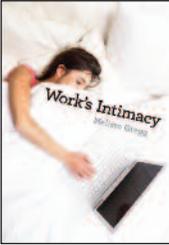# *Reviews*

Work's Intimacy. *By Melissa Gregg.* UK: Polity Press, 2011. 200 pp. ISBN: 9780745650289 (pbk).

> "You've got to find what you love. And that is
> as true for your work as it is for your lovers."
> (Steve Jobs, quoted in Gregg, 2011, p. 170)

Steve Job's affective elevation of cognitive work in his 2005 address to students at Stanford University, cited above, ties work to intimacy in precisely the mystifying and non-negotiable way that is at the centre of discovery and analysis in Melissa Gregg's remarkably insightful book, *Work's Intimacy* (2011). This is a timely book, which covers an area that has been begging more critical and empirical analysis since the contemporary social moment, and our work lives have been almost completely invaded by new media technologies. These technologies are deployed in such ways that the labour process has now extended beyond the workspace and the traditional work hours. This development, establishing multiplier effects across the entire range of intellectual and informational industries, has asserted and consolidated a new regime of constant and continuous expropriation of symbolic labour that has largely eluded systematic attention of the academic community—mainstream and critical. This is why Gregg's book could not have come out at a more critical juncture. For these technologies are represented in the media and in the work of heraldic scholars such as Christopher Jencks (1996), Richard Florida (2005), and others, as liberating tools for creative employees and indeed, for late modern civilization as a whole. The story that Gregg tells, however, is a more complex one.

Based on a qualitative study of four organizations and 26 participants in Brisbane, Australia, *Work's Intimacy* explores the experience of employees in information and communication spheres of the knowledge economy and situates the collective experience of these participants vis-à-vis the positive government and commercial rhetoric on the creative economy. While there has been research on the "new" economy and the ideal-type of this creative economy—as one that works with passion all the time—Gregg's work differs in that she explores other historical concepts with respect to the "middle-class infatuation with work" (p. xi). *Work's Intimacy* demonstrates how, in a time of social upheaval and lack of civic engagement, where only investment in one's job "pays off," prospects for online connectivity feed into the middle-class passion and obsession for work as a "proven source of personal esteem" (p. xii). It also echoes the concern we find in Pierre Bourdieu's writings in books such as *Distinction* (1987), which the professional middle class (PMC) subject performs a dominated function within the dominant class. It is precisely PMC control over symbolic capital that consummates this role for the cap-

tains of industry. Gregg's book elaborates empirically on Bourdieu's insight and extends its terms of reference into the twenty-first century working world in which consumption and production are synergistically connected and office work extends quite literally into the bedroom, the living room, and the kitchen of the cognitive worker. Gregg mainly looks at our contemporary condition of working with digital technologies and asks the following questions: What happens when work leaks beyond the traditional office space? What does the "presence bleed of contemporary office culture" (p. 2) look like? In this respect, presence bleed is one of the central concepts in the book, which analyzes the contemporary contradictions of an ever-growing to-do list and the "possibilities" offered by online technologies to do work outside the office and beyond the working day.

In the introduction, Gregg makes quite strong and much-needed interventions into the sociology of labour and social theory. First of all, she critiques the discourse of "work-life balance" with the argument that it "absolved management for the human resourcing decisions defining their employees' experience" (p. 5). Secondly, she juxtaposes the notion of alienation with the celebration of status in the new workplace and states that a new vocabulary is needed to account for the experience of the new forms of creative labour. She also makes a concerted effort to historicize "the links between social networking practices of the present and those of white collar work in previous decades" (pp. 6–7). In other words, she points to some continuities within the organization of capitalism regarding the material social practice and experience of professionalism. Thirdly, Gregg investigates a broad literature from William Whyte's *Organization Man* of the 1950s to C. Wright Mills' *White-Collar* in order to underline historical continuities and shifts in the organization of the modern workspace. Then, her analysis is informed all the way through by the writings on PMC labour process and internalized status, values mentioned by William Whyte, Pierre Bourdieu, C. Wright Mills, and Alan Liu. Gregg carries through and updates these analyses by examining the post dot.com juncture of open-plan offices that abolishes the cubicle and creates an open and intimate environment. In other words, Gregg writes a vivid ethnography of the "new spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Sennett, 2006) as it materializes in the new workplace. In this new workplace, networking becomes labour and is never a guarantor of stable employment or relationships in the domestic space. Meaningful work in the digital, online age, according to Gregg, is a seduction that facilitates the bartering away of cognitive labour at discounted costs to capital.

Gregg's study is located in Brisbane, which, at the time of the research was trying to situate itself as a smart/creative city propelled by the emerging scenario of a deepening convergence of "financial, academic and political interests" (p. 25). She points to the ways in which policy initiatives mobilized within the creative economy mostly cater to the real-estate industry rather than actually improving how labour practices are materialized in reality, and that is where her intervention is. She aptly demonstrates how the materialization of the creative city coincides with the historical emergence of the creative self and the techno-utopian discourse of online technologies and free-market fundamentalism. What she does in the introduction then is to analyze how advertising of new media technologies and the creative economy worked together to create the smart city of Brisbane and disguise other forms of labour that sustained Brisbane.

The first part of the book deals with intricate issues that the advent of online tech-

nologies leads to as far as the organization of labour process is concerned. For instance, Gregg investigates the reasons why employees opt for working from home and also addresses challenges of the very same practice, which at times prove to be difficult due to lack of support from the employer. She particularly tackles the question of email with respect to labour and how employees experience this situation, as well as the gendered aspect of working from home. Another very important matter she tackles is the condition of precarious employment. Through Gregg's qualitative study, we get to learn about the lack of definition of roles and positions of contract-labour, as well as surveillance of emails of young contracted employees. The story of precarity has telling implications as far as the future of teaching jobs in the academia are concerned. A very significant point Gregg makes is how the protracted student identity is assumed to be temporary but can actually pave the way for a lifelong precarity. She also provides a well-stated critique of the university for actually perpetuating precarious forms of employment.

In the second part, Gregg explores how the celebrated notion of teamwork manifests itself in work life. As she wittily puts it, "to CC or not to CC" (p. 73) becomes a node of power relations at work. She subjects the discourse of teamwork to a nuanced critique on the interviews. Again, emailing emerges as a very strong theme with respect to how it irritates employees when they are not supposed to be on an email exchange. She also demonstrates how engaging with emails involves levels of hierarchy. What is particularly important as far as the practice of emailing within the context of teamwork experience is concerned, as we learn from the book, is that it becomes a site where the culture of teamwork is cultivated rather than indoctrinated from above.

Gregg also addresses social media sites and their relationship to work and network. For instance, she approaches Facebook as the social networking platform of the liquid times in which we live. For Gregg, Facebook is where we make it through the day or communicate with friends in isolating work spaces. The platform also holds the potential for providing employment opportunities in the precarious lives of information workers. Moreover, it becomes a virtual reality for employer surveillance. It is also perceived as a "blackmailer" (p. 96) in that disconnection would endanger the user and threaten his/her relationships or value in the society. In Gregg's words, Facebook enforces a "coercive intimacy" through a "hyperactive presence" (p. 96).

Another strong theme in the book is the increasing importance of online branding of the self for employability in a flexible economy. Through such processes of online branding, the distinction between "public outreach and commercial transactions" (p. 114) is blurred and employees increasingly instrumentalized their connections for the sake of other material benefits.

In the last part of the book, Gregg looks more closely at the internal motivations of information employees to demonstrate how "work-related technology competes with the pleasures and demands of love and family; and how in a battle between the two, it is work that often emerges the winner" (p. 122). The final part, in this respect, provides vivid descriptions as to how technology organizes the domestic space and intimate relations. Here, Gregg narrates a story where "work was a source of fulfillment that rivaled that of family life" (p. 131). She is very close to reconstructing a theory of the domestic space through which subjectivities and social relations are reproduced. As she states, "the fact that the home office is now an architectural commonplace in

so many domestic settings consecrates the idea of a career-centered and responsible citizenry, one that sees fulfillment in the combination of personal and professional success" (p. 136). The last part also takes the reader into the lives of information workers whose lives constitute the intersection of both precarity and employer demands that require workers to be at work on-call. The willingness to be ready to go and fix IT-related issues, as we are told, creates trouble within the household especially when the family makes plans for the weekend, and also puts limits on the mobility of the employee. We encounter reflexive moments of employees, considering how they should position themselves vis-à-vis their companies. We get to understand the personal cost of maintaining the new flexible work place and its infrastructure.

Ultimately, Gregg's work comes as a timely critique of what work in the highly aestheticized economy means for the individual and their families. She calls for a "labor politics of love" which "must fight this corporatization of intimacy" (p. 172). Those working in the domains of intellectual labour—the academy, the university, and schooling—should pay heed to this critique and its prescription. We seem quietly besotted by the idea of the immateriality of our labour. And we can sometimes too vigorously embrace the transcendental air of the ivory tower. This frankly, after reading Gregg, maybe the basis of our collusion with the coercive regime of the new communications technologies and the intensification of the creative labour they have precipitated. Gregg's call for the rethinking of "work's intimacy" and for a new politics that extends labour struggles into the domestic sphere will probably depend for its actualization on how the employees of the creative workplace negotiate their passion for work and the fact that their future relies on that of their colleagues, both nationally, transnationally, and across different workplaces, be it creative or not. In these matters, academic workers cannot remain idle bystanders, nonchalantly participating in precisely the transactions that Gregg identifies in this book as complicit with the subjugation of cognitive labour.

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