

Chapter 4, “Data Centers, Data Peripheries,” clears ground for developing a new conceptual framework called “on-the-way place” in the literature surrounding data infrastructure. An emerging landscape of data storage infrastructure is happening around the Icelandic countryside, competitively seeking out global capital. By foregrounding such unlikely places as the next nodes of the data storage landscape, Johnson questions our ideas about the core and periphery of development.

This chapter also brings in the dimension of security and policing that pervades the Icelandic data centers. Drawing on the data center industry’s tendency to obscure realities, the author questions what the security protocols really accomplish. Johnson’s main argument is that data centers use excessive security protocols to hide the extractive relationship it maintains with the location. In doing so, these centers also distribute the risk unevenly across proximate geographies and its communities.

In the concluding chapter, the book raises questions concerning data’s externalities. On the one hand, the technology industry has turned a corner with its greening efforts to consume less energy. On the other hand, new strides in AI and other technologies are demanding energy-intensive storage, and processing facilities are making meaningful transformations. In this context, what do technology companies owe communities where their industry takes form and shape?

What this book does best is raise questions such as these around the social and environmental justice that data storage brings about. By focusing on the materialities of data, Johnson highlights how the energy-intensive sector is extractive. In noting the historical continuities of occupation, the author sets forth a premise that new grounds of colonialism can take place in the hinterlands of development where erstwhile economic isolation combined with natural abundance might facilitate such exploitation.

The main contribution of this work is the conceptual framing of “ground” that weaves together the place where data is held and the assumptions that feed the narrative. The book argues that the seemingly natural fit of a place to an industrial demand is contrived and coerced through active manipulation by means of propaganda and obscuration by securitization. These maneuvers have consequences and collateral effects that currently no stakeholder is bound to address. Focusing on social construction of this enterprise makes these gaps strikingly obvious.

*Where Cloud Is Ground* is an important work that deserves to be widely read and discussed. The arguments around materiality and placemaking would be of interest to the anthropologists of work. The power dynamics between technology companies, workers, and communities are relevant to labor sociologists and scholars of industrial relations. The mapping of national and regional sovereignties will engage political scientists, legal scholars, and policymakers.

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*Side Hustle Safety Net: How Vulnerable Workers Survive Precarious Times.* By Alexandrea J. Ravenelle. Oakland: University of California Press, 2023. 344 pp. ISBN 9780520387294, \$95 (hardcover); ISBN 9780520387300, \$29.95 (paperback).

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*Side Hustle Safety Net* is a qualitative panel study of precarious workers that examines the impact of both the pandemic recession and government policy responses on their well-being over time. It thoughtfully extends the influential line of research on gig work that author Alexandrea J. Ravenelle began in her earlier book *Hustle and Gig* (University of California Press, 2019). Based on in-depth interviews with New York City workers, the new study includes both service-sector employees (e.g., restaurant workers, child care workers) and independent contractors (from app-based gig workers to creative freelancers in the entertainment industry). This purposive sampling approach allows Ravenelle to understand how their legal

status (i.e., W-2 waged work versus 1099 contract work) affected how they coped with the pandemic recession and how they moved among these categories and through spells of joblessness over time. After recruiting the sample using a mix of strategies—from Craigslist listings to Reddit posts to snowball sampling—Ravenelle and her team conducted the first set of interviews with 199 respondents in mid-2020. They then followed up with 168 of the same respondents from the end of 2020 into the first half of 2021. (A third wave of interviews conducted between 2021 and 2023 are largely left out of the book, Ravenelle notes, presumably because of their recency.)

Many findings of note arise from Ravenelle's rich data—especially impressive given that she and her research team were limited to online surveys and phone interviews. During the pandemic, the federal government turbocharged unemployment benefits, providing a \$600 supplement (later dropped to \$300) to existing state payouts and extending coverage to self-employed individuals—including gig workers—normally excluded from this critical safety net. Not surprisingly, the expanded supports (which also included, significantly, eviction moratoriums) were a lifeline for many workers.

Ravenelle draws from her respondents' stories to flesh out her illuminating concept of *polyemployment*, which she uses to describe how individuals will pursue a full-time job and gig work, or multiple part-time jobs, or some combination thereof to sustain themselves. The book is a bit unclear about whether polyemployment is a distinctly modern condition of work, or old wine in new bottles. On the one hand, the term is defined as the “movement toward multiple income-producing jobs” (p. 29), and Ravenelle describes gig workers as “canaries in the coal mine”—being savaged by trends increasingly affecting the rest of the labor market. On the other hand, Ravenelle paints a larger picture of a brave new world of work that is also a throwback to an earlier Hobbesian economy—the regulatory Wild West that existed prior to the passage of the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act, union-won “family wages,” and other key labor victories. Then, as now, many households scrambled to scrape together multiple and erratic streams of income to get by.

While the advent of the platform economy has undoubtedly created qualitatively different forms of precarity and polyemployment, official statistics muddy our picture of these trends, Ravenelle points out, given how they seriously undercount those who rely on gig work and other non-wage labor. She cites a government survey that finds multiple jobholding has grown “from 6.8 percent in the second quarter of 1996 to 7.8 percent in the first quarter of 2018” (p. 145); if the increase seems small, Ravenelle argues that even this indicator falls well short of capturing the widening scope and influence of the gig economy.

Regardless of how prevalent polyemployment is—and it may be exceedingly so in a fast-paced cultural mecca like New York City geared toward gig work and creative freelancing—Ravenelle shows how it fits the logic of today's reality of increasingly unstable and uncertain careers. Her interviews show that workers are managing the economy's growing risks by not putting all their eggs in one basket of work. Instead, they make money in different and often diverse ways, thus shielding themselves from volatile income flows caused by swings in demand, downsizing, or the like. Again, this is reminiscent of earlier times, such as the strategies of 20th-century middle-class households (whose “breadwinners” worked full-time jobs and whose spouses pitched in as reserve labor to fill income shortfalls or garner “pin money”), and Ravenelle's precarious workers can be seen in a similar light—if only to underscore how much flimsier today's bootstrapped safety nets are, stitched together by lone workers who have even less margin for error.

While workers take on these side hustles to hedge against risks, one fascinating takeaway of the book is that this strategy can backfire for them, thanks to the widening disconnect between the state's antiquated approach to regulating work and the kinds of labor that many people now do. Existing regulations largely overlook gig workers, who bear the risks of their occupations and are left on their own when their work dries up. Even during the extraordinary policy moment of the pandemic, when the self-employed temporarily received unemployment benefits, having multiple income streams presented problems once workers lost one of them. Benefit amounts depended on their waged employment, and states clawed back funds from those who worked part-time, often forcing the polyemployed to choose between receiving modest benefits or keeping their other gigs—with either option slashing their income. Here, Ravenelle shines a much-needed light on the nation's outmoded social safety net and how, even when a global emergency pushed federal policy to its political limits, it continued to fail a vulnerable class of workers. These “forgotten jobless” sometimes found

themselves resorting to unsettling survival strategies—from sex work to selling “clean” urine for drug tests—that Ravenelle vividly documents.

Another important contribution of the book is its relevance to policy discussions over the feasibility and impact of a universal basic income. Ravenelle leverages the timing of her study to show what happens when individuals are given cash with few strings. She finds evidence to be optimistic about how a basic income might transform the lives of those struggling with the partial or total loss of their livelihoods. For instance, she illustrates how some individuals used the windfall of ramped-up benefits to pivot from dead-end and soul-deadening jobs. Besides the pathways this *de facto* basic income opened up for retraining and education, it offered a crucial psychological pause from worries about hustling daily to make ends meet (a respite that in my opinion the eat-pray-love rich take for granted), giving workers the space to consider better careers and life options.

The book might overstate its empirical case for a universal basic income, given that its respondents’ outcomes in terms of their material hardships and subjective outlooks are notably mixed. Of course, no social policy, even a universal basic income, is a panacea, but this disconnect speaks to how the book sometimes tries to be too many things at once—a study of the pandemic recession’s toll on unemployed precarious workers, an analysis of how gig workers manage the risks of the modern economy, an assessment of the possible impacts of a basic income or permanently expanded unemployment benefits, and so on. While the study’s ambitious scope is also a strength, more acknowledgment of its limitations, particularly the uniqueness of the policy and economic situation in New York City and New York State, would have helped.

The book’s use of its voluminous qualitative data could have been more focused as well. Striking a healthy balance between narrative vignettes and theoretical analysis is always challenging, but perhaps partly because of the reliance on phone interviews, which somewhat flatten that narrative, some stories could feel generic and unnecessary. Flurries of separate cases could have been trimmed and connected with more analytical tissue, and extended quotes (from both secondary sources and interviewees) could have been paraphrased to hammer home key themes. Chapter takeaways could have been more consistently signaled across the book, and sections on the history of the New Deal, scam job listings that bedevil jobseekers, and the struggles of vulnerable visa workers could have been condensed and tied more tightly to the book’s driving arguments.

Overall, *Side Hustle Safety Net* provides an important window into how vulnerable workers coped with a traumatic period of economic and existential uncertainty. Building admirably on Ravenelle’s trailblazing research on gig workers, it puts forward a sharp-eyed perspective on modern conditions of work and the adequacy of the US social safety net in the post-pandemic era.

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*What Work Is.* By Robert Bruno. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2024. 232 pp. ISBN 9780252045493, \$110 (hardcover); ISBN 9780252087608, \$24.95 (paperback); ISBN 9780252055119, \$14.95 (e-book).

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Interest in and about work remains paramount for labor studies and industrial relations scholars. Who is doing or undertaking work is a central theme of this book, and an inseparability is inherent between work *per se* and those who engage in it, and how they understand their paid activity. With an unequivocal focus on paid labor, the author, Robert Bruno, continues his long-standing interest in the intersectionality of workplace policy, class relations, history, unionization, and the quality of jobs. I found *What Work Is* to be highly engaging, readable, and difficult to put down. Influenced by the genre of Studs Terkel and