Some jobs have relationship at their core, depending upon a personal, emotional connection between workers and their charges. “Connective labor” is the relational work between practitioner and recipient, such as in therapy, teaching, or primary care, where workers serve as a human witness of the other in their efforts to produce a particular end such as learning or healing. Contemporary capitalism – insecure production, expansive consumption and rampant inequality – has helped to generate both a widespread need for recognition and the connective labor jobs that provide it. Yet ironically, as existing research shows, it is also ushering in the rationalizing systems transforming this work. Based on 100+ interviews and 300+ hours of observation, my research argues that the contemporary degradation of connective labor, particularly for disadvantaged people, makes its automation seem more acceptable. Tensions surrounding judgment, authenticity and expectations also give rise to ambivalence about connective labor and its workers. But while there is mounting evidence suggesting people can learn or heal to some degree with machines, I argue this is answering the wrong question, and contend that the automation of connective labor risks making more people invisible, with political, social and health costs.