

WORK UNDER SURVEILLANCE

ANN LAWLESS

laway001@mymail.unisa.edu.au

[<https://annlawless.academia.edu/cv>](https://annlawless.academia.edu/cv)

Dr. Ann Lawless is a university worker in Australia and active as a unionist and health activist. Her doctorate examined a Habermasian analysis of activism in the Australian academy. She is an active aunty, niece and cousin in a large family. She can be contacted on ResearchGate and Academia.edu.

KEYWORDS

analytics, audit culture, emotions, normalization, workplace

PUBLICATION DATE

Issue 6, December 11, 2018

HOW TO CITE

Ann Lawless. "Work Under Surveillance." *On_Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture* 6 (2018). [<http://geb.uni-giessen.de/geb/volltexte/2018/13904/>](http://geb.uni-giessen.de/geb/volltexte/2018/13904/).

Permalink URL: [<http://geb.uni-giessen.de/geb/volltexte/2018/13904/>](http://geb.uni-giessen.de/geb/volltexte/2018/13904/)

URN: [<urn:nbn:de:hebis:26-opus-139045>](urn:nbn:de:hebis:26-opus-139045)



Work Under Surveillance

Abstract

This poem addresses the lived experience of being in workplaces under legal forms of surveillance in Australia. It refers to the evolution of emotions and behaviors during workplace surveillance, and adaptation to surveillance technologies of audit cultures. It refers also to compliance with surveillance, and to normalization of stressful emotions and behaviors as part of dealing with surveillance technologies and culture.

They count my keystrokes
and the periods between
performance of keystroke activity.
So occasionally I tap a key
Just to suggest:
I am working.

They count my printing
and the photocopier use.
500Km away a robot tells me
Change the settings of your printer.

They monitor my hours performed
Time at work must be timed and coded
Everyday I'm called to that account.
Facial recognition technology
In the lecture room:
It seems they know I am working.

I open the window
I imagine
I am being watched
Everywhere I go
I know for sure that
Monitoring, watching, reporting ongoing

Others there are watching me

as is my invisible audience.

I am clever, I will adapt

I know I have adapted

I know I am adapting

to work under surveillance,

I know I am, I know I can.

It was difficult at first

It is normal now

I don't have to try very hard:

I'm on auto-pilot now.

They have their analytics

The next generation are watching me

Watching not over but of me.

I shape myself carefully

Knowing they watch that too.

We warn each other

“Watch out! They are watching us....

Don't do this, don't do that, do this and that.”

We watch out for each other

while they monitor us.

We monitor each other, because we care.

I know they have data

Vast repositories of data

Big data absorbs my little self

They can check my passwords

So I choose not to vexate them.

They monitor email, phone and performance

work under surveillance.

I squirm with discomfort in private places

Refuse a private scratch

Because I know
nothing private is private.

I am not who I was
who I was before certain of their surveillance
I am who I am made
Made mad by paranoia, suspicion, loss of innocence
Exhaustion from performing
Knowing I am watched.

I can't find hope for you
No hope in this
My innocence protests
Yet still, innocent or not I
work under surveillance.