

PROOF

Part III

Virtual Intimacies

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PROOF

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White Collar Intimacy

Melissa Gregg

An advertisement beckons in a London Underground carriage on the Piccadilly Line coming in from Heathrow Airport. Lovestruck.com, 'where busy people click', is a dating site that 'lets you meet single professionals working nearby', whether you are at home, in the office or 'on-the-go'. 'No matter where you work in London' the website reads – 'Soho, Chelsea, The West End, Notting Hill, Canary Wharf or The City' – this online community 'lets you walk into a bar or venue and see which fellow Lovestruckers are out and about'. While its 'high-calibre' membership is developing in various locations across the English-speaking world, the service is 'strictly for city singles'. At first glance, Lovestruck is just one of a range of platforms premised on the convenience enabled by geo-mapping technology. The advantage of such applications – from Grindr to FourSquare and lately Facebook's Places – is more than just the pleasure of discovering attractive company. Each in their own way makes city space legible, familiar, inhabitable. The taste logic of profile pages establishes the terms of encounter in advance, making the anonymity of the city safe to navigate. With the utmost discretion, social networking sites and their geomapping counterparts domesticate life's unruly potential, online and off.

What does this list of precincts bring to mind on the long ride to or from the city? Do they house the office parks and open-plan lofts typical of travellers riding the Tube to Heathrow? Or are they the business hubs attracting visiting professionals to London from elsewhere? No matter the case, these creative enclaves of urban regeneration blossom with untold possibility, just as the monolithic towers of corporate precincts contain untold numbers of hearts to be wooed. Lovestruck takes it as read that the demands of work life impact on opportunities for intimacy. Help is at hand for those wanting to avoid the 'ignominy' of

1 speed dating and the time-consuming dimensions of start-up relation-
 2 ships. To those familiar with the cues of online identity performance,
 3 there is no need for unhelpful and unproductive emotional energy to
 4 be wasted in the search for after-work company. Lovestruck promises to
 5 make love so much easier and more convenient.

6 The website also trusts that those who work in the city will be attracted
 7 to others of a similar inclination. In this way, Lovestruck shares with
 8 other social networking sites the logic of like attracting like. As Pierre
 9 Bourdieu explains, in his theory of 'elective affinities':

10
 11 Those whom we find to our taste put into their practices a taste
 12 which does not differ from the taste we put into operation in perceiv-
 13 ing their practices. Two people can give each other no better proof of
 14 the affinity of their tastes than the taste they have for each other.
 15 (Bourdieu, 1984: 243)

16
 17 Social networking sites follow this pattern to the extent that they
 18 promise to unite 'all those who are the product of similar conditions
 19 distinguishing them from all others'. The profile page central to online
 20 identity performance 'distinguishes in an essential way, since taste is the
 21 basis of all that one has – people and things – and all that one is for oth-
 22 ers, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others' (ibid., 56).

23 Building on Bourdieu's insight, this chapter explores the intricate
 24 relationship between white collar work and intimacy. Noting the met-
 25 rocentrism¹ naturalized in advertising like Lovestruck, I question the
 26 notion of busy-ness that corporate capital renders commonsense, and
 27 which becomes technology's unique mission to navigate. The produc-
 28 tivity imperative that drives both workplace cultures and their digital
 29 assistants has worrying effects when translated to the realm of intimacy
 30 and love. And yet, with the rise of workplace-based online cultures,
 31 these effects may be proving quite common. The second part of this
 32 chapter takes examples from a recent study of information professionals
 33 to think about the impact of productivity imperatives as they encroach
 34 on home life.² This is to consider how intimacy is reconfigured along-
 35 side wider shifts in white collar work, and what this perspective offers
 36 our understanding of labour politics.

37 38 **A market of strangers**

39
 40 In his landmark 1951 book *White Collar*, C. Wright Mills describes the
 41 'prestige market of the big city' as 'a market of strangers, a milieu where

1 contacts having relevance to prestige are often transitory and fleeting'
2 (Mills, 1973: 251). Mills' influential study is one of a number of precedents
3 that are useful for analysing the white collar worker, a key demographic
4 for online platforms in the English-speaking West.³ Mills' classic account
5 of US modernity allows us to think historically about the popularity of
6 online networking, its phenomenal rise in recent years. The idea of a 'mar-
7 ket of strangers' reveals how digital culture offers new outlets for social
8 practices long engaged in by the professional middle class. For young pro-
9 fessionals entering the big city today, online cultures supplement the lived
10 experience of physical space, magnifying the 'milieu' and the number of
11 opportunities that may manifest. A site like Facebook, for instance, com-
12 bines the need for a set of contacts to negotiate the city with the psycho-
13 logically reassuring function of a safety blanket: friends and family can be
14 brought along – as 'virtual' company – through a succession of projects
15 and positions. Contacts no longer need to be transitory or fleeting when
16 they can be maintained, however tenuously, online. Facebook thus arises
17 as a coping mechanism for middle class social mobility, a comforting
18 reminder that one is never completely alone.⁴

19 Facebook has become the iconic application amongst a middle class,
20 office-dwelling user or aspirant because it illustrates – indeed encourages –
21 the seamless combination of professional and personal identity. Work
22 life, school and fun all converge in the shift to intimate work, where
23 'contact' always equals 'friend'. Amassing these relationships in a unique
24 biographical configuration, Facebook's rise to prominence is notable for
25 the way that it confirms and displays the significance of work-related
26 accomplishment in the lives of white collar professionals.⁵ The plat-
27 form is one of a host of digital avenues (another being Twitter in the
28 English-speaking world) providing new insight on how work influences
29 individual status and esteem. Facebook also demonstrates work's capac-
30 ity to generate intimate relationships and pleasures. Through 'status
31 updates', 'posted items', 'pokes' and 'gifts' – the latter often specific to
32 one's profession⁶ – Facebook users showcase their interests and obsessions
33 to a cast of sympathetic onlookers. If Grossberg described the mainstream
34 appeal of rock music as 'a way of making it through the day' (1997: 115),
35 for desk-bound employees in information jobs, Facebook provides a
36 similarly reliable solace.

37 This is especially the case when long hours work cultures prevent other
38 kinds of intimate connection. Facebook and other social networking
39 sites offer a reliable locus for affection for the growing number of workers
40 for whom traditional forms of community seem lacking (c.f. Sennett,
41 1998). Comment sections, wall space, email and instant messaging are

1 just some of the ways familiar friends are encouraged to accept the
2 'incitement to discourse' (Foucault, 1984). Add-on applications allow
3 gestures and mementos to accrue over time, acting as tangible evi-
4 dence of friends' ongoing presence – not to mention the potential for
5 further 'hook-ups' in future. It is this potential, and the constant and
6 reassuring guarantee of presence, that is Facebook's permanent con-
7 solation. Like Lovestruck, it creates a mobilizing belief in intimacy's
8 imminence.

9 Another of Mills' observations of the white collar worker is his sugges-
10 tion that for many, 'such traits as courtesy, helpfulness, and kindness,
11 once intimate, are now part of the impersonal means of livelihood'
12 (1973: xvii). In Mills' reading, 'self-alienation' is a key feature of the
13 emerging professional class: 'When white-collar people get jobs, they
14 sell not only their time and energy but their personalities as well' (ibid.).
15 These words more than echo some of the concerns raised with the wide-
16 spread uptake of social networking sites. The public displays of affection
17 that online friendships reward and sanction have been taken to mark
18 a significant departure from more organic, discreet or authentic friend-
19 ships of an earlier time, with popular media routinely worrying about
20 the wisdom of airing intimate thoughts in corporate-owned online
21 spaces (Morris, 2009). In the scholarly literature, it is the cumulative
22 effects of the chronic beckon to 'broadcast yourself' that are of concern
23 (Driscoll and Gregg, 2008). Drawing on the ideas of Erving Goffman
24 (1973), critics fear that 'front region behaviour' will have a detrimental
25 impact on especially young people's capacity to switch off, relax, and
26 appreciate the pursuit of friendship in properly intimate – which is to
27 say private – settings.⁷

28 Such studies typically fail to note Goffman's own acknowledgement
29 that those further up the class hierarchy have always spent more time in
30 the 'front region'. It is in fact a direct reflection of their higher status:

31
32 the higher one's place in the status pyramid, the smaller the number
33 of persons with whom one can be familiar, the less time one spends
34 backstage, and the more likely it is that one will be required to be
35 polite as well as decorous.

(Goffman, 1973: 133)

36
37
38 Following this argument, Goffman's theories regarding the presenta-
39 tion of self in everyday dealings build momentum for reading social
40 networking sites as one of the key ways that class power is reconfiguring
41 to fit a new economic formation.

1 This is also to recognize that the public friendships that social
2 networking sites make possible aren't limited to the online era. For
3 decades, the mobility involved in the pursuit of middle class security
4 and patronage has brought adjacent requirements in the domain of
5 friendship. In his take on life inside The Organization, William H.
6 Whyte (1963) speaks of the 'outward personality' required of couples
7 moving between company towns in the long march up the workplace
8 hierarchy. His 'organization man' of the 1950s is a diligent employee
9 whose shifting residential location is an inevitable feature of career
10 elevation. The mutual bond captured in the title of Whyte's book is less
11 an indictment of mindless corporate ambition than it is a synopsis of
12 the kind of loyalty expected between employer and worker at this point
13 in Fordist modernity.

14 Whyte's writing speaks of a time when workers pursued a 'social
15 ethic' through affiliation with an outstanding firm. Employees could
16 depend on a return on their investment in the company so long as
17 the latter maintained a convincing vocational narrative and enviable
18 position within the community. The 'web of friendship' Whyte uses to
19 describe the social networks of dormitory suburbs in the mid-century
20 US is a precedent for the coercive friendships of digital culture today.
21 Whyte saw few alternatives to participation in the 'outgoing life' of the
22 neighbourhood for couples seeking a sense of belonging in unfamiliar
23 locations.⁸ His analysis highlights the enduring problem for profession-
24 als seeking to recapture a lost sense of community when work leads them
25 away from home, revealing the limited avenues for intimacy available to
26 busy professionals.

27 In fact it is Whyte, as much as Mills, whose resources help to unpack
28 the further dimensions of white collar intimacy prevalent in the digital
29 workplace today. He distinguishes between the 'well-rounded man' of
30 the organization, who is successful, but not *too* successful (1963: 125),
31 and 'the executive', endearingly termed the 'not-well-rounded man'. As
32 new technologies make the possibility of chronic connection to work
33 an effortless proposition, it is precisely this distinction that may well
34 be eroding, at least in the stories I will focus upon shortly. In Whyte's
35 account, the well-rounded worker follows the principle: 'be loyal to the
36 company and the company will be loyal to you', and he had particular
37 insights to share:

38
39 On the matter of overwork they are particularly stern. They want to
40 work hard, but not too hard; the good, equable life is paramount and
41 they see no conflict between enjoying it and getting ahead. The usual

1 top executive, they believe, works much too hard, and there are few
2 subjects upon which they will discourse more emphatically than the
3 folly of elders who have a single-minded devotion to work.

4
5 For 'the wise young man' of the organization, the main imperative is 'to
6 enjoy himself – plenty of time with the kids, some good hobbies'. He is
7 'obtrusive in no particular, excessive in no zeal. He will be the man in
8 the middle' (1963: 127).

9 The executive, by contrast, is described in Part III of the book, 'The
10 Neuroses of Organization Man':

11
12 Common to these men is an average work week that runs between
13 fifty and sixty hours. Typically, it would break down something
14 like this: each weekday the executive will put in about 9½ hours
15 in the office. Four out of five weekdays he will work nights. One
16 night he will be booked for business entertaining, another night
17 he will probably spend at the office or in a protracted conference
18 somewhere else.

19 On two of the other nights he goes home. But it's no sanctuary he
20 retreats to; it's a branch office. While only a few go so far as to have
21 a room equipped with dictating machines, calculators, and other
22 appurtenances of their real life, most executives make a regular prac-
23 tice of doing the bulk of their business reading at home and some
24 find it the best time to do their most serious business phone work
25 ('I do a lot of spot-checking by phone from home,' one executive
26 explained. 'I have more time then, and besides most people have
27 their guard down when you phone them at home.')

(1963: 136)

29
30 When it comes to technology use in the home, Whyte notes: 'In one
31 company, the top executives have set up a pool of Dictaphones to
32 service executives who want to take them home, the better to do more
33 night and week-end work. In almost all companies the five-day week is
34 pure fiction' (ibid.)

35 These details illustrate how technology has long facilitated particular
36 work styles and preferences, and that these often spill into home space.
37 But Whyte's description is of further interest for the way that it captures
38 the motivation of employees at this level:

39
40 In talking about why he works, the executive does not speak first
41 of service, or of pressures from the organization; very rarely does

1 he mention his family as a reason. He speaks of himself – and the
2 demon within him. He works because his ego demands it.
3 (1963: 138)

4
5 For these personalities, work is dominant. Even though wives, doctors
6 and friends warn against such priorities, Whyte's executives main-
7 tain: 'They just didn't understand' (1963: 139). The unique satisfac-
8 tion to be gained from white collar work is described as an irresistible
9 compulsion.

11 **Performance anxiety: Having an email relationship**

12
13 Workers I interviewed over several years use similar rhetoric to describe
14 what drives them to work. Here I will focus on two employees, neither
15 of whom were executives in their organization, but both of whom were
16 women (a noticeable development in white collar work since Mills and
17 Whyte were writing). Jenny, a part-time policy officer for a library, was
18 one of many employees in the study who checked her work email at
19 home in spite of her paid hours. She explained that it was her personal
20 preference 'to deal with something once' by answering email straight
21 away, even on her days off. It was a way for her to demonstrate her
22 commitment to the team and the job: 'how I see myself as a profes-
23 sional. I want people to know I am looking after things.' It was also an
24 inclination that generated self-censure when her email monitoring got
25 out of hand at times. When she worked on weekends, for instance:

26
27 I'm feeling pretty guilty, usually. I'm thinking, 'Oh look, I shouldn't
28 do this; it shouldn't take this long. I said I was going to do 10 min-
29 utes. Just contain it.' But I then think, 'No, but it's just easier to get
30 it done on the spot and I can do it in there, and then I don't have
31 to come back to it.'

32 (Jenny, 2 November 2007)

33
34 Jenny had strategies to stop herself from the temptation of work and the
35 enticements to be found online. She kept her home connection limited to
36 a desktop computer, because 'I think if I could search the Internet every-
37 where, I would'. Jenny admitted: 'I do sometimes say right, this weekend
38 I'm not doing any work', especially because she knew that her partner
39 'would probably prefer I was online less'. But she also believed that he
40 didn't 'truly understand or relate to the idea and notion of the work I do
41 online at home' since 'he can't take his work home like I can'.

1 Jenny realized – even though it ‘will make him sound not very
2 good’ – that her partner didn’t tend to notice her working habits ‘when
3 the football season is on’.

4
5 Because he’ll watch some of the footy, he just doesn’t notice that
6 I’ve disappeared for an hour and a half, but when the football season
7 finishes, he’s more like, ‘What are you doing? What are you doing
8 there?’ I’ll say, ‘I’m going just to check my emails for 10 minutes’ and
9 I’ll come out in an hour, and he’ll say, ‘Why are you doing that? You
10 don’t need to do that.’

11 (Jenny, 2 November 2007)

12
13 Nonetheless, Jenny thought having access to mobile technologies had
14 improved her relationship at home because she spent more time with
15 her partner.

16
17 I sit in the lounge. Don actually made the comment last night, ‘You
18 seem to still work as much but at least you sit out here now.’ I thought,
19 I don’t know why you think that’s any better – because he’s watching
20 a movie and I’m doing work – but he seems to think it’s nicer.

21 (Jenny, 2 November 2007)

22
23 In this situation, Jenny refers to a time she was clearing her inbox on
24 her laptop on a Sunday night while Don was watching a movie.

25
26 I was trying to just do it all via arrows and enter instead of using
27 the touch pad because I thought the touch pad was louder. He kept
28 keeping increasing the volume of the television and I thought I’ll
29 try and be a bit quieter. I was thinking that I know that I don’t
30 have to be doing this work now here. I could watch this movie with
31 him. But I was not interested in the movie and I feel better about a
32 Monday morning if I have done something productive on a Sunday
33 night.

34 (Jenny, 2 November 2007)

35
36 The fact that Jenny didn’t even work on Mondays is a further compli-
37 cating factor in this example. Efforts to consider her partner by quietly
38 going about her email filing are matched by a punishing interior dialogue
39 about why she feels the need to be working. What is it about Jenny’s
40 personality that makes her unable to enjoy a trashy movie with her
41 partner on a Sunday night? Something prevents her from being able to

view this time and space as free for unproductive activities. Like Whyte's executives, Jenny thinks her partner doesn't understand what it's like to have a job that requires her to work outside paid hours. But it is her own motivation that leads her to carry out these job-related tasks.

On Mondays and Tuesdays, when Jenny was looking after her son, it was normal for her to 'log on to work and just leave the email open, and the laptop on just there, and just walk past and check things and deal with things on the fly'. A number of Jenny's colleagues, including her boss Georgia, would email her on days off so that she would be kept aware of developments in the office. It was also so that she had time to think things over before getting to work on Wednesdays. As Jenny explained: 'If I didn't look at my email before I got in on a Wednesday I think at least the first two hours would just be wasted on catching up.' Whether at home or work, Jenny is intent on making productive use of her time.

In a diary entry for the project, Jenny made an interesting observation about her email habits:

Have noticed my partner does get annoyed when I log on at night to check my email. I try to limit it but I sometimes find myself quickly checking my email

- before he gets home
- when he goes to the shop
- when he is downstairs gardening etc.

I check my email constantly because I think to try and stay organised, 'on top of things'. I do not want any surprises.

The final sentence suggests that Jenny's behaviour is not solely a personal choice. It is also a response she has formed to an unpredictable workload, including the coercive email preferences maintained by colleagues. Her relationship to the technology and her work reads as a series of opportunities to be seized in moments free from surveillance – like a clandestine affair that she needs to hide from her partner. Contact with work here manifests as a highly intimate relationship, with all the symbols of adultery.

Running on adrenaline

Donna worked as a project co-ordinator for the same library, in charge of capital assets. Her job involved negotiating between management, outside consultants and building contractors hired to work on library infrastructure. In our first meeting, Donna's schedule was especially busy, as

1 the library continued to deal with issues following a major renovation
2 and relaunch. She told us she had 'the highest mobile phone bill' of any
3 worker in the organization. During this period she was working at home
4 up to three nights a week, and she would do this 'all over the place':

5
6 So if I've got documents I need to refer to I'll perhaps sit at the din-
7 ing room table. If I'm just responding to emails and organising diary
8 entries and appointments and things I often sit on the couch and
9 do it while I'm watching TV or talking to my daughter or whatever.
10 Sometimes I'll sit in bed when I should be sleeping but I can't so
11 I sort of do a bit of work.

(Donna, 15 November 2007)

12
13
14 Donna was trying to limit the amount of work she did at home, 'but if
15 it's going to make my life easier the next day at work it's worth it'. This
16 statement neatly captures why so many in the study claimed to pursue
17 extra home-based work. But it also effaces her involvement in other
18 relationships beyond the requirements of the workday that could be
19 affected by such individually oriented decisions.

20 We can get a glimpse of the intensity of Donna's workday as she
21 describes the difficulty of adjusting to her arrival back home. 'I spend
22 maybe an hour trying to get in my head now I'm home. My work's still
23 very on my mind.' By contrast, she claims the days she spends working
24 from home are less of a transition: 'It's a little bit softer.' Some things help
25 to ease the adjustment from work to home: 'I have a glass of wine and
26 sit on the couch and I just stare at a wall. I put the TV on but I actually
27 don't watch it.' Withdrawing from work involves coming down from
28 heightened stimulation. Her experience resembles de Botton's descrip-
29 tion, in *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work*, that 'office civilization could
30 not be feasible without the hard take-offs and landings effected by coffee
31 and alcohol' (2009: 266).

32 Considering the broader dynamics of her household, one of the draw-
33 backs of online technology that Donna reported was that her daughter
34 spent a lot of time on the computer. Donna thought Chloe seemed
35 depressed and withdrawn and had taken her to see a counsellor to get
36 some help. The counsellor actually diagnosed an internet addiction,
37 estimating that '90 per cent of the kids she sees have internet addic-
38 tion'. In light of the range of comments from study participants who
39 diagnosed *themselves* as addicted to email and other online platforms,
40 this was an interesting side note, raising questions about the patholo-
41 gies that come attached to new media (Cohen, 2006).

1 The second time we met Donna, a period when her workload had
2 noticeably slowed, it became apparent that her daughter's depression
3 may have had other causes. Having taken some time off for a holiday,
4 and facing a less hectic workload, Donna reflected on the amount she
5 had sacrificed to stay on top of her job:

6
7 I think my daughter could have done with me a little bit more at
8 home during sort of Year 11 and 12. But now it's almost too late,
9 she's finished Year 12, and she's working herself and doing similar
10 hours that I'm doing.

11 (Donna, 10 July 2008)

12
13 She continued:

14
15 I think she could have really done with a lot more support at that
16 time ... because I've only got a small family as well. But my partner
17 who works a lot of night shift and he does a lot of hours every week
18 and usually has 12 to 14 hour days and sometimes seven days a week.
19 So it's not like he'll notice because he's not there either.

20 (ibid.)

21
22 When she was busier, Donna admitted: 'I was never home for her after
23 school or anything. It's like I had other pressures on my mind when
24 I probably could have had hers on my mind a little bit more. She had
25 sort of personal issues at the time as well, that I could have concentrated
26 a little bit more on.' It was here that Donna explained how three of her
27 daughter's friends committed suicide during the last six months of Year
28 12, a factor that she hadn't mentioned previously.

29 Donna rationalized her earlier workload and her willingness to work
30 long hours due to the bond she'd made with a colleague:

31
32 the other person I worked with was very passionate and a workaholic
33 with you know, no partner, no children ... a single person, a career
34 minded person and she was fantastic. We just drove through every-
35 thing. I don't work with her any more. We're still very close and we
36 still talk a lot ... I sort of love and respect her to death.

37 (Donna, 10 July 2008)

38
39 Indeed, in spite of her stated intentions, Donna also admitted that she
40 would 'probably end up doing the same thing' if she had the chance to
41 work with the same colleague again.

1 These contradictions indicate the conflict experienced by workers
 2 like Donna when professional relationships generate their own kind
 3 of intimacy. 'You're enjoying what you're doing and you're running
 4 on adrenaline', she mentioned. The job gave her a regular feeling of
 5 importance and achievement that was hard to attain at home, espe-
 6 cially with her partner quite absent. Describing her new role, Donna's
 7 tone had the character of mourning that accompanies the end of a
 8 significant relationship: 'There was a while, there was a period of a cou-
 9 ple of weeks there where I just wondered what I was doing, the phone
 10 wasn't ringing there and I wasn't coming in as much.' A hint of emo-
 11 tion seemed evident in her acknowledgment that: 'Even though I have
 12 someone to report to in this new building project, no one really cares
 13 where I am.' For Donna, like a number of study participants, work was
 14 a source of fulfilment that rivalled family life. It took priority in daily
 15 concerns to the point where other relationships could sometimes be
 16 neglected. Looking back, Donna was thankful that her daughter had
 17 found a job and a boyfriend and seemed 'well adjusted' overall. But her
 18 story illustrates the stakes involved when work schedules threaten other
 19 forms of intimacy.

21 **Intimate work**

22
 23 To sum up some of the themes in these workers' stories, online technol-
 24 ogies are a factor in making their jobs feel at times invasive, compelling,
 25 consuming, readily available, a solace, anxiety provoking and addictive.
 26 Many of these qualities can also be taken as the terrain of passion, love
 27 and intimacy, and it is these analogies that warrant further exploration
 28 as the basis for an affective labour politics. Barbara Ehrenreich claims it
 29 is 'the cultural ubiquity of the professional middle class' that 'may seem
 30 to make it an easy subject for a writer ... Their lifestyles, habits, tastes,
 31 and attitudes are everywhere, and inescapably before us.' It is for this
 32 reason that scholars are challenged to produce critical analysis of such
 33 practices: 'Nameless, and camouflaged by a culture in which it both
 34 stars and writes the scripts', the middle class is rarely seen to be 'one
 35 class among others, and as a class with its own peculiar assumptions
 36 and anxieties' (Ehrenreich, 1990: 6). Of course, Mills' whole project was
 37 to define the particular anxieties of the white collar worker, which arose
 38 from his having 'no firm roots, no sure loyalties to sustain his life and
 39 give it a center' (1973: xvi). With the certainties of previous centuries
 40 forever lost, the white collar worker struggled to find 'new sanctions or
 41 justifications for the new routines we live, and must live'. This made

1 him uniquely vulnerable 'to the manufactured loyalties and distractions
2 that are contrived and urgently pressed' upon him by popular culture.⁹
3 In the most famous passage from *White Collar*, Mills writes:

4
5 He is not aware of having any history, his past being as brief as it is
6 unheroic; he has lived through no golden age he can recall in time of
7 trouble. Perhaps because he does not know where he is going, he is
8 in a frantic hurry; perhaps because he does not know what frightens
9 him, he is paralysed with fear.

(ibid.)

11
12 Set against the unrelenting busy-ness that defines Donna and Jenny's
13 experience of work, Mills' words find ongoing resonance, just as they
14 pinpoint the need for updated accounts of life in the post-feminist
15 workplace. Matched with the insistent address of digital communica-
16 tions technologies, white collar affects now stretch to include the anxi-
17 ety of anticipating the next batch of email, indeed the sheer number of
18 messages waiting to be audited, among workers at all levels of the office
19 hierarchy.

20 Describing the impact of the BlackBerry in 2006 – just before the
21 iPhone changed mobile computing for keeps – Research in Motion's
22 John Balsillie explained his bestselling devices as 'latency eliminators'.
23 According to this logic, Balsillie argued, 'successful companies have
24 hearts ... and intrinsic force that makes the whole greater than the sum
25 of its parts. BlackBerries ... allow those hearts to beat faster' (in Connors,
26 2006, n.p.). The language of love may help to explain the market tri-
27 umph of Balsillie's product, but the stories above enable us to identify
28 some of the real-life 'latencies' that smartphones and laptops help to
29 eliminate. They include time spent with children, partners, and a host
30 of non-work friends. In other examples from the same study, the affec-
31 tive fabrics of digital cultures prove strong enough to prevent workers
32 leaving the house, and the solace of a restful night's sleep.

33 Classic definitions of love see the beloved as 'the only important thing'
34 in life, compared to which 'everything else seems trivial' (Armstrong,
35 2003: 3). Armstrong's 'philosophy of intimacy' notes the combination
36 of longing and rapture that accompanies 'the romantic vision', leading
37 to 'the sense that one is in touch with the source of all value' (ibid.). A
38 significant number of participants in my study spoke about work using
39 language very similar to these tenets. The desire to be alone with work,
40 to the exclusion of all other distractions, was certainly couched in the
41 language of productivity and efficiency in many cases. But the time

1 spent engaged in work-related tasks regularly rivalled or came at the
 2 expense of other experiences. There was often little time for the very
 3 domestic or leisure pursuits we might consider to be the rationale for
 4 needing to be productive in the first place.

6 **Moving is living**

8 This chapter began with an image from a train, and it is to technolo-
 9 gies of travel and movement that I want to return. This is partly to
 10 question the intense relationship – encouraged by so many advertising
 11 campaigns – associating new media devices to the notion of freedom
 12 (Gregg 2007b). Whether it is office workers tethered to their email inbox,
 13 or mobile applications like Lovestruck, the routes of travel and freedom
 14 delivered by digital communication technologies seem far from spectacu-
 15 lar. Rather, they appear to reify the lifestyle choices of a distinct white col-
 16 lar demographic, one that need not cast its horizons much further than
 17 the demands of the working day. As images of creative work and social
 18 networking applications dominate the spaces and airwaves of public
 19 media, the ubiquity of their middle class address performs a kind of
 20 symbolic violence. Such images exclude the many citizens who lack the
 21 means of access to these heavily sanctioned pleasures, and for whom
 22 the prospect of rewarding work is ‘a bad joke’ (Gorz, 1994: 46). Gorz
 23 reminds us of the substantial numbers of people ‘on the margins of our
 24 so-called work-based civilization’, who appear destined to stay ‘on the
 25 fringes of its scale of values, its ethic of productivity and merit’ (1994:
 26 46–7). The metaphors of space and place that drive Gorz’s analysis high-
 27 light the dominant position inhabited by Western urban professionals
 28 in the technological and political imaginary. His words are a necessary
 29 caution against the loyalties developing between today’s employers
 30 and employees, a reminder that such intimacies have few solid bases.
 31 (Here it is significant to mention that an entire team of workers was
 32 disbanded and made redundant during the course of my study due to
 33 cuts imposed by the 2008 financial meltdown.)

34 A film released in the same period as the final interviews for this
 35 project offers a further reminder of the risks involved in identifying
 36 too closely with work-based forms of recognition. In Jason Reitman’s
 37 *Up in The Air*, Ryan Bingham (George Clooney) is a professional job
 38 terminator who epitomizes the affordances of the mobile lifestyle. In
 39 contrast to the companionship of friends and family, Bingham is most
 40 at home when he is in transit. It is the ‘systemized friendly touches’
 41 of strangers that keep his world ‘in orbit’. Bingham is the flipside of

1 Whyte's Organization Man. His sense of identity is wrapped up in
2 loyalty cards, and the notion of loyalty plays out in the film in multiple
3 ways. Billboards for frequent flyer programmes adorn the background
4 of poignant airport scenes, and the film opens with an extreme close-up
5 of a hostile worker Bingham has just sacked. Given the movie's release
6 in the wake of the US fiscal crisis, it is hardly incidental that an African-
7 American man addresses the camera directly: 'This is what I get for 30
8 years of service to my company?'

9 Bingham's motivational talks on the professional speaker circuit urge
10 tired middle managers to empty their symbolic backpacks: 'Make no
11 mistake', Bingham warns, 'moving is living. Your relationships are the
12 heaviest components of your life'. Unlike the neighbourhood rituals of
13 Whyte's suburban dwellers, however, there is no longer any pretence that
14 community can or should be manufactured alongside career ambitions.
15 Speaking of digital cultures, this film's plot is driven by a technical inno-
16 vation. Upon joining Bingham's firm, a young female business graduate
17 suggests that job terminations would be more efficiently performed
18 via webcam. Her superiors warmly welcome the plan, even though the
19 scheme would put an end to Bingham's pleasantly rootless existence as a
20 citizen of the air. While he maintains an ambivalent relationship to the
21 company (in a way Whyte would have applauded) Bingham does how-
22 ever make one pivotal mistake. Like the other white collar workers in the
23 film,¹⁰ his presumption is that loyalty will have its rewards. Upon finally
24 reaching his coveted points total, marking his exceptional status amongst
25 flyers, Bingham is congratulated by the aircraft captain, who reiterates:
26 'We really appreciate your loyalty.' But by this stage in the narrative
27 Bingham is preoccupied by other thoughts – namely, the woman he has
28 loved and lost. Hotel sex in a succession of flyover states has become
29 a poor substitute for the normative intimacy celebrated in the film: a
30 home with a wife and family in the suburbs. Bingham finds himself in a
31 similar position to the thousands of workers he has counselled during his
32 career, that is, wondering if his energies may have been better exercised
33 elsewhere.

34 In the closing moments of *Up in the Air*, Clooney's narration reconciles
35 his character's role as a spectre, transcending the conventional relation-
36 ships of this world. He urges the audience to see the wing tip of his plane
37 as just another star in the night sky, looking down on us omnisciently
38 from on high. This haunting image has an ethereal quality, suggesting a
39 kind of death. It sounds like a story we might tell a child when someone
40 passes away. It is also a poetic depiction of a sensibility I felt often dur-
41 ing my study visiting the workplaces of parents like Jenny and Donna.

Family photos populated the cubicles and desks that housed these workers and their technologies. Holiday snaps on laptop screensavers were a poignant addition to the very devices preventing workers from being with their kids. These affective tokens were a further representation of the remote nature of intimate relationships for today's office workers, for whom the lines between virtual and actual presence remain permanently blurred. For me, they confirmed that the register of intimacy is one of the better ways to explain how workplaces exploit the pact between emotional and temporal investment in labour in the interests of capital. If loyalty is the term we have used to describe this form of commitment until now, we must wonder if it remains the most effective language to express the psychological limits now needed to fight the demands of online work cultures. Stepping outside the routes of travel dictated by digital technologies and their seductive platforms is only the first move needed if we are to contemplate putting work back in its rightful place.

Notes

1. This chapter continues previous analyses of city-centric technology marketing developed in Gregg (2007a, 2009).
2. The book-length account of this study, which interviewed 26 workers over a 3-year period, is published as *Work's Intimacy* (Gregg, 2011).
3. My choice to focus on mainstream platforms such as Facebook, and workplace experiences of using digital technology such as checking email, is a deliberate move to question the obsession with youth in dominant accounts of online social networking (see Driscoll and Gregg, 2008). It also aims to extend cultural studies' ongoing interest in the everyday and the ordinary (e.g. Hartley, 2009; Highmore, 2010; Stewart, 2007; Turner, 2009). The significance of middle class office cultures in the take-up of new technologies is acknowledged by Streeter (2005) and Liu (2004) among others. The Anglo-American frame of much Internet studies debate is contextualized by Goggin and McLelland (2009). Hjorth (2009) is an extensive account of mobile media use in the Asia-Pacific, and the centrality of gender in mobile cultures of leisure and labour.
4. This is not to say that the platform isn't used in other ways, but the premise of the site, and its accompanying design, assumes that one will *always* have more friends to meet. See Miller (2011) for more on Facebook's cultural assumptions.
5. In the 2011 update to Facebook's site layout, work came third in the list of distinguishing characteristics on a profile page, after relationship status (first) and birth (second). According to this logic, having a relationship is more important than being alive.
6. For instance, 'Shite Gifts for Academics' has enduring appeal in university circles.
7. I discuss this in more detail in Gregg (2007b). The pan-disciplinary academic insistence that Facebook be understood in terms of changing privacy norms

- is in fact a culturally specific class anxiety regarding propriety that I discuss in greater detail elsewhere (see Brown and Gregg, forthcoming). These concerns are doubtlessly exacerbated by the comments of the site's founder, Mark Zuckerberg, reported in articles such as Johnson (2010).
8. 'Web of Friendship' and 'This Outgoing Life' are the titles of Chapters 26 and 27 of the book. These textured renderings of neighbourhood sociability bear comparison with the writing of Richard Hoggart, particularly his *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), which documents similar aspects in working-class districts of England in a similar period.
 9. Concern for the pernicious attractions of mass entertainments are another point of connection between Mills' and Hoggart's projects.
 10. Many of whom were played by actual laid-off workers rather than actors, a deliberate casting choice given the historical context. The song that accompanies the closing credits, and shares the film's title, is written and performed by another unemployed countryman, Kevin Renick. Renick handed a cassette version of the track to Reitman following an early test screening and Q&A. In another twist on the temporality of technology platforms, Reitman needed to borrow a friend's car to hear the song for the first time, since he didn't own a cassette player. Thus it was another transportation technology that allowed him to decide that he wanted the song in the movie (Tapley, 2009).

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