the loss of her son, ten years later, are to let her know that they are crying. At this point in the collection, death has made an appearance in six of the seventeen chapters, and this repetition brings the body and its intimate belongings to the surface of the reader’s affective present. *Digital Intimate Publics and Social Media* is an empirically and theoretically rich collection that destabilises the politics, temporalities and affects through which social media might normatively be thought.

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**Reference**


*Gender and Relatability in Digital Culture: Managing Affect, Intimacy and Value*  
Akane Kanai  
London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019

It has become almost impossible to speak of the internet without also considering gender and how it is made, remade and enacted within the not-so-new digital landscape. Recent popular narratives have focused particularly on the dangers of certain forms of masculinity in spaces like Reddit, as well as the consequent vulnerabilities of women interacting online, as they navigate and negotiate violence, threats and sexual harassment. Aside from being painted as vapid or as victims, women’s participation in and communication through social media is not afforded much attention in public discourse. Social media, and its associated practices, are often dismissed as feminine, and therefore trivial and undeserving of serious political analysis.

With this book, Kanai offers a deeply analytical view of feminine online culture. Braiding together the work of Lauren Berlant, Amy Dobson, Rosalind Gill and Arlie Hochschild, Kanai demonstrates the ways in which the cultural norms of the internet are operationalised in a neoliberal context in order to reify ‘girlfriendly’ styles of femininity that are positioned as commonly ‘relatable’, even while maintaining investments in white, middle-class heterosexuality. Examining the cultural life of several GIF-based blogs on Tumblr, Kanai is here able to explore the seeming banality of humorous digital communication and unpack the politics of representative generality.

Lauren Berlant features prominently in this work, especially her theorising of intimate publics (2008) and cruel optimism (2011). According to Berlant, the intimate public is one in which a sense of intimacy and perhaps more importantly, *commonality*, is produced through circulation of and attachments to cultural artefacts, such as the GIFs that appear in these blogs. However, as Kanai notes, ‘the reliance of women’s culture on the emotional sameness of women premised on a common historical situation remains a “fantasy of generality”’ (Berlant 2008, 6) that can only deliver for some’ (p. 5). That is, dominant forms of white, middle-class femininity are positioned as general, *relatable*, and perhaps therefore inevitable or essential, via the circulation of these images.
The text also draws heavily on postfeminist scholars such as Amy Dobson and Rosalind Gill, situating the work within a critical postfeminist framework, though Kanai troubles the easy separation between feminism and postfeminism. She argues that in contemporary digital culture, ‘feminism is disassembled and flexibly incorporated into normalising knowledges’ (p. 157), rather than repudiated or disavowed entirely. In this landscape, feminism is reconstructed as a valuable attachment or feeling that can be kept separate from political or collective action.

This distillation of feminism as personal value is echoed in the text’s understanding of femininity within a neoliberal context. Here, femininity becomes an ‘entrepreneurial subjectivity’ (p. 8) that can be both freely chosen and leveraged for social value. What this means is that individuals become responsible for asymmetrical modes of belonging, effectively concealing the ways in which such modes are embedded in hierarchies of power broadly and whiteness specifically.

For Kanai, affective attachment to the perfect is the central way in which femininity is operationalised as part of neoliberalism. She argues that the production of a relatable, and therefore valuable, self ‘requires the articulation of a continuous attachment to the perfect as well as ongoing struggles to achieve it’ (p. 31). These struggles must be manageable, however, rather than insurmountable. The relatable, ‘girlfriendly’ bloggers of Kanai’s research utilise examples of food and body management and university struggles to demonstrate tension with but also proximity to the ideal, which remains white, middle-class and heterosexual. Thus, the exploitations of contemporary labour become co-opted into the capitalist system itself, such that dissatisfaction with bodily management and governance become part of the ‘pleasure’ of participation, rather than the beginnings of collective resistance.

In this landscape, the normative feminine self is constituted through the telling of figures such as the best friend, the boyfriend, other girls, hot guys and creeps (chapter 4). The ability to deploy these figures appropriately demonstrates an ability to read the cultural landscape and discern and disseminate appropriate performances and enactments of femininity. As Kanai notes, these figures act as ‘normative reference points through which the self may be made intelligible to others and make a claim of value’ (p. 120). Though this might suggest a relational constitution of the self, these figures are primarily mobilised as the constitutional limits of the self in aid of the management of femininity, heterosexuality and social capital.

Furthering Hochschild's work on emotional labour in *The Managed Heart* (1983), Kanai argues that the distinctions between work, leisure and identity have become blurred, such that women are now expected to locate social and exchange values in everyday situations and relationships. Success in this intimate public relies on relatability and branding one’s self as relatable requires positioning the personal as general. The attributes that can be understood as general are indeed quite narrow, favouring markers of whiteness and middle-class membership, because, as Kanai explains, ‘they do not carry the baggage of the “complexities” of other disadvantaged identity positions’ (p. 126). That is, whiteness is produced as *common* within the cultural imaginary and is therefore more easily associated with relatability.

Kanai concludes by reminding us that the ‘averageness implicit in gendered relatability is not a neutral, ahistorical “middle”’ (p. 181) and that women are negotiating
gendered expectations online in ways that produce pleasure and intimacy (for some) while also contributing to ongoing inequalities and reifying exclusionary practices. Demonstrating relatability requires the collective attachment to shared norms as feelings, thus femininity here feels ethical, relatable, common, even as it maintains narrow parameters of inclusion and belonging that are centred on whiteness, heterosexuality and middle-class membership.

*Gender and Relatability in Digital Culture* offers significant interventions in several fields: critical femininities, critical race theory and internet studies. Rather than offering a clear-cut narrative of victimhood or agency for women in this intimate public, Kanai remains ambiguous about the gendered implications of neoliberal life online. Femininity appears humorous here, even pleasurable, yet the markers of gendered governance and mediation remain. Thus, this work provides a nuanced analysis of how gender and race are operationalised in the kinds of everyday communication that are often overlooked in studies of online culture.

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*The Great Transformation: History for a Techno-human Future*
By Judith Bessant
London: Routledge, 2018

Public discussions about new technologies seem to agree on one thing: the changes in Artificial Intelligence, robotics, personal computing and social media, among others, are transforming our societies. Furthermore, this is happening at an unprecedented rate and is raising important and urgent questions. If robots and AI continue to develop at this pace, will there be any work left for humans in the future? If our social needs can be met ‘at a distance’, will we stop spending time in each other’s physical presence? When we invest new capacities into our machines, are we creating new forms of machine consciousness? And will we ultimately have to accept a role as the ‘pets’ of our technological masters?

In this timely and thoughtful book, Bessant acknowledges and works with these questions. However, she does not fall prey to utopian or dystopian imaginings of the future. Her goal, instead, is to create a new framework for discussion based on two important foundations. First, she argues that current developments are contributing to a profound transformation not just of our societies or technologies, but of what it means to be human. Second, she calls for an end to fears that technologies will somehow overtake humanity’s capacity to control them. Such an outcome is only possible, she argues, if we forget that these are technologies we have been instrumental in creating.

The first of these foundations is the most compelling and theoretically interesting contribution of this book. Bessant draws on insights from historical sociology and cognitive science to argue that we are undergoing a shift in human consciousness. This is more than noting the necessary small, everyday adaptations to the impact of new technologies