Wired to the World, Chained to the Home: Telework in Daily Life by
    Penny Gurstein. Vancouver, Canada: University of British Columbia
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Feminist scholarship has long been exploring technology and its links to
gender, race, sexuality, and class issues. From the celebratory, collapsed
boundaries between human and technology proposed in Donna Haraway's
"Cyborg Manifesto" (1991), to documentaries linking the Internet and the
global sex trade, to studies of the impact of reproductive technologies on
women of color, technology and its (dis)contents have been at the forefront
of feminist analysis in the last decades. And with the proliferation of
technology and the growing role it plays in human experience, the need
for increasingly focused feminist evaluations of technology's impact on
lived lives becomes ever more urgent.

What happens, for example, when technology turns a home into a
workplace, or when a worker's office overlaps with her living room? And
what do the answers have to do with gender, work, and society? In her
study on telework in daily life, Penny Gurstein sets out to examine these
far-reaching questions. Citing the paucity of critical discourse concerning
how technology directly affects everyday lives, Gurstein explores how
telework restructures time use, spatial organizations, and personal rela-
tionships, often in intrusive and damaging ways. By looking with care at
the position of women in this reordered world of work and home, she illus-
trates how the frequently lauded aspects of telework ("global access," flex-
ibility) often have negative consequences, especially for poor women.

Of particular interest is the way in which Gurstein argues that tele-
work is, by its very nature, linked to gendered issues of domesticity. Obvi-
ously, people telework for many reasons, but Gurstein's research clearly
demonstrates that both the decision to telework *and* the experience of
telework are often rooted in gender identity and gendered family roles. Her
studies show that as women try to fill the roles of homekeeper, mother,
and wage earner, telework is at first understood as a way to reconcile more
easily these varied demands. The lived reality of telework, however, does
not always solve the Superwoman dilemma. It often further complicates
the issues, and the female teleworker feels pressure to successfully fill all
roles—child caretaker, homekeeper, and office worker—simultaneously.

Gurstein's analysis does not shy away from numerous variables involved
in evaluating the impact of telework, and *Wired to the World* cuts broadly
across issues of social organization, spatial use, and gender. The study
does not seek easy answers to complex questions and Gurstein remains
willing to discuss the brighter sides of telework (such as the positive
changes it can make in the lives of the differently abled). However, I found
myself wishing that this project paid more attention to the issue of labor

as such, with a closer analysis of how telework functions within a larger system of corporate exploitation. Gurstein is aware that earning power itself is often gendered, observing that information technology has created a dual labor market where "mobile informational workers" (mostly men) fare better than the "vulnerable low-skilled pool of predominately women workers" (196). Yet, while the book is admirably sensitive to class and the ways in which low skills, low pay, multiple roles, and gender overlap, a reader may wish for a more direct link between aspects of telework and labor analysis. While union responses (and objections) to telework are mentioned in passing, the issue of how teleworkers might achieve better working conditions remains largely unaddressed.

Gurstein's arguments and conclusions are drawn from an impressive data set, and her research is based on teleworker questionnaires (reprinted in various appendices at the back of the book). Her studies took place over a ten-year period in the San Francisco area, Canada-wide, including Vancouver, and the effect of so much empirical evidence is to both powerfully convince and almost drown one in detail. For example, in the chapter "I Don't Have a Home, I Live in My Office: Transformations of the Spaces in Daily Life," Gurstein develops a complex set of four workspace typologies (with subsets) that analyze kinds of telework workspaces. Such exactness is impressive, but it makes for occasionally labored reading. This is clearly a text intended for advanced scholars of city planning, sociology, and Women's Studies; as such, its interdisciplinary perspective is impressively sophisticated.

"The virtual office is not a specific place but a process," writes Gurstein (158). It is a process attached to gender and class issues, and one with especially grave consequences for poor women. So clearly does Gurstein illustrate the hierarchical, gendered nature of telework that her study does indeed reveal wires of access to sometimes be exploitative chains that bind. Her claim that telework needs continued analysis as a social issue, especially in terms of gender and class, seems irrefutable.

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Reference

Haraway, Donna. 1991. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." In her *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 149–81. New York: Routledge.