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BOOK REVIEW

The Handbook for the Future of Work by MacLeavy, Julie, and Frederick Harry Pitts (eds). Taylor and Francis. 2024, 424 p.

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Few research topics are as contested as the "future of work." What counts as work, whose futures matter, and which forces deserve emphasis remain open questions. The Handbook for the Future of Work assembles more than thirty specialists to map the terrain, offering panoramic coverage (or state-of-the-field cartography) of automation, platformisation, social difference and policy innovation.

Editors Julie MacLeavy and Frederick Harry Pitts position The Handbook as "a flexible guide" rather than a canonical gatekeeper, precisely because "there is no single conception of the future of work". The book's ten multi-chapter parts highlights that pluralism: histories (Part 2), automation debates (Part 3), platform labour (Part 4), identity and difference (Part 5), gender-care-reproduction (Part 6), sectoral case studies (Part 7), labour-market transitions (Part 8), geographies (Part 9) and policy futures (Part 10). The intention of the book is mainly in creating a reading material for university courses on Future-of-Work subject spread across a semester.

The Handbook assembles thirty-two short chapters to map how technology, capitalism and social difference are co-producing multiple and, often contested, work futures. Organised into ten thematic parts (not including the introduction and the conclusion), the volume travels from historical perspectives to climate-exposed "thermal futures", threading a consistent message: trajectories are neither linear nor inevitable; they are made and un-made through political struggle, institutional design and everyday resistance. What follows is a condensed

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summary of all the 30 essays trying to pinpoint the concepts and the take-aways most important to current debates. It continues with a personal reading of The Handbook trying to discover new insights into personal interests currently – mainly the future of care work (paid and unpaid, especially concerning the elderly) and a specific work sector (hospitality and tourism).

Contextualising futures (Part 2): Tim Strangleman opens by showing that every forecast carries with it a selective past; visions of what will come rest on stories of what has been and what is valued now. Greig Charnock then critiques the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" hype, locating it within wider capitalist cycles and reminding readers that technological waves are mediated by power and ideology. Jean Cushen and Paul Thompson add a neglected layer to the subject: financialization. When shareholder imperatives dictate firm strategy, the future of work is scripted as much by capital markets as by code or robots. Together these chapters insist that any serious prognosis must combine technology with political economy and collective memory.

Automation re-examined (Part 3): Eleni Papagiannaki classifies four camps in the automation debate – optimistic, utopian, pessimistic and dismissive – arguing that most misjudge capitalism's dual antagonisms of labour-to-capital and capital-to-capital competition. James Steinhoff deepens the critique by introducing synthetic automation: machine-learning systems that can model tacit, non-codified tasks, thereby widening what is automatable and accelerating capital's "postulate of automatism". Abigail Gilbert supplies a six-archetype heuristic to show cognitive technologies in practice, urging analysts and unions to track the choices embedded in design and deployment rather than succumb to deterministic extremes.

Platforms and gig work (Part 4): Al James highlights how women's often invisible digital labour forms the basis of platform growth, countering narratives that treat gig work as wholly new. David Hesmondhalgh and Charles Umney pivot attention from on-demand apps to "non-labour" platforms whose rating, booking and payment infrastructures reconfigure jobs in retail, hospitality and the creative industries. Finally, Kalie Mayberry, Lindsey Cameron and Hatim Rahman document algo-activism in the #DeclineNow movement, where dispersed DoorDash couriers forged solidarity through collective refusals of low-paid orders, showing that algorithmic management can galvanise, not just suppress, worker action.

Identity and inequality (Part 5): across three chapters the authors bring intersectionality to the fore. Bridget Kenny demonstrates how South Africa's platform economy amplifies racial-capitalist hierarchies even as it promises digital inclusion. Melanie Jones and co-authors trace the compounding disadvantages disabled workers face amid labour-market turbulence. Julie MacLeavy argues that access to assets – not only wages – will increasingly structure class position, implying a shift from job-centred to portfolio-centred inequalities.

Gender, care and social reproduction (Part 6): M. Winter reconstructs the "ideal agile worker": always measurable, always on, and evaluated through quantified self-tracking, a figure that re-inscribes gendered divisions by rendering unpaid care invisible. Lizzie Richardson and Daniel Cockayne "queer" linear future-of-work scripts, proposing alternative temporalities that value social reproduction alongside waged labour. Karin Schwiter shows how the commodification of care shifts risk onto migrant and female workers, raising the stakes of organising this sector's digital transition.

Sectoral lenses (Part 7): Matthew Cole contends that services will remain the growth engine of advanced economies, but their shape will be fought over by labour and capital. Darryn Snell and colleagues critique Industry 4.0 promises in Australian manufacturing, where free-trade orthodoxy and extractivism complicate re-industrialisation. The MEND collective contrasts growth-oriented agrifood tech with post-growth alternatives that prioritise conviviality, ecological repair and dignified work.

Transitions and insecurity (Part 8): Edward Yates details how young workers face deteriorating job quality and delayed life-course milestones, arguing for union renewal and industrial policy to stabilise their trajectories. Nancy Worth reframes unpaid work - care, volunteering, household tasks - as a strategic lens for understanding future labour regimes. Paolo Borghi charts the rise of "independent professions", suggesting new norms of rights and autonomy for the self-employed.

Geographies and mobilities (Part 9): Rutvica Andrijasevic, Julie Yujie Chen and Marc Steinberg historicise just-in-time production, showing how temporality and space have been reframed from Toyota factories to AI data-annotation gig work, with synchronisation inseparable from labour precarity. Julie MacLeavy and co-authors track post-pandemic remote-worker migrations that are reshaping urban–rural balances and regional policy agendas. David Etherington, David Beel and Martin Jones argue that "city regions" like Sheffield are becoming key arenas for contesting platform labour standards.

Politics and policy (Part 10): Huw Thomas and Peter Turnbull rehabilitate industrial-relations institutions, insisting that concepts of efficiency, equity and voice must be re-imagined, not discarded. Jo Ingold critiques welfare regimes whose active-labour-market tools often discipline rather than empower workers. Frederick Harry Pitts and M. Winter link automation anxiety to electoral volatility among routine workers, questioning whether conventional redistribution can quell these fears.

Environment and climate (Part 11): Ed Atkins dissects "green-jobs" optimism, warning that just-transition rhetoric can mask unequal burdens and missed opportunities for systemic change. Evie Gilbert shows how decarbonisation pressures in Asian garment supply chains may entrench precarious employment

unless labour rights are foregrounded. Laurie Parsons introduces thermal futures, chronicling how extreme heat already kills outdoor workers and demanding climate-sensitive labour standards.

Conclusion: futures in contention. Across its eleven parts the Handbook returns to two intertwined claims. First, capitalist dynamism ensures continual technical and organisational aspects, but outcomes – good jobs, bad jobs, or no jobs – are steered by finance, policy and struggle, not by technology alone. Second, imagining work futures is itself a political act: depictions of automation, platforms or green transitions can mobilise investment, shape regulation and legitimise new forms of control. By juxtaposing individual case studies with big-picture theory, the volume equips scholars and practitioners to challenge deterministic narratives and to craft alternative paths.

Implications for Research on care work

Across multiple parts the Handbook reframes unpaid work as central and deeply political. Rather than treating it as a residual category, the authors view unpaid labour as expanding; it is used in the analysis to expose blind spots in mainstream future-of-work debates and to argue for policy architectures that value – or at least adequately compensate – the work that keeps paid employment and the wider economy functioning.

In Part 8, an entire chapter (Nancy Worth, Ch. 21) is devoted to unpaid work, elevating the subject from footnote to analytical lens and arguing that forecasts centred on waged labour miss a vast share of actual labour time. Worth treats unpaid activities – caring for relatives, volunteering, community organising, even the "hidden" hours of self-employment – as a diagnostic window on future labour regimes. When jobs fragment and social protection shrinks, households absorb risk; unpaid work therefore becomes a barometer of precarity rather than an historical leftover.

Chapters in Part 6 (Gender, Care & Social Reproduction) links unpaid care to platform and automation dynamics by showing that digital scheduling apps, ratings systems and remote-monitoring devices do not replace embodied care; they simply fold unpaid or under-paid labour into data flows. Migrant and female carers shoulder this invisible work while simultaneously feeding the data that justify further "efficiency" drives. Digitalisation doesn't erase care's "hands-on" nature; it layers data-driven surveillance onto already feminised work. M. Winter shows how platform scheduling, sensor tracking and ratings produce the new "ideal agile worker" whose emotional effort is constantly quantified; rather than liberating carers, these tools intensify pace and extend managerial

reach. Marketisation shifts risk from states to families, then onto a precarious, migrant-heavy care workforce. Karin Schwiter maps how outsourcing elder-care and domestic help to private agencies globalises the labour pool, but locks many carers into low pay, temporariness and weak legal protection.

In the rest of The Handbook several contributors insist that any macro "future of work" scenario – green transition, AI expansion, asset-based welfare – must begin with the work that reproduces daily life. Future inequalities will hinge as much on asset ownership and household wealth as on wages from care work. Julie MacLeavy argues that as care tasks move in and out of formal labour markets, class positions may be determined by who can monetise housing or savings to buy care services – or who must supply unpaid care themselves. Whether that labour is paid (home-care aides) or unpaid (family members), its availability and quality condition every other sector's future. Without explicit policy for social reproduction, technological change will merely displace costs onto households. It further shows how unpaid tasks proliferate inside paid jobs: platform chapters (Part 4) observe that hospitality, ride-hail and delivery workers perform growing volumes of unpaid digital labour: app-navigation, waiting time, equipment maintenance, ratings management.

This pseudo-unpaid work complicates wage statistics and clouds discussions about productivity and "good jobs". The Handbook's policy section (Part 10) proposes tools that recognise or redistribute unpaid labour: care credits in social-protection systems, portable benefits for self-employed carers, collective bargaining over algorithmic waiting time, and wealth-tax proposals (MacLeavy in Chapter 13) that shift resources to households undertaking essential but unpaid tasks. Alternative temporalities – drawn from feminist and queer theory – open space to value slow, relational aspects of care that techno-optimist "efficiency" narratives ignore. Richardson & Cockayne propose futures where social reproduction is central, challenging the idea that caring hours are a drag on productivity.

Climate change and demographic ageing converge to widen care gaps and expose carers to new risks. Laurie Parsons (Part 11) highlights heat stress for home-health and outdoor community carers, while Ed Atkins warns that "green-job" transitions will fail if they don't finance expanded elder-care services alongside decarbonisation.

These themes suggest that safeguarding the future of social care will require integrated policies: regulating platform algorithms, extending labour protections across borders, taxing wealth to fund universal care, and embedding climate resilience into both paid-care workplaces and unpaid-care support systems.

Implications for Research on Platform Hospitality

"Rating disciplines labour" – Customer-review platforms such as TripAdvisor and Yelp are now de-facto managers. Front-line staff in hotels, restaurants and B&Bs find their pay, scheduling and even mid-shift "recovery plans" tied to aggregated guest scores. Any fieldwork should treat ratings dashboards as a core site of control. Interview guides can probe how workers and managers anticipate or game reviews, and how this shapes emotional labour.

Non-labour platforms do more damage (or good) than gig apps. Research has fixated on Uber-style labour platforms, yet non-labour platforms (booking engines, payment gateways, review sites) reorganise work for employees who never "join" a platform. One focus on new research can be to broaden the lens beyond on-demand housekeeping apps to include Online Travel Agencies algorithms, dynamic-pricing tools and embedded fintech that reshape hotel payrolls and job design.

Platform power is sector-specific, and hospitality needs its own analytic toolkit. The editors warn against grand "platform capitalism" narratives and call for sector-level studies; retail/hospitality illustrates how the same technology produces unique labour stresses compared with, say, creative industries. The main take here is the tourism focus: comparative case studies (chain hotel vs. family-run pension, resort vs. urban Airbnb) will reveal what generic platform debates miss.

Services are the future growth engine, but with intensified surveillance. Service work—including hotels and tourism—will keep expanding; automation will come less as full job loss than as algorithmic control, datafied performance metrics and low-wage polarization. Interesting research will explore how "smart" housekeeping apps, occupancy sensors or AI concierge systems shift skill demands, wage ladders and union strategies rather than eliminate roles outright.

Customer bias and opaque algorithms results in new equity risks. Online critiques often target visible staff while hiding upstream cost-cutting (a classic misdirection tactic); workers have little recourse and face discriminatory ratings. A new policy recommendation should be enhancing the transparency standards for guest ratings, anti-bias auditing, and local-government leverage (as Chapter 25 of The Handbook shows) to protect hospitality labour conditions.

Concluding remarks

The obvious strength of the volume is scope: we have in this Handbook thirty-two concise essays, each ending with further-reading lists, make the volume a literature-review goldmine. Its interdisciplinary approach also widens

geographical view by including South African, Australian and European cases (although it rests mainly in Anglophone centres). Yet breadth breeds unevenness: some chapters synthesise decades of debate, others offer narrower empirical slices; cross-referencing is light (and confined in the first and last chapter), leaving readers to connect dots between, say, financialisation (Part 2) and policy instruments (Part 10). For projects that need a sector-specific deep dive – platformised hotel work, for instance – researchers must supplement with targeted field studies.

Most chapters are state-of-the-field syntheses: they map debates, and point readers to further reading, rather than presenting large new datasets or original fieldwork. Some authors do illustrate points with brief case studies (e.g., the DoorDash #DeclineNow action, a UK daffodil farm, post-COVID remote worker moves), but these vignettes serve mainly as examples inside a broader approach. In other words, the Handbook's chief value is cartographic: it curates and organises the sprawling research on work futures - whereas deep, primary research is left to the sources it cites.

We can summarize here core take-away for a researcher interested in the field: The Handbook main attribute is the historical grounding – the first chapter shows that imagining the future of work always re-imagines the past and present, puncturing techno-determinist timelines. Automation is a new type of social relation since AI as "synthetic automation" is embedded in capitalist value extraction rather than a neutral productivity booster. Dedicated treatments of race, disability and queer temporalities situate technological change within differential power structures showing intersectional futures. We must observe the diversity of platforms as "non-labour" platforms (e.g., Booking.com, Yelp) that reshape conventional employment far beyond gig apps. One last important aspect is the granularity of sectors: separate chapters on services, advanced manufacturing and agrifood prevent a one-size-fits-all automation story.

In short, the Handbook offers a panoramic, critical map of where work may head and why. Its rich mix of history, feminist, critical race, anarchist, postcolonial, decolonial, Indigenous, Marxist, intersectional analysis and climate urgency provide a toolkit for anyone seeking to navigate - or contest - the changing world of work.