

Re-Humanising Work: from vocation to precarious and robotised work

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Introduction – sleepless, workless and homeless in Seattle

Three months ago I landed in spectacular Seattle for a short study leave focusing on Faith and Work in the archives of Seattle Pacific University. But the more I saw, read and talked with locally engaged and thinking Christians, the more anxious I felt about this fastest growing of major US cities. Its growth is driven by a wave of high-tech companies such as Boeing and Microsoft, and service companies like Starbucks. It is a harbinger of the future, not just in the US, as further reading on New York and Miami confirmed, but also Australia (see Claire Harvey Dawson's 'Changing Work' article on alternative housing in this Perspectives). Sydney especially is highlighted in the recent SBS series *Filthy Rich and Homeless*.

The fastest growing company of all is the aptly named Amazon, taking over Seattle's inner city, and exemplifying Richard Florida's 3 T formula for Creative Cities of talent, tolerance (liberal, pro-gay marriage, as is its economically libertarian CEO Jeff Bezos, and what's been more broadly called Silicon Valley Ethics – for homosexuals but not the homeless) and technology. But it is also bringing massive disruption, intractable traffic and high homelessness levels for many locals I met at Seattle Union Gospel Mission, up to 15% of whom can be US community college students and 33% go hungry (S. Goldrick-Rab et al., *Hungry and Homeless in College*, Wisconsin HOPE Lab, 2017).

Bezos is the world's richest man on a mere \$167 billion, with Amazon the world's second largest company after Apple, worth a trillion dollars. It has Amazonian ambitions to increase that wealth exponentially and to replace citizenship with consumer identity in an enveloping digital environment. Bezos praises his customers for 'divine discontent', seeing this as an aspect of our technological evolution (see D. Austin, 'The Constant Consumer', *reallifemag.com*, 10/9/18). Alas there is little sign of a mid-life crisis opening the gates to prolific philanthropy, like former Microsoft CEO and still Seattle native Bill Gates, despite the \$2 billion foundation recently set up by Bezos for homeless families and preschool education - a start, but only 1% of his fortune (L. Stiffler, 'How Jeff Bezos' new \$2B "Day One Fund" stacks up to other tech billionaires' philanthropy', *geekwire.com*, 13/9/18).

An inhumane pace is demanded of Amazon's 340,000 global workers by the algorithms (in extreme heat without air-con), testing human endurance in a way that makes the obsessive-compulsive Frederick Taylor's mechanised stop-watch measured methods look relaxed. And Amazon's ironically named Fulfilment Centre workers and drivers have pee bottles so they don't delay deliveries by treks to the toilet (see P. Hatch, 'In Amazon's "Hellscape"', *theage.com.au*, 7/9/18; 'The disturbing accounts of Amazon delivery drivers', *businessinsider.com.au*, 12/9/18; and J. Bloodworth, 'Amazon: the new Victorian workhouse', *unherd.com*, 4/5/18).

I was once told by a Christian man working for a call centre that their new manager had noticed queues to the toilets, so she asked people to send a group email if they were answering nature's call. They didn't specify if they were doing a number 1 or 2! Someone in his Bible Study group dubbed it not an email but a pee-mail. Holy humour may be one defense against unnatural and dehumanised work.

Unions are a dirty word to Amazon, and sometimes a sackable offence if the word is overheard. Sadly unions like the US Teamsters can be corrupt and in league with unjust management, thus making workers wary of joining.

De-industrialised and GFC-devastated areas are easy game for Amazon to exploit with demands for big tax exemptions from cities and wage concessions from desperate workers. Further, Amazon's barely minimum wages for extremely physical work (up to 15 miles walking per shift) exemplifies the rapidly growing gap between the top 1% and the rest. Contrary to assumed economic law and employer-employee deals, productivity gains no longer translate into wage gains, not for 40 years in the US, nor ten years in Australia).

The distribution centres also have poor OH&S standards that are routinely violated. When workers are injured, they can find that insurers, influenced by Amazon, cut their cover, leaving them invalid and isolated. I was told of enlightened work practices at higher, creative, technological levels of Amazon, but the system seems highly hierarchical in how it apportions more humanised work. Perhaps worst of all was Amazon's shameless and successful campaign to overturn Seattle City Council's high wage tax to provide for the homeless directly affected by increased rents due largely to Amazon's inner-city takeover (D. Beekman, 'Amazon Backlash Spurs Seattle City Council to Repeal "Head Tax"', governing.com, 13/6/18) - this did help make a city park safer and cleaner, but so much for democracy.

From Seattle to Seaside Miami and no more Neighbourly New York

According to Matthew Stewart ('The 9.9% is the new American Aristocracy', *The Atlantic*, June 2018), Seattle isn't the only city following Richard Florida's flawed pattern noted above. New York, San Francisco/Silicon Valley and other high-tech cities have followed it, lemming-like also. Housing, education and transport have been effectively privatised in many places. The Clintons' coast and high-tech city-based model has now come home to roost. And their 'basket of deplorables' apprentice themselves to Trump's twitter feed of false promises. At Union Gospel Mission we met an Afro-American with a pro 'Trump's wall' message proudly paraded across his ample chest. We started talking but I wasn't going to argue in the only place he had to call home. Sadly, for him and many like him, a thin veneer of conservative values is used by the rich to fool the working class to vote down their economic interest. Trump's massive corporate tax cuts have gutted the base for job-creating infrastructure investment, except in defence. And the working poor, without means for corporate tax avoidance, bear too much of the brunt of the tax base. Meanwhile the Trumps' preferred weekend escape from Washington is their Mia Lago Mansion in Florida. But the Secession of the Successful reaches its limits at the advancing shoreline. Florida is feeling the perfect storm of economic and ecological pressures. Trump's wilful blindness to the latter is like 11th century English King Canute's sycophants who claimed the King could do anything, even stop the sea. So wise King Canute dragged them down to the shore, had his throne planted in the sand and awaited the tide's coming in, and in, and in, as his courtiers fled to save their skins.

Climate Gentrification increases in cities like Miami as climate change accelerates and waves get higher. The next wave of gentrification literally finds them leaving once wealthy waterside real estate and buying up higher ground in trendy areas. These historic black and Hispanic/Cuban neighbourhoods attract creatives and technologists to live and work, eat out and educate their kids at increasingly exclusive schools (J. Gage, 'How Rising Sea Levels Are Gentrifying Miami', *Sojourners*, August 2018). The Miami

scenario of fake Pharaohs fleeing the waters may become the future experience of coast-clinging Aussies who talk only of investment properties and water views.

Creative and vocational destruction and monopolisation?

These intersections of the economic, technocratic and ecological raise questions as to whether Joseph Schumpeter's 'creative destruction' process for capitalist growth, fuelled by creative technologies and entrepreneurs, is simply destructive, or at least creative at considerable cost. Destructive developments since Richard Florida's *Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) have led to his *mea culpa, The New Urban Crisis* (2018). In an interview by Paul Solman ('Is the "creative class" saving our cities...?', pbs.org, 1/6/17), Florida admits that, while clustering of the 'creative class' – professionals in the arts, in the media, in tech - has brought growth and innovation to cities, it has also led to 'the new urban crisis' with massively rising real estate, school fees and the development of a new creative class of hereditary wealth through monopolisation of land and learning. 'Well-being inequality' happens when creative class workers pay premium prices to live in neighbourhoods with better food, education, entertainment and jobs. Lower-wage workers are relegated to lower-quality neighbourhoods farther from the city with less family time due to increased commuting time and hence higher family breakdown rates due to less family time.

The increasing monopolisation of a sense of vocation or calling by celebrity creatives and techno-entrepreneurs in liquid or post-modernity has led to rapidly changing roles and jobs for others. It becomes difficult to have a long-term sense of relational and role responsibility in real time and place. The sense of precarity and vocational fragility, at work and home, challenges Luther's more medieval 16th century notion of unchanging vocation; it also raises questions as to whether vocation in a liquid, constantly changing world is psychologically and spiritually sustainable. This inhumane pace, so opposed to the slow pace of grace, with its customised and tender tailoring to our finitude and frailty, requires new and old resources for re-humanising work that this essay and issue of *Perspectives* seek to explore.

Re-meaning of vocation against 'Protestant' ethic justification by job

Into this elitist context, where often only creatives are considered 'called', Lutheran theologian Robert Benne helpfully retrieves Luther's signature doctrine of justification by faith as a way of freeing us from justification by a job, both before God and others (*Ordinary Saints*, 2003, 169). I would add that, if our alien dignity is in Christ, we don't have to earn dignity or status through our work, and, though I'm wary of possible ideological distortion by the powerful, we can exercise patience in the midst of alienated labor. Yet we do this while simultaneously seeking our and others' modest share now of the first fruits of the full harvest of un-alienated labor in 'the new heavens and new earth' (Isa 65:17-25). We are both 'waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God' (2 Peter 3:12).

For Benne,

[f]reedom from placing work in an idolatrous position means freedom for work as a penultimate good [cf. Bonhoeffer, Ethics, 1955, 98-127]. For those whose work is on the absorbing and demanding side of the ledger, the promises of the gospel allow proper distance. For those whose work is on the routine and pedestrian side [or threatened by robotization], the gospel frees people from [the anxiety of] needing significant work as a way of earning their self-esteem before God'. They serve neighbors in a matter-of fact way

But this is incognito (cf. Mt 25:31-46), doing so by God's common grace 'which the Creator showers on the whole creation' as much as those in 'important' work (170). Justification by grace through faith, not work(s), is a helpful antidote to the increasing precarity of work and the inversely related proud propaganda of work as identity or co-creation today. It also reminds us of the precarious nature of work in Scripture, church history and the majority world today, as Andrew Sloane rightly reminds us in this *Perspectives*.

Our worth is in Christ, not our work. Out of our worth in Christ and worthwhile work under the risen Son, our work, however precarious, is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58, Rom 8:20) under the sun of death and transient vanity (cf. Ecclesiastes). Here, work flows into what Kara Martin (in her *Perspectives* article and breakthrough books *Workshop Vols I and II*) calls work as a weekly and daily sacrificial offering of our bodies and renewal of our minds, our rational or *logikos* worship or Workshop (Rom 12:1, 2). She rejoices in these broken, bodily offerings, even as she experiences the precarity of work herself.

Another Lutheran, Uwe Siemon-Netto, sees rediscovery of vocation as 'the most effective antidote' to the 'narcissism' of today's western worldview 'because it directs the individual to the "You", the other person, and therefore away from the "Me"' ('Vocation versus Narcissus', 149 in *Where Christ is Present*, ed. J. W. Montgomery and G.E. Veith, 2015, 149-64). He blames Max Weber's anxiety-ridden, secularised Protestant Work and wealth Ethic, which sees earthly success as proof of predestination, as an example of this 'me-centredness'.

Australian Tim Dunlop (*Why The Future is Workless*, 2016, 36-37), like most secular social scientists, fails to get behind Weber's secularised sources and much modern practice back to the original Protestants. He sees calling as an almost psychotic worshipping of work itself, as the source of worth and meaning (42).

Hence Dunlop sees Protestant vocation as inferior to the Greek view espoused by German-Jewish political philosopher Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1958). Arendt draws a strong distinction between labour as a private necessity and work as an expression of public freedom. Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, the Greeks saw physical, irrational, animal-like labour as primarily performed by women and slaves, and rational public philosophical and political work by men with sizeable souls (*Why The Future is Workless*, 18-22). Their freedom was bought by the heavy burden of necessity being shifted from male shoulders to the backs of women and slaves.

By contrast, Luther's richer view of vocation sees it as rather a means for those justified by faith, not justified by a job, to worship God and freely love and serve God's images. He sees callings as masks or relational roles, clothing humble actors in the everyday drama of salvation (from slavery) and voluntary service. Vocations prevent a focus on the self's fragile reality, identity (150) and pursuing of freedom at others' expense.

Weber's theological tin ear and his key secularised source, the Deist Ben Franklin, missed the great anxiety-reducing assurance and freedom that the Protestant fathers Luther and Calvin found in the finished work of Christ, not our own work. Nonetheless, baby-boomer bourgeois critiques of millennial narcissism should be more circumspect given the generational injustice perpetrated on the first generation in 70 years to be worse off than their parents, as Dawson notes in her article.

Shifting from Protestant work ethic for all to elitist aesthetic vocation

Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of the shift from Solid to (what he entitles his book) *Liquid Modernity* (2000) sees that the modern work ethic sought to equally humanise all work,

pleasureable or unpleasureable, as vocation. By contrast, the postmodern work aesthetic exalts differences. Some 'elevated' professions are works of art. Other work is worthless. The new work aesthetic is stratifying. It is as if you are constantly auditioning or, in reality, digitally objectifying yourself online, and in reality TV, whether romantically or creatively, via music or cooking shows.

Contrary to the relatively equalising and stabilising Protestant vocational view, Bauman claims that Liquid Modernity requires most to take a liquid view of vocation: 'in the present-day flexible labour market, embracing one's work as a vocation carries enormous risks and is a recipe for psychological and emotional disaster'. An 'until further notice' sign is permanently hung over the post-modern work aesthetic (*Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, 1998, 31-34). Both sides – employers and employees – merely adopt a pretense of a humanising vocational pattern. Can vocation keep afloat in liquid modernity? Stay in your calling? Not if it's just a job; only if it's primarily the call to Christ and his community.

Higher education expectations: selling students and teachers short of a vocation

A sample of Victorian university ads in recent years shows shifts largely in the liquid modern direction. Deakin University featured an ad with one catch-word – 'Worldly'. Not in the negative Christian sense, but, judging by the many 'world as your oyster' images, more in the sense of being cosmopolitan consumers, able to travel the world, perhaps becoming world citizens, but with no particular loyalty to place, making choices based on whatever creative projects you want to pursue.

Monash University's ad had an ultra-modern technological theme appealing to the creatively destructive entrepreneurial and technological instincts of its ideal students. Technological creatives were clearly to see stability and tradition as things to be trashed. By contrast, Australia's leading research university, the sandstone University of Melbourne, had an image of students climbing on each others' shoulders up a sandstone building in a great tree-like dance, embracing its 'sandstone' reputation and values of organic creativity and community. Given their American style liberal arts course and general education before specialising at master's level, this seemed to fit.

Latrobe University in late 2012 sought to sketch stories of graduates now making a difference in their discipline through particular graduate 'thought leaders' such as Kon Karapanagiotidis OAM, current CEO and founder of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. Its 2018 ad is entitled 'All Kinds of Clever', inviting students to develop in holistic ways – arts, science, law – teaching students how to learn for life in a quickly changing world. It is one of the better ads, but could have been better still with something more about apprenticeship in, and finding a calling requiring, wise and courageous character, by following in the footsteps of people like Karapanagiotidis.

The optimism of some university ads, with their technological utopian and anti-tradition aspects, represents a new techno-informational and sometimes even military complex, a fast and furious form of disruptive Capitalism with some entrepreneurial idealism thrown in. But this optimism looks Pollyanna-ish or even propagandistic given US college students being homeless and often hungry. This is reinforced by student debt levels, rapidly rising in Australia (though from a low base compared to the US) and further added to by the time it takes, on average four years, to enter the field you trained for. Flat wage growth and many not making HECS payments means education debts are accumulating year-by-year at indexed rates ('Student Debt just keeps growing', *Sunday Age*, 26/8/18, 21). Besides the increasingly visible numbers of homeless on big city streets, there is the mass un- and under-employment in outer-urban and rural areas, as highlighted by the

Brotherhood of St Laurence's national hotspots maps. The massive inflation of educational expectations via higher education, and the often-false promises of jobs and money at the end of it, are a cause for considerable concern.

This consumerising of education is an international problem, most extreme in the US as highlighted in Tom Nichols' recent book, *The Death of Expertise* (2017, Ch. 3, 'Higher Education: The Customer is Always Right'). The gap between expectation and reality is also increasing in India, despite its insatiable appetite for creating computer software engineers. Delhi and Bangalore exemplify the Hi-Tech, entrepreneurial and competitive image that Prime Minister Mohendra Modi wants for his country. Delhi-based Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli is the epitome of competitive new middle class techno-Capitalism. But what happens to those who don't land that kind of job - are they in Trump's terms 'losers', or in Indian terms bearers of bad karma?

And what about those who seek an academic career or vocation, if those terms are still appropriate, when an estimated 60% of Australian university staff are now casual and many are on teaching contracts only. Nonetheless they are still expected to 'publish or perish', now publish *and* perish.

This is particularly sad when set in the context of a Sydney philosophy teacher with two courses per semester for many years who suddenly lost out when international student numbers recently dipped. He suicided. John Bottomley's 'Humanising Research Work' in this issue draws on a range of research showing that university teachers and workers are under increasingly unrealistic strain to churn out internationally peer-reviewed articles while increasingly feeling that they are no longer in a collegial academic vocation.

Precarious work is a global phenomenon, typified by a Czech academic who says he has 'no life', just surviving from casual course to course. It is also a phenomenon that clearly crosses class boundaries, in some ways creating a new 'dangerous class' in itself, even though the term precariat seemed originally to be a replacement for the old working class proletariat (see further G. Standing, *The Precariat*, 2011; and *The Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens*, 2014). It is less restricted now, even including supposedly secure public servants.

The woes of precarious work are part of 'the honeymoon is over' stage of the gig-economy that was once seen with rose-coloured glasses as an expression of the sharing economy enabling people to capitalise their spare assets. Uber cabs and food, Deliveroo etc. have been shown to offer their ultra-convenient services at the tip of our fingers at the cost of a highly casualised, constantly on-call, private risk-bearing, non-super supported servant class while price gouging in high demand times. Increasingly their workers are protesting at wages that barely cover their car, motorbike or other costs. And Airbnb has been increasingly corporatised by real estate investors and criticised for exacerbating housing problems (Dunlop, *Why The Future is Workless*, 131 ff).

The mutual ratings systems, which I have hopefully mentioned in past finance ethics classes as part of Arvidsson and Pietersen's *The Ethical Economy* (2013), also have a dark democratic underside when, for example, Uber's apparent equality of evaluation can cause drivers and riders to both arbitrarily lose access without appeal. (I did, though, just receive a notice from them that they have reviewed their system.)

These systems are not apolitical, value-neutral technologies but techniques of control, as Ellul and Foucault would say in their different ways. China's use of mass systems of pervasive social evaluation and conforming, with severe consequences for the non-

compliant, is a warning sign, as are sci-fi techno-dystopian series like Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror*.

The question provoked by a creation-fall-redemption-consummation biblical framework is whether there can be some form of redemptive transformation of such technological systems and pervasive 'principalities and powers' (Colossians 1:15-23). This transformation comes not from the economy of precarity but from true human dominion through sacrifice displayed in Christ and from our 'being securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel' (v. 23). Other hopes are hollow.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) challenges to vocational and professional expertise

As if the current manifestations of technologically induced precarity are not enough to arouse anxiety, Artificial Intelligence (AI) may make them the mere tip of a technological iceberg. Responses to the prospect that AI-based robotisation could cause major employment disruption are divided along technological boom or gloom lines as to whether the artificial brain is half full or half empty. A way of rephrasing this might be to ask: is AI fully or partially autonomous? One recent way of cutting through the debate is to talk of AI as Assisted Intelligence, assuming that some form of large-scale AI is inevitable and ineradicable, but still in need of humane guidance.

To see this as leading to considerable disruption to employment at not only lower levels but at reasonably sophisticated self-programming and professional levels is not merely the dystopia of pessimistic lefties but also of some you'd expect to be techno-optimists (see R. and D. Susskind, *The Future of the Professions: How technology will transform the work of human experts*, 2015).

A graphically illustrated centre-spread on 'Technology taking our Jobs' pictures a Tidal Wave of Technology leaving drowning bodies in its wake. It appears in the largely neo-liberal *The Economist* (18/1/14, 23-26). Similarly, Jonathan Taplin's brilliant *Move Fast and Break Things: How Facebook, Google and Amazon have cornered culture and what it means for all of us* (2017) is written by a digitally disillusioned former founding technology wizard and creative guru.

Taplin is not alone. Compare Terry Noone's 'Why musicians are the canaries in the coal mine' (eurekastreet.com.au, 20/8/17). Noone argues that, 'To get a good idea of where employment practices are headed, a good place to start is the music industry. There is no more predictable pay according to industry awards, merely a miniscule cut of the door but not on a normal employment basis. Like increasing numbers of internship 'opportunities', the pay is the exposure, but as one said, 'you can die of exposure'. The exposure is so you can record and receive pitiful payment on an infinitesimal ratio-per-play that only the most famous can survive upon due to high rotation. As the parents of two budding or busting young musicians tell me, most musicians are like begging buskers asking for very small change. Joni Mitchell's wonderful song 'For Free' captured this contemporary tragedy with its poignant line: 'Now me I play for fortunes, and those velvet curtain calls, and the black limousines and the big hotels, but he was standing on a corner, and he played real good, for free'.

AI Armageddon for jobs?

Some Australian economists still think that revolutionary disruption is not happening and is unlikely. This includes the venerable Ross Gittins ('Why the robot revolution won't play out as predicted', smh.com.au, 12/9/17), who is skeptical of predictions that 40% of jobs in Australia will be automated in the next 5-10 years (*Australia's Future Workforce*,

Committee for Economic Development of Australia, 2015). Compare Michael Jones ('Yes, robots will steal our jobs, but don't worry, we'll get new ones', theconversation.com, 12/2/16) who, despite his many graphs and evidence of employment growth in the US, is frankly very cocky and fallacious in claiming that 'the fact that calling someone a Luddite today is considered an insult is proof that those worries were largely unfounded ... Labor benefited right alongside productivity throughout the 19th and 20th centuries'. But in fact the 'law' of wages increasing in line with productivity is now subject to increasing critique. For a balanced biblical and economic evaluation of the changes, see Peter Docherty's paper on 'Non-Standard Work' in this issue of *Zadok Papers*.

The sceptics also tend to argue that, in the past, machines took over one sector at a time, with workers switching to other sectors. For instance, when agriculture started to automate, displaced workers moved into manufacturing; and when manufacturing automated, its displaced workers moved into the service sector.

But the service sector is now automating at a rapid rate, particularly in areas of repetition that are easily replicated. Those who protested have been dismissed as Luddites and falsely labelled as being against all technology. But the Luddites were primarily against job-destroying technology. A similar disservice has been done to the Amish who also have no absolutist objection to technology, as a Canadian Mennonite told me recently, but prefer to wisely wait and evaluate its effects. They are slow-technology, not necessarily no-technology, people.

Martin Ford, a 25-year veteran Silicon Valley computer design entrepreneur and software developer, rightly dismisses the sector-by-sector paradigm of technological change:

Today is quite different. IT is a truly general-purpose technology impacting across the board'. In his informed view, 'Virtually every industry ... is likely to become less labor-intensive as new technology is assimilated into business models, and that transition could happen quite rapidly.

Simultaneously, emerging industries 'will ... incorporate labor-saving technology ... from inception', instead of medium- or late-term development or revitalisation as in the past. And despite the illusory hopes of some that hi-tech is a highway to jobs, digital behemoths like Google and Facebook hire very few people compared to their size and influence (*The Rise of the Robots: Technology and the Threat of Mass Unemployment*, 2015, xvi).

A possible caveat comes in the form of futurologist John Naisbitt's neat formula that 'every hi-tech invention leads to a hi-touch reaction' (*High Tech/High Touch: Technology and our Search for Meaning*, 1981). This was his empirical observation but it is also good holistic philosophy and biblical theology. For instance, will robots take over in traditional high-touch areas of aged care? When my late father was in a nursing home with whole system Parkinson's, they had a machine to lift him up and place him on the toilet and help him to be washed by the nursing staff. Will all of those human functions be taken over or only those based on sheer strength and repetition, not tailored for face-to-face relations with a particular, unique person/patient and their highly nuanced needs? Nonetheless, labour costs more in the long-term than technology, just as euthanasia or the euphemistically expressed assisted dying via a pill costs much less than painstaking palliative care. If in Bill Clinton's formula 'it's the economy stupid', or we 'follow the money', technological economic efficiency, not humanity, comes up trumps.

Feminist labour academics Jenna Price, and Elizabeth Hill whom she cites, are rightly concerned at Uber's technological corruption of Caring Work ('The Uberisation of caring

work is diabolical', canberratimes.com.au, 8/3/18). They warn against the self-defeating female assumption that technology cannot replace tender care. And they see signs of the erosion of work standards, wages and security for the female-dominated caring industries. We need to promote an urgent genderised discussion about the technologisation and on-call casualised coordination techniques that, while not evil in themselves as in the technological gloom view, inevitably look like favouring the healthy seemingly independent men in the prime of life who largely come up with the machines and techniques to insulate themselves against interdependence (A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 1999).

System-wide disruption from AI

Ford's *The Rise of the Robots* argues that 'technology will intertwine with other major social and environmental challenges such as an ageing population, climate change, and resource depletion. This leads to changes that are meant to more than counteract the retirement of baby boomers'. The tendency is now towards longer work lives before retirement or getting pensions. Ford further argues that, 'If we don't adapt advancing technology we may face a "perfect storm" where impacts from soaring inequality, technology, un [and under]-employment, and climate change ... unfold roughly in parallel, and ... amplify and reinforce each other' (xvii-xviii).

While 'disruptive technology' has become part of casual conversation, it has tended to be seen on a case-by-case basis but not on a broad enough, or join-the-dots, canvas. Technology can devastate entire industries and upend specific sectors of the economy and the job market. So Ford's key question is: 'Can accelerating technology *disrupt our entire system* to the point where a fundamental restructuring may be required if prosperity is to continue?' (xviii).

Stressful transition to an AI Economy

Ford sees an enormously stressful transition to an AI economy coming relatively soon. In terms of economic cost he foresees that the up-till-recent 'virtuous feedback loop between productivity, rising wages, and increasing consumer spending will collapse' (xvii). Already we see 'soaring inequality' in income and consumption, and decline in purchasing power. On this we can compare Global Financial Crisis prophet Umair Haque on 'Was Marx Right?', namely, that increased capital investment in and use of technology would lead to less labour usage and stagnant or declining wages, or the immiseration of the worker. Stagnant wages (as the US has had for about 50 years and Australia has had for about ten) or declining wages in turn cannot fuel economic growth. The basic bargain of Fordist factory and assembly-line based technology, which paid a sufficient wage for workers to buy a Ford car themselves, produced a virtuous circle of economic growth. Now, in the age of automated austerity, it is getting harder to crank the motor of economic growth.

Utopian technologisation and basic income

In contrast to Ford's looming dystopia, some others see an equal extent of change but stress the Techno-Utopian Possibilities. Dunlop predicts a bright future. He foresees a synthesis of the Gig Economy, 3D Printing, Robotics and AI breaking down the traditional bosses-versus-workers/unions pattern which uses or is used by such technologies for flexible work on bosses' time terms. He prefers the prognosis of a technological convergence that radically alters our notions of time and place, the coordinates of community. This enables us to imagine not just

"a post-industrial future", but a future in which a job is no longer the measure of human identity. Should the new technologies ... actually bring about the workless future that threatens us with either extinction or liberation, wouldn't this be tantamount to falling back through time and finding ourselves in a universe once more linked to the cosmos? Wouldn't we have got back to the garden, or at least realised Karl Marx's wish to "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner ... without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic"? (*Why The Future is Workless*, 233)

Such a Romantic vision of whole humanity, irreducible to a specialty, is truly wonderful. But its illusory self-redemption piggy-backs perhaps on the unalienated redemptive realism in Isaiah 65, where those who plant grapes get to drink their wine, those who build houses get to live in them, unlike Seattle, and Sydney today.

Yet Dunlop himself deftly critiques as nostalgic those who long for a restoration of the car industry in places like Doveton in the far east of Melbourne, or the Toyota factory at Altona next door to my parish (see Ian Porter, *What Happened to the Car Industry?*, 2016, for one example). Dunlop wrote just before Trump's election, and seems in some ways to echo the US Democrats' techno-utopians. But even more so in the paragraph above he echoes Joni Mitchell's Woodstock anthem with its chorus 'we are stardust, we are billion year-old carbon and we've got to get ourselves back to the garden'. Yet having just seen *Mary Shelley*, the prodigy author of *Frankenstein: The New Prometheus*, I can't help feeling that Shelley's mature critique of her and her partner Shelley's adolescent, Romantic God-like selves, and their tormented creations, has passed Dunlop by. Similarly, Mitchell's Woodstock, like Shelley's utopian vision, gives way to the awareness of her complicity in the massive inequality of work and wealth in her song, 'For Free'.

Further, Dunlop's advocacy of universal basic income (150-176) as the way to pay for the millions of technologically unemployed, freeing them up for creative leisure, struck me as naïve on the page and in person when I heard him speak at a Deakin University conference in 2017. Imaginative though basic income may be, it is as likely to be implemented as French Socialist Andre Gorz's similar proposals in *Paths to Paradise* (1985) and pre-World War II prophecies when Bertrand Russell wrote his apology for leisure and Lord Keynes said that the problem of their then grandchildren would be what to do with their all their leisure time.

Australian Renaissance man Barry Jones wrote presciently in his *Sleepers, Wake!* (1990) that the two sides of the union movement, the party of leisure and the party of money, were wrestling over this, but it is clear that the latter won (see my *Changing Work Values*, 1995, Ch. 2, 'Towards 2000'). Ironically though, it was a pyrrhic victory; wages have flattened in the last decade in Australia, despite productivity growth, and there is less leisure.

Tentative conclusion

This leads to a key question: who will pay for universal basic income? And will it go to everyone, including the rich, especially given the rebellion of the rich in the US and Australia against the previous consensus on progressive taxation? Will it be the corporate tax dodgers who will pay for universal basic income, like Amazon, who turn democracy on its head to avoid paying taxes for the homeless they've effectively turned out of Seattle? But the even bigger question is: what will people do meaningfully with their time, especially men? Play video games and watch porn? Or do domestic work? Hopefully more of the latter. The government could, as Victorian Labor commendably has been doing, sponsor hundreds of men's sheds. The craft movement might be restored to its

former glory, as some advocate. But Harry Braverman's 1974/1998 book, *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism: The Degradation of Work in the 20th Century*, with its detailed depiction of the deskilling of labor, doesn't hold much hope for mass reskilling. The evidence from the de-industrialised US Rust and Coal belt and its deadly opioid epidemic among the unemployed is not encouraging.

A revival of craft would require something like a revival of household economies to make it work. But the elitist confining of a sense of calling to creatives only, of vocation as an upper-middle class luxury, a secession of the successful from the consequences they leave for the vocation-less poor to clean up, is deeply concerning. This, along with commercial and elitist separation of art from craft, plus the increasingly precarious nature of appropriate housing for households, makes it questionable whether a mass movement of craft work would have the resources of time or money to arise.

It will take more than a bit of crowd-funding to re-humanise our work. Recapturing a sense of the household of God as more than domestic intimacy and nuclear family, and reconnecting it to the economic and ecological household, might be a good place to start to counter cascading crises. An extended notion of household, and experiments that have been tried in Europe and parts of the US exchanging a Basic Wage with, for example, part-time Aged and Disability Care Jobs, child care, and accommodation in the spare rooms of the aged (even some attached to nursing homes) in exchange for low-tech, hi-touch care work, may be worth trying on a wider scale. Creative forms of humane care are as vocational as the most exalted and expensive piece of art. They may re-humanise the care-givers as much as the care receivers.

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