Emotional AI and the future of wellbeing in the post-pandemic workplace
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This talk interrogates the growing pervasiveness of affect recognition tools as an emerging layer human-centric automated management in the global workplace. While vendors tout the neoliberal incentives of emotion-recognition technology as a pre-eminent tool of workplace wellness, we argue that emotional AI recalibrates the horizons of capital not by expanding outward into the consumer realm (like surveillance capitalism). Rather, as a new genus of digital Taylorism, it turns inward, passing through the corporeal exterior to extract greater surplus value and managerial control from the affective states of workers. Thus, empathic surveillance signals a profound shift in the ontology of human labor relations. In the emotionally quantified workplace, employees are no longer simply seen as physical capital, but conduits of actuarial and statistical intelligence gleaned from their most intimate subjective states. As a result, affect-driven automated management means that priority is often given to actuarial rather than human-centered managerial decisions.