed' circulation in these offices. Taking the first point concerning openness, co-working offices are attractive to potentially distributed digital workers for the ways that they partially concentrate, yet retain the freedom for sharing and circulation of, work. The constitutive significance of these work interactions through co-worker circulation is noted by Ed, who manages a co-working office, also in Cambridge:

"We didn't put the coffee machine here, we put it in a separate room with the idea being that it gives them a bit of privacy to have a chat with another co-worker, and who knows what conversation that may lead to? Marissa Mayer, who's the CEO at Yahoo, said [...] one of the first things she wanted after she took over was to get all the people who work from home to go and work in an office, because of that watercooler moment. You don't know, you could have a chat with someone who's in an entirely different department and you don't know where that may go. It's exactly the same as co-working, but we just don't all work for the same company."

So Ed emphasizes here the 'openness' of working space that enables movement around the office and the creation of places for 'serendipitous' interaction.

This means that for those running the co-working office, working space is measured not so much through the productive outputs of the workers, but in terms of the production of interactions. This is crystallized by Andrew, who works for a company that runs co-working offices in London:

"We're judged on collaboration that we engender, joint contract bids that fall out of people clustering together, and the social asset value of the management. We've got 85 per cent socialization, or around 60 per cent collaboration, where there's some meaningful relationship going on between the organizations. And that leads to 35 per cent on contracting and bids that are very tangible in terms of financial impact on the organization."

Andrew's description illustrates the tendency in shared digital work to emphasize the quantities of impressions – the number and type of work interactions – over the qualities of expression of the work – how the work is done and what constitutes its outputs. This difference is noted by Andrew, when he suggests that there is a mismatch between those at a distance from the doing of work – the executives like himself – and those employed as 'hosts' who are closer to co-workers because they are involved in the operations of the office day-to-day:

"So what we [the executives] did was to create an opportunity for socialization, but it's the teams rather than focusing on the executives, who often have fixed agendas and quite often they don't actually know where the synergies are on the ground."

One implication of such measurement of working space through productive interactions is the need to manage, facilitate or 'curate' encounters between workers in the space.

Curation picks up the second aspect of Jonny's point above concerning the need to regulate or reduce the substantive circulations constituting co-working space. Curation (as term and practice) has arisen in response to the volume, velocity and variation of consumption and consumables through digital technologies, for example in music (Reynolds 2011; Hracs et al 2013; Hracs 2015). It is way of adding value to existing 'cultural products' through practices of selection, sorting and filtering: consumers pay to have their choice reduced, to have streams dammed, perhaps by an 'expert'. These 'content curators' or 'intermediaries' assemble digital interactions often based on personal preferences (invariably built through an algorithm of past choices, for example in the case of music streaming services). Such sorting and securing of interactions inferred by curation is a selling point deployed by operators of co-working offices to potential co-workers (i.e. consumers of the space). This promise of office culture as a curated network tend to be articulated and managed through terms of membership that are frequently dictated by the 'hosts', as Jonny describes:

"We are confident that the culture is basically one of trust and we can expect people to behave [...]. We've had two people we've denied membership to, because they basically lied during the membership process or they tried to get inducted on a piece of equipment before they'd had their general induction [...]. But always when we reject people we say 'this is about trust and that's why we can't take you on as a member now. If you restore that trust, then that's great, come back.'"

Membership thus serves as a gateway to regulate access to the substantive circulations that constitute the co-working office with the aim of ensuring the right 'sort' of working space through 'trusted' membership (Banks et al 2000; Ettlinger 2003; Murphy 2006).

However, these attempts to manage access are not always able to reduce what could become problematic uses of the space once membership is granted. As is typical in debates over the usage and constitution of ('digital') public space (Crang 2000), these were forms of activity that for one set of people might count as 'purposeful', but for another were felt as a 'disturbance'. Julien, a co-worker in London, draws on such differing perspectives to explain why he prefers one office over another:

"It's [a different co-working office] a very nice place to visit, and I go there regularly because there's great atmosphere. Yet, I think work-wise I prefer it here, because it is, maybe less hipster-y,

but more of a work atmosphere for me [here]. I mean, it's good having beer on tap [there], but it also means that you're distracted more easily. I think that's what people like [there], and that's what I dislike. I think each to his [sic.] own."

Returning to Rob, these different understandings of acceptable interaction were tolerable up to a point. As the number of employees in his business grows he suggests that there are challenges for getting work done when he does not have overall say in the running of the office space:

"It's getting to the point where culture as a team is increasingly more important than in a co-working space. For example, I want to put up a kind of physical board of a timeline of the progression of us as a company, because it's very difficult sometimes to have perspective on how far you've actually progressed in the last six months. If I had the physical space where we could have that, it would be a brilliant thing, but I can't put that up here."

Taken together then, this section has illustrated the problems and possibilities of the substance of digital sharing as a postwork style through the co-working office. Whilst the circulation of digitally-enabled workers is necessary for the production working space through their interactions, these encounters are nonetheless subject to varying degrees of regulation and reduction to ensure substantive working activity can take place.

Conclusion

Popular evocations of the sharing economy point to the role of digital technologies in altering how economic activities take place. This article has examined how digital sharing might be understood as a style of working activity that is postwork that therefore has ambiguous implications for worker identity and expression. I have emphasized how digital technologies can result in shared work through distributing the workplace beyond fixed location and by enrolling individuals as workers through processes of communication circulation. These styles of sharing challenge fixed spaces and times of work and have utopian and dystopian postwork possibilities. This argument has been supported through ethnographic examination of practices of shared digital work that constitute co-working offices in Manchester, Cambridge and London. I finish by making two points: one emphasizing the importance of a focus on styles of sharing with digital technologies, and the other concerning methods for researching digital work.

Firstly, the focus on styles of sharing highlights the importance of subtle changes to social and economic life with contemporary digital technologies. This is not to dismiss accounts of 'disruption' that are heralded as markers of a 'digital age', but rather to find a different emphasis. Evoking but not reducible to symbols and categories, the recognizable yet shifting movements and dispositions that constitute styles illustrate how changing life with digital technologies might occur as a 'background',

through almost indiscernible alterations that seep into a multiplicity of social and economic practices (Thrift 2004). Close attention to how individual articulations become discernible as a collective style of expression offers understanding of the sorts of politics that might emerge through the postwork ambiguities of digital sharing. Secondly, the co-working office as a site for shared digital work highlights the myriad manifestations of digital technologies in economic practices and therefore the potentially diverse methods for their approach. As well as focusing on quantities, for example of transactions through digital platforms, it is equally important to examine how people live and work with these technologies. Such an ethnographic approach might therefore be considered 'non-digital centric' (Pink et al 2016), including but not necessarily privileging such digital interactions and transactions as the sole focus of inquiry.

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