

**Gabriella Lukács, *Invisibility by Design: Women and Labor in Japan's Digital Economy***

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Gabriella Lukács's analysis of women's digital labor in *Invisibility by Design: Women and Labor in Japan's Digital Economy* speaks to the particular history of women and labor in Japan, as well as to the broader attempt to theorize the many different kinds of uncompensated labor that women perform. At the same time, it intervenes in ongoing debates about the role of digital labor in the deregulation of the labor market and the dismantling of labor protections. Throughout the book, she examines five digital practices that emerged at different moments over the past three decades and argues that women in Japan engaged in these practices as part of a search for meaningful work. Lukács argues that this work produced profit for online platforms and should be understood as a form of labor. In this account, women's search for meaningful work through new digital technologies drove the emergence of new forms of capitalist accumulation, in which online platforms were able to extract value without employing workers. According to this argument, the labor of women who created content for these platforms was made invisible—that is, excluded from the conceptual realm of labor, and un- or under-compensated.

*Invisibility by Design* is based on forty-three structured interviews that Lukács conducted in 2010 with women involved in these digital practices, many of whom she interviewed multiple times. It also draws on analysis of their writings and visual work, and readings of printed interviews. The book is divided into an introduction and five chapters, each of which is devoted to a different form of digital labor. Chapter 1 focuses on women's photography in the 1990s, chapter 2 on the net idol phenomenon that developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, chapter 3 on blogging from the mid-2000s onward, chapter 4 on amateur traders in the second half of the 2000s, and chapter 5 on cell phone novelists beginning in the early 2000s.

Although her book is based on rich ethnographic work and careful interviews with the women involved in these trends, Lukács describes her methodological focus as centering “the relationships between young women and digital technologies,” and explicitly states that it is beyond the scope of the project to “document the motivations of all participants” (21). This text, then, focuses more on the structural relationships of exploitation and extraction between women and digital platforms, and less on the ways that women themselves experienced this work.

Chapter 1, “Disidentifications: Women, Photography, and Everyday Patriarchy,” describes the ways in which women's digital photography sets the stage for later forms of digital labor and argues that this kind of photography was a strategy to challenge everyday patriarchy by critically deploying “mainstream representations of women” (32). Chapter 2, “The Labor of Cute: Net Idols in the Digital Economy,” explores how online platforms took advantage of the feminized affective labor of women engaged in the “net idol” trend to generate revenue from banner advertising, while simultaneously working actively to prevent women from commercializing their own activities. Chapter 3, “Career Porn: Blogging and the Good Life,” traces the role that blogging, and particularly blog tutorials, played in encouraging ways of imagining work and the good life apart from Japan's lifetime employment system and argues that this helped to create an alibi for the dismantling of labor protections. Chapter 4, “Work without Sweating: Amateur

Traders and the Financialization of Daily Life,” describes the work of women who aimed to profit from trading foreign currencies on online platforms, who in fact made much of their money as experts giving lectures on online trading, capitalizing on their own amateur status in a way that the author argues ultimately made it more difficult for women to enter the financial sector as professionals. Finally, chapter 5, “Dreamwork: Cell Phone Novelists, Affective Labor, and Precarity Politics,” argues that young women wrote cell phone novels as part of a rejection of underpaid or unpaid service work, but that cell phone novel platforms profited greatly from advertising revenue generated by this content while most women who wrote these novels were never able to make a living in this way.

The argument at the center of this text about the relationship of women’s labor to online platforms is an incisive critique of how women’s work is made invisible and undercompensated, and the author draws important analytical connections between this kind of exploitation and the ongoing deregulation of the labor market and increasing conditions of precarity. The epilogue in particular draws key connections between these processes and ongoing movements to resist precarity and the exploitation of digital labor, such as the “Wages for Facebook” campaign and the movement for basic income. Despite this analytical focus on structural relationships, the text also conveys the richness and variety of this work, which I read as an attempt to avoid reproduction of the abstraction that it critiques. This text also reads to me as sensitive to the author’s position in relation to women’s accounting of their own lives; for example, Lukács often sets off her own analysis with explicit first-person markers, in order to preserve the distinction between her own analytical positioning of these practices as forms of labor and the diverse ways in which women may have experienced them.

This text engages deeply with the rich tradition of English-language feminist theorizations of nonstandard labor. However, it engages less explicitly with the Japanese-language feminist tradition, although the core arguments of this text could speak eloquently to questions raised by the body of Japanese-language feminist writing on women and irregular and part-time labor that has been developing since the 1980s. This text also left me with questions about how the form of capitalist accumulation that Lukács critiques fits into a global system in which women are subject to very different levels of exploitation and violence.

Lukács’s work addresses questions concerning the relationship between digital labor and precarity that are becoming increasingly urgent and would be of interest to scholars of Japan but also to scholars interested in women, labor, and digital labor, and to anyone trying to understand the changing conditions of capitalism at this moment.

Mairead Haynes  
*Columbia University*