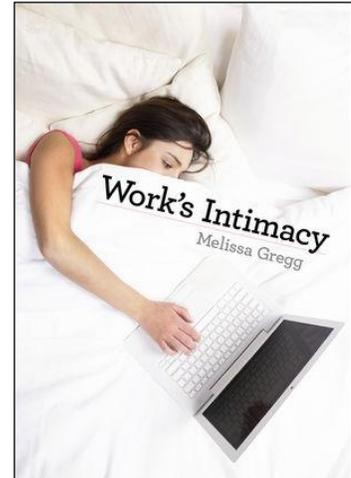


Melissa Gregg, **Work's Intimacy**, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011, 200 pp, \$50.29 (hardcover), \$14.63 (paperback).

Reviewed by
Yujie Julie Chen
University of Maryland

Labor issues in the network society have attracted tremendous attention recently. Rather than totalizing contemporary working experience, *Work's Intimacy* by Melissa Gregg focuses on the complexities and contradictions of mid-rank professionals, previously defined as white-collar workers and later on as knowledge workers. It comes out as a long "overdue" and valuably nuanced account of the impact of mobile/online technologies on work, life, and social relations. Based upon three-year ethnographic studies on 26 professionals in Brisbane, Australia, Gregg's book successfully fills the gap in the existing literature on digital labor, which is drastically divided by the claim of "super-exploitation" and the advocacy of producers' creativity (see Bruns, 2008; Terranova, 2000).



Gregg uses the narrative of intimacy to describe the shared working experience of these professionals and to articulate the new meanings of work, domesticity, and love. In the introduction and chapter 1, Gregg traces the rise of salaried professionals in the early 20th century and demystifies the autonomy that otherwise is usually attributed to the wide spread of mobile technologies. On the contrary, she recognizes that "technology has long facilitated particular work style and preferences" (p. 9). The promotion of self-monitoring and social networking is among the preferences reinforced by the global triumph of neoliberalism and the pervasiveness of mobile technologies. Along this line, for Gregg, constant connectivity to work triggers positive feelings of freedom and flexibility, but at the same time, it also results in persistent anxieties to perform professionally in a timely manner. Against this backdrop, Gregg situates her research in Queensland, whose self-branding image was refreshed to the "smart state" to spearhead creative economy. The author argues that the rhetoric of "flexible workplace" blows out of proportion the irrelevance of time and place for work, considering that deadlines for specific projects are nonnegotiable, and the amount of working time is never reduced by flexible hours.

Two of Gregg's findings in chapter 2 differentiate this book from rhetoric assertions of the invasion of work into home space: (a) Although the convenience of working from home enhances productivity, the economic burden to maintain network infrastructure most likely falls on the employees; and (b) anxiety to keep abreast with coworkers via e-mail exchanges is prevalent among professionals, but constant checking of e-mails and sorting them out is ironically downgraded to below the status of "productive work," namely to "discount labor." In chapter 3, the author singles out contractual part-time staff and student workers as the ones at risk of falling prey to precarious working conditions and to the prolonged apprenticeship of performing discount labor in the information industries.

Chapter 4 ("To CC: Or Not to CC") highlights the shift from the omnipotent surveillance at the top to the hegemonic rhetoric of teamwork. The egalitarian spirit imposes coercion on lower-rank employees fully aware of their obligations to align to team priorities. The power of the digital *panopticon* (peer surveillance) reveals itself in the lengthy e-mail correspondence among fellow team members when the supervisors are carbon copied (cc-ed). Once a majority of work is performed online, employees have less face-to-face interactions. Their desires to escape surveillance of formal e-mails and establish a community of "collegial support" partly explain the popularity of Facebook among professionals (p. 100).

According to Gregg, social networking sites cushion the uncertainty caused by an unstable working environment by allowing professional workers to build friendships with colleagues online and maintain interactions with friends and family members during the workday. The Facebook friendship is genuine to the extent that some respondents want to protect it as a "safe space" against intrusions from work (pp. 97-99). Nevertheless, maintaining this genuine online friendship can be a luxury for others when online participations and presence become part of their jobs. As the discourse of participation prevails in private and public sectors alike, employees in public relations must maintain online publicity. Some are even forced to "instrumentalize" their online networks for strategic marketing. A multiplied workload due to transferring the same content to different media and adopting new platforms is overlooked.

Part III of *Work's Intimacy* presents the most compelling stories of how these professionals' intimate relationships with their work has challenged conventional understandings of domesticity and love. In chapter 7, Gregg charts a remarkable gender divide evident in the workplace-making at home. However, for career-driven women, work generates feelings of fulfillment and control that "rival" those provided by family life (p. 131). In this sense, domesticity loses some of its earlier functions to discipline women and picks up new ones. Gregg then quickly shifts focus in the next chapter to the unpredictable working schedules of on-call technicians. Their precariousness is again excused in the name of teamwork. Unfortunately, this chapter repeats previous argument and appears a bit out of place in Part III.

In conclusion, Gregg labors to find an appropriate vocabulary with which to lay the foundation for contemporary labor politics. She singles out the slogan "love what you do" in Steve Jobs' 2005 address at Stanford University commencement as emblematic of the professional class. For them, the language of love and passion is entangled with that of work and career ambitions. As opposed to the poorest workers at digital device assembly lines who are left little room to love their jobs, the professionals in Gregg's study proactively let work overflow into intimate social relations and spaces, and they incorporate work into their register of love and intimacy. Consequently, Gregg argues that the divisive line in the labor politics is between the "conflicting constraints, freedoms, and opportunities of the 'lovers' [and] the 'loveless'" (p. 171).

The information expressed in the *Work's Intimacy* more than fills its slim volume. In-depth interviews and rich contextual knowledge give the book incredibly powerful voices and resonate strongly on the sectors that Gregg did not dwell on. Given the increasingly capricious ups and downs in the global economy, she raises more questions than answers. She does, however, guide us through the interview subjects' daily lives, throwing into relief the complex and intertwined relationship between work, intimacy,

social relations, and technologies. Her book is a must-read for all who are interested in labor politics and critical studies of media technologies.

References

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