

## Pressed for time

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Pressed for time**, by Judy Wajcman, The University of Chicago Press, Will Publish June 2016, 215 pp., \$17.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-226-38084-1; \$24.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-19647-3; \$18.00 (e-book), ISBN 978-0-226-19650-3

In this book, Judy Wajcman offers us a feminist sociotechnical standpoint to deconstruct technology and time determinisms. This is why it is a book of special interest to those of us who work to close the digital gender gap, but also to those who, even nowadays, minimize its importance. For reading it will allow the incredulous to understand how important it is that more women and people who are more diverse in terms of class, culture or ethnicity, enter the field of creation, control, distribution and design of technology. At the same time, it will arm us, the 'believers' (those who are already convinced) with more, and more effective, arguments.

In the first chapter, 'High-speed society: Is the pace of life accelerating?' Wajcman questions the real role played by ICT in the feeling of acceleration we live in today by confronting us to the false belief that as we use faster devices, our life is also necessarily going faster. She criticizes the technological determinism some narratives attribute to ICT when naming our time 'Network Society' or 'High-Speed Society'. To do so, she turns onto social studies of technology as a possible frame to analyze our relationship with time and technology. By using this frame, technological determinism is confronted with the argument that 'all artifacts are socially shaped not only in their usage but in their design and technical content' and with the idea that users are not considered only passive consumers of technology, but that 'the life of machines ultimately depends on the locally contingent meanings that people attribute to them in practice'.

In the following chapter, 'Time and motion: Machines and the making of modernity', the author reminds us that to talk about a supposed acceleration of life makes only sense when we compare it to an imagined slower pace in the past, for acceleration has become synonymous with progress. This narrative of progress has made us accept and internalize the time and the discipline of the clock as the only possible time. Moreover, we have assumed that to save time is to save money.

Then, in 'The time-pressure paradox', she begins to pull apart the idea that ICT are the cause of us rushing everywhere and for everything. From this chapter on, her own research and those of other authors she collects and presents critically become the raw material to analyze, deconstruct and counter the dominant discourses on time and technology. In this third chapter, she shows us how changes in work styles; family life management, especially if both parents work; and, changes in the fashion of educating children; and not technology per se, are actually what explain stressful lives.

The fourth chapter 'Working with constant connectivity' is dedicated to look critically at the workplace. To counter the idea that constant connections are the explanation of an increased stress at workplace, she points out that one of the most perceived interruptions, the email, has changed the standards and expectations about time, activities or tasks. And, she puts into question as well the imaginary figure of a passive worker with no control over the management of connectivity by giving visibility to people who, according to their needs, follow different strategies to manage their living with technology.

In 'Doing domestic time', the category of gender takes the utmost relevance for the analysis and, in it, we are given a revelation as startling as fatal: Appliances do not save the time

promised because standards for cleanliness are higher nowadays and new tasks and new ways of caring for children appeared. There is still a massive amount of unpaid work that women do at home and we are still without enough time and too pressured to deal with all of it. Furthermore, current technological innovations aimed at home tell us more about the interests of their designers than about the real home automation needed by the people who will dwell these smart homes. Because, taking care of others, which is one of the tasks more demanding and time consuming, remains in charge primarily of women. Finally, we are shown how household chores are still a space for gender performance that divides the masculine from the feminine.

The sixth chapter, 'Time to talk: Intimacy through technology', examines changes due to technologies in everyday practices of intimacy and interpersonal relationships. Again, through her own research results, we see how everyday relationships are more complex and less easy to quantify or describe than with the usual dichotomy confronting mediated and non-mediated communication (that considers better non-mediated communication by default. Technology-mediated intimacy is not necessarily less private or of less quality: Thanks to technology, adults and youth multiply and extend their relationships and the time devoted to them; some machines, such as mobile phones, are necessary for coordinating and managing family and relationships, which greatly reduces the pressure and stress of working hours. It is like that, that technological artifacts are an entangled web of communications, emotions, materiality, culture, and so on.

In the last chapter, 'Finding time in a digital age', we are embarked in a search to find in the devices that apparently dominate us, potentialities, vanishing points or escape roads: new possible technological practices are signaled. Neither time nor technology 'forces' us to do things; there is nothing intrinsic in them that we have not already put in our collectively shared practices, values and meanings. ICT makes possible new temporalities; we do just practice some of them because they are those well suited to our beliefs, but we could also have other technologies with designs that support non-dominant values, alternative practices, the everyday life of minorities, or our best hopes and desires for a better society. For this, we should start a conversation about a responsible engineering; a responsible innovation politics; a responsible science and one concerned with the active participation of citizenship; a state more involved in designing a future now only in the hands of big companies, and so on.

This book is an excellent conceptual toolbox, full of bibliographical information, empirical data and, overall, with more critical questions than dogmatic answers on all the academic and popular granted assumptions about the time we lose with technologies that were supposed to free our lives. However, the reader should be aware that the book mainly uses data, research, theorists and information from the Western and westernized worlds. There is a lack of the whereabouts with time and technology, practices, reflections, theoretical approaches and references from other geographical locations but also victims of a capitalist global regime. It is increasingly clear that a work of this kind, so important to keep a critical mind and a critical social science alive, cannot be the work of a sole author. Although Judy Wajcman's work is commendable, maybe editors should put some pressure on forcing authors to gather and put in place interdisciplinary, international and overall intersectional teams. The forgotten voices of minorities, and majorities outside the Western world, will provide us with arguments, information and resources to imagine new common senses and narratives about time and technology. Finally, this is a highly topical book for us interested in debating the democratization of technology and, therefore, society. Societies that build technologies, and are built by them at the same time, which do not cover the needs of having more and better time of their citizens. And, above all, that do not distribute equally the available time, making the time of some more valuable than the time of others. I truly encourage the readers of this journal to read this book; books are still the most popular technology of the word (Ong,



1982). But, I also encourage you to combine the reading with the oral technology of the word, for example, by discussing the topics and empirical data of the book with your colleagues while having a cup of coffee, or by listening to the author discussing her own book at the London School of Economics (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uR1xDyh2oXY>), at the Oxford Internet Institute (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyNaytBYTnw>) or at the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (<http://www.cccb.org/ca/multimedia/videos/el-nostre-temps-el-temps-a-lera-digital/223288>). Certainly, any of those technologies of the word will offer you arguments that will need you to find some time to discuss them. Hopefully, your smartphone will help you find that last free slot in your agenda.

### Reference

Ong, W.J. (1982). *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Methuen.

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