# ND – AC -- Berardi

#### The oscillation between the formation of structure and the chaos of incomprehensibility is our theory of chaosmosis. Instability of the world around us produces desiring flows that form relations between bodies – what we perceive as stable but are constantly mutating. Only by becoming attuned to our surroundings can we create active affective relations and program social recomposition.

Mecchia, Giuseppina, et al. The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy. United Kingdom, semiotexte Limited, 2009. |Harun|

Limit, alterity, re-composition We can think of the other as a limit, or we can think of it tit of (com)passion. Anti-Oedipus reminds us: je est un autre, "I is an other," rev that the question of the other cannot be posed in merely social terms, as relation of the individual with the individuals around Alterity is the pulsional, phantasmatic, imaginary flow which-places and transforms the very existence of subjectivity. Alterity is the productive Unconscious. What is produced by the Unconscious is a singular existence in its complex relation with the world. The question of the limit, though, does not appear in Deleuze's and Guattari's texts. In Hegelian language the limit is understood as "alienation": the is the limit of the self, its diminishment and impoverishment. In a dialectal context alienation is the subject's limitation in its relation to the other, or the perception of the other as limitation. The Hegelian dialectic attributes to the historical process the task and possibility of overcoming the limit, and of realizing a totalization where alterity is finally removed. But for us the limit is not a reduction of potency. The relation to otherness is constitutive of psychological and social dynamics. It is structured through instable forms, for reasons that change throughout history. What to be understood and analyzed is the way this relation has changed while we went beyond modernity. we have seen already that the Workerist (Compositionist) cri-que, of the dialectic abandoned the notion of alienation in favor of an idea of positive estrangement. In the context of Workerist Compositionist theories, otherness is indeed acknowledged as limit, but also as the condition for an expansion of the power of the self. The limit is a condition for potency: this is the meaning of the recomposition process. Social recomposition is the process through which the relation to the other is linguistically, affectively, and politically elaborated, then transformed into a conscious collective, an autonomous aggregate, a group in fusion, constructive in its rebellion. Beginning with the awareness that the other is the limitation of the existing organism, Italian Compositionist Workerism asserted that this limitation does not involve a loss, an impoverishment: it opens instead the possibility of collective experience, based on conflict. The limit (which is not reducible to any historical synthesis) cannot be exhausted: this also means that the pleasure of enjoying the other, who is at once limit and extension, cannot be exhausted. In this way, once the field of dialectic materialism and historicism was abandoned, it began to be clear that the science transformation is much closer to the chemistry of gases than to the mechanics of sociology. There are no compact forces, unitary sub-jects that promote unequivocal wills. In fact there is no will: only flows of imagination, depressions of the collective mood, sudden illuminations. There are abstract devices able to connect flows: valves, faucets, mixers that cut, stir and combine flows and events. There is no subject opposing other subjects, but the transversal flows of imagination, technology, desire: they can produce vision or concealment, collective happiness or depression, wealth or misery. On the other hand, the historical process is not a homogenous field where homogenous subjectivities are opposed, or where clearly identifiable projects would be conflicting. It is rather a heteroge-neous becoming where different segments are active: technologic automation, panic psychosis, international financial circuits, and identitarian or competitive obsessions. These heterogeneous segments neither sum up nor oppose each other: they enter con-catenating relations that Guattari called "machinic arrangements" (agencements). At the beginning of the known history of Western thought, Democritus proposed a philosophical vision of a "compositionist" kind. There is no object, no existent, and no person: only aggre-gates, temporary atomic compositions, figures that the human eye perceives as stable but that are indeed mutational, transient, frayed, and indefinable. Being is in his [Democritius] eyes an infinite multiplicity of losses, which are invisible because they are so small. They move in vacuum. When they come into contact, they do not fake a unity, but by these meetings, uniting, they produce generation, and by separating they produce corruption."' History of modern chemistry on one hand, and the most recent cognitive theories on the other, confirm this hypothesis. The shape of every object is the shape projected by the eye and -the brain. A person's being is the temporary fixation of a relational becoming in which people define themselves, for a moment or for their entire life, always playing with an imponderable matter. Towards the end of the history of Western thought (at the exact int where it starts coming out from itself), Deleuze and Guattari open the way to a new philosophy that we could name Molecular Creativism. In their philosophical landscape the image of the body without organs plays an important role. Let's consider the concept of a body without organs from a Compositionist point of view. A body without organs is the process of reciprocal crossing between everything and everyone, the endless molecular flows from composite body into another. It is an orchid continuing to exist as a baboon, a bee, a rock, and a cloud. It is not "becoming," Felix Guattari says, but multiple becomings." A body without organs is the atemporal, extended substance that becomes temporal in its "becomings," and becomes temporarily singular as an effect of chaosmotic creation, emerging from chaos in order to give shape to an enunciation, a collective intention; movement, a paradigm, a world. Guattari's notion of "Chaosmosis" describes this surface concatenations of sense within chaos: "I is an other, a multiplicity of others, embodied at the inter-section of partial components of enunciation, breaching on all sides individuated identity and the organized body. The cursor of chaosmosis never stops oscillating between these diverse enunciative nuclei—not in order to totalize them, synthesize them in a transcendent self, but in spite of everything, to make a world of them."' The events of the planet appear like stormy and incomprehensible clouds. The history of late modernity appears like a chaos whose evolutional lines are unforeseeable. But what is chaos? Chaos is a form of the world that is too complex to be grasped by the limiter categories available to humans. More sophisticated sensors are necessary in order to Lindeman extremely complex phenomena and even more complex categories interpreting processes that seem fortuitous. Now an algorithm of a superior order is necessary. A chaosmotic concept, Deleuze and Guattari would say, since chaosmosis refers to the process of sur-facing from what appears like a chaos of a conceptual, formal and paradigmatic order. "A concept is a set of inseparable variations that is produced or constructed on a plane of immanence insofar as the latter crosscuts the chaotic variability and gives it consistency (real-ity) a concept is therefore a chaotic state par excellence; it refers back to a chaos rendered consistent, become Thought, mental chaosmosis. encounter between Italian Autonomous theory (Compositionist Workerism) and French desiring theory (Molecular Creativism) was a fortuitous hazard, due to political and biographical vicissitudes. A certain point, in the middle of social struggle, the autonomous movement necessarily had to use categories of a schizoanalytic kind, in order to analyze the process of formation of the social imaginary. So the same way, in the middle of a psychoanalytic practice, Guattari had to use categories of a socio-critical kind, in order to analyze the process of psychogenesis, as Guattari himself explains in his book Psychanalise et transversalite [Psychoanalysis and Trans-versaity], published in Italian with the title Una tomba per Edipo. Psicoandisi e transversalith [A Tomb for Oedipus: Psychoanalysis and Transversality].4 The methods of Autonomist theory and Schizoanalysis coincide in, their Compositionist method: they both reject any constituted subjective primacy, looking instead for the processes of transversal formation of those unstable, varying, temporary, singular aggregates that are called subjectivities down to their molecular dimension. Subjectivity does not pre-exist the process of its own production. In order to explain the process of social recomposition we need to refer to the notions of desire, machinic unconscious and schizoanalysis. How can it be explained that—in a certain decade—workers all over the world started singing the same song? It was the visible manifestation of a complex phenomenon, like the formation of storms over the oceans. In order to understand the muscular relaxation of Its entire neurovegetative system experienced by Western humanity in the 1960s, we need to understand what made it possible: which substances, languor, expectations, and sensations. Social insurgence is the manifestation of an extremely complicated archeticture entered by the psychological, imaginary, and material flow strcturing everyday experience.

#### Labor in modern capitalism has been emblematic of consumption and circulation of images.

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With the undeniable rise of variants of fascism in the United States and around the world, an up to date account of the logistics of antidemocratic mediations is urgent. Here (as everywhere) I take it as axiomatic that capitalism and democracy are structurally contradictory—“capitalist democracy” and “democratic capitalism” are in fact oxymorons. The strategic management of that contradiction by a system dedicated to conserving class power leads to what Walter Benjamin famously identified as the aestheticization of politics, or what Orwell understood as a short-circuiting of thought, and what today we might be calling “the politics of affect,” a term that among other things would indicate a schism—and thus a mediation—between individual experience and systemic rationale. By means of aestheticization and the preservation/re-invention of ritual (cult) values, Benjamin told us, the masses are granted “not their right but instead a chance to represent themselves.” Since the 1930s, the Führer cult and the celebrity, as both artifact and means of expropriation have obviously “evolved,” even as they provided the shape of things to come in what now appears as a kind of fractalization of celebrity. Fractal variants would include fundamentalisms from that of ISIS to Tea Partiers; other racist nationalisms like Golden Dawn in Greece, Le Pen in France, and Trump in the US; the branded conversions of persons and objects into franchises; as well as many state nationalisms including (but unfortunately not limited to) those of France, China, Israel, and the US. Such opportunistic occasions for representation—in which individuals, icons, scapegoats and flags serve at once to figure collective authority and as points of narcissistic subjectification and phallic compensation, separated from any ability to transform hierarchical property relations—exist necessarily, through the suppression, that is, the unrepresentation and unrepresentability of others. The non-representation of most of us in these racializing and gendering iconographies that, in the last instance, are written on our bodies and indeed every body, is a condition of possibility for both the leveraged accumulation of private property and the star-commodity and provides a lingua franca for political struggle enframed by a capitalist imaginary. Here writing means the practical subjugation of peoples to meet the exigencies of hierarchical structures of representation—Debord’s spectacle in binary code. Thus, symptoms of such suppression include not only the celebrity form (the authoritarian personality and its fractal multiplications on, for example, Instagram, who exist through the accumulation of our attention), but the various and dynamically evolving racisms, sexisms, and nationalisms, with their circulating, prejudices, hatreds and phobias. The plurality of fascisms represents, quite literally if not quite intelligibly, the mutual competition at multiple scales among the many capitals.

The cultural field, as Marxists, feminists, anti-colonialists, anti-racists, queer activists, radical filmmakers, poets, activists, and many others have long recognized (despite our significant and often problematic differences) is also a battlefield. Since Benjamin, and with the passage through what was called “postmodernism” (a periodization that retrospectively can be understood to have marked the real subsumption of the cultural by the economic), we have learned to understand culture not merely as a medium of politics, but as a means of socio-economic production and reproduction as well as of potentially radical transformation. Here I have in mind a broad range of phenomenon informed by radical imaginaries, found nearly everywhere we people seek freedom in cultural pursuits: from its trace presences in fan détournement in places like “An Archive of Our Own” to its concerted concentrations in a socio-critical work like Allen Feldman’s Archives of the Insensible with its indefatigable critique of “dismediation,” “apophatic blurring,” and metaphysics as a medium of war.3 The forms of counter-culture are, of course, myriad, and every sentence made for this essay owes a debt to an infinity of struggle—I mention the archive because it indicates a topos for this struggle in addition to the more familiar notions of literature, cinema, ideology, etc.

The new situation of culture as means of production (and here we should probably say “cultures,” even though, given the situation, inclusivity is the last thing some of us want) is that it has been largely functionalized by political economy. This historical repositioning of culture as on a continuum with the shop floor and the factory is an economic and technical result and raises the question of a technics of fascism as a technics of computation, or of what I call “computational capital.” While it is usually understood that culture has a relation to economics and technology, what remains less well understood is the degree to which, from a hegemonic standpoint, culture has become a technical and economic relation. Cultural practices are posited and presupposed as productive for a capitalism that was, in hindsight, itself already a computer (Digital Culture 1.0) and that today requires discrete state machines (Digital Culture 2.0) for its profitable and intensifying operations by which qualities are transformed into quantities. The rise of visual culture during the twentieth century, and the re-organization of the life world by that interface called the screen along with the calculus of the image, was a requisite step in the financialization of culture and its real subsumption by capital. The succeeding phase, for which digital culture (2.0) serves as both consequence and pre-requisite, marks a heavy investment in the extension of quantitative logics into the micro- and nano-logical operations of the formerly analogue endeavors—all of which, including language, images, aesthetic form, philosophy, spirituality, the imagination and the like, fell under the auspices of the now defunct humanities and are today rigorously and almost inexorably submitted to background monetization.

This financialization of culture, as we shall see, requires the informationalization of social practice, indeed, of the social metabolism. Managed by means of screens, information flows from users (and the used) to capital in a pattern that can be described by the sequence Image-Code-Financialization. If it can be said that fascism and/or other contemporary antidemocratic state-formations legitimating hierarchizing modes of production depend upon leveraged value extraction, and that much if not all of that value passes through/as data and its organized transmission (number of hours worked, links clicked, pages viewed, money banked), then data flow disruption or redistribution—though tremendously varied and relatively unexplored through the lens of a critique of political economy—presents key tactics and perhaps strategies in an anti-fascist praxis. The flow of information-value up the value chain does not trickle back down in equal amount either to populism’s mass participants or really to most content providers. I want here to give a set of examples of partial or successful data-flow disruptions, but more pointedly to conceptualize forms of potential intervention through data disruption by analytically parsing the micro-dynamics of images and screens—and the practices they organize. Understanding the emergent relationships between image, code and discourse/culture/profit effectively exposes sites and possibly means by which to interrupt the expropriative valorization processes of capitalism—the “valorizing information,” to use the term that Romano Alquatti presciently used to describe workers’ contributions at Olivetti in the 1960’s, that is today everywhere extracted. It also suggests that despite the invisibility of an increasing proportion of machine operation in ultra-fast, ultra-small computation, in the internet of things and in what crypto-currency programmers are calling “the internet of value,” the screen/image retains key functions and is, in fact a necessary moment in the valorization process of capitalist computing. The analysis of the screen/image that at once serves as interface and engenders the production of both data and meta-data raises the question of what it might mean to seize the means of production, particularly when many if not most readers (here just like most readers and non-readers everywhere) are experiencing a crisis of control not just over the management of the (built) environment, the workplace and its infrastructure, but over their attention, interiority, self-image, imagination, social practices, relationships, and time. The survival of all of these forms of precarity, remunerated or not, is at once bound up with the seeming impenetrability of informatics and algorithmic governance while having become means of production for capital. As I hope will be apparent, the struggle over the means of production, includes the domain of socio-cultural analysis and conceptualization, as well as of culture and interiority, in addition to the more familiar notions of fixed capital. Such analysis provides a necessary, even if by no means sufficient, component of struggle.

The Programmable Image, or, From M to M’

In a forthcoming essay entitled “The Programmable Image of Capital: M-I-C-I’-M’ and the World Computer,” I argue that in order to correct the multiple misunderstandings in various “post-Marxist” analyses of capital that assume that value has become “immeasurable,” it is necessary to bring the labor theory of value up to date. In “The Programmable Image” I extend my earlier hypothesis of the attention theory of value in The Cinematic Mode of Production (in which “labor” was understood as a subset of the emergent yet more capacious category of “attention” and, conversely, attention reduces to what used to be called labor at the sub-light speeds of non-screen-mediated production), and rewrite the general formula for capital, M-C-M’ (where M is money, C is the commodity, and M’ is a greater quantity of money realized in the sale of the commodity C), as M-I-C-I’-M’.

In this new equation, we replace commodity C with I-C-I’, where I is image, C is Code and I’ is a modified image). Where paradigmatically, labor had once been sedimented in the commodity-object, I had argued in The Cinematic Mode of Production that attention was sedimented in the image, and furthermore that commodities and images converged as image-commodity. In the cases of both labor and attention, sensuous activity produced surplus value for capital through dissymetrical exchange. With the wage, as Marx clearly showed, workers put more value into the creation of commodities than they receive in their wages, with spectatorship, spectators do more to valorize and legitimate images, media platforms and the status quo than they receive in pleasure or social currency. In bringing the industrial revolution to the eye, the cinema opened up the mediational spaces of what would become known in autonomist Marxism as the social factory—albeit in a manner that was more or less incognizant to the technical and indeed techno-logical aspects of this very mediation. In my most recent work I have endeavored to show that forms of attention result in the modification of code on the pathway to monetization. This relationship between image and code, I argue, is the paradigmatic form of leveraged mediation in the distributed production and consumption of post-Fordist capital. Value extraction, instead of taking place only during wage labor as it was purported to do under industrial capital, can take place anywhere in a network in which oscillations between image and code occur. The embodied entity, formally know as the “laborer” or the “human” is still the source of all value for capitalism, but has, to use a cutting term from Sean Cubitt, been structurally reduced to a “biochip” in an increasingly ubiquitous computational armature. The absorption of value is thus no longer paradigmatically organized around a factory worker producing an object for a wage. In our era there has been an exponential intensification of the number, form, and distribution of sites of production as well as in the metrics of evaluation and remuneration. As “Bifo” aka Franco Berardi puts it, production and valorization have become, “cellularized.”

While it is patently true that hundreds of millions of people still work in much the same way as in the industrial age (on assembly lines, in factories, for subsistence wages, without safety nets), it is also true that any and nearly all commodities (the iPhone, say) today rely on the integration of various moments of valorization: commodities are no longer paradigmatically objects with singular points of sale, but rather arrays of images (imaginaries) tethered to computable information and anchored to a distributed material system with multiple points of interface. The iPhone is a particularly good example, because even as the A-side of its screen is immersed in networks and clouds, the B-side depends on a network of labor practices that are effectively forms of enslavement. Therefore, when considering informatic production in the world of the programmable image, think not just of Disney’s organization of the imagination through franchises and product lines of Frozen, but also of the share pricing of Apple and Google with its tendrils in rare-earth mines, factory servitude, national and geo-politics and a rentier model of the general intellect. Thus we can see that early capital’s generalized quantification and therefore digitization that renders nearly all human practices computable in industrialization but also, and emphatically, through colonialism, is the pre-history of the current moment. Like the ledgers of slave ships, the East India Company, and monopoly cartels, the metrics of dataveillance are precisely the metrics of valuation. They measure the very metabolism of a society organized by screens in a way that suggests that computational capital is also computational colonialism. These screens interface the dynamic data-visualizations of computational capital and convert the general population into content providers. They are also worksites—points where attention is required to valorize capital through the production of new information.

There is more to this formula and its functionality in the post-Fordist milieu defined by computational capital, but I do not want to repeat all of the main points of the M-I-C-I’-M’ essay in which I try to formally demonstrate the viability of this formula. I’ll just add here that fractal celebrity on social media (such as Instagram and Facebook), and the currencies of “likes” and the like, are one of the salient features of the ways in which we (as individuals, dividuals, cellularized intensities, whatever) are enjoined to wager in the programmable image to get ahead in the thoroughly financialized market of daily life that has become inseparable from sociality itself. We are programmed by images and we program with images, all the while generating data, that is, modifying code. Significantly different (but less so than one might think) from the plantation, this sense-/attention-/cognitive-/neural-/location-mediated modification of code is the paradigmatic mechanism of value extraction today; it is the unhappy evolution of labor and the new expansive and all encompassing form of work in what Pasquinelli calls “the society of metadata.” As with the regime of labor and cinematic attention, there are some pleasures involved both in the process and as the result, but their distribution is profoundly unequal. The more than two billion dispossessed within this planet are both the condition and result of this regime. The instagram porn-star in Moscow or LA and the Syrian refugee struggling for survival are each overdetermined if not almost fully absorbed in the ambient semiosis that is part of the precarity of informatic financialization, but the benefits of this (partial) self empowerment via a struggle with info-servitude and computer mediated abstraction accrue unequally along the lines of a hierarchy of historically negotiated codes and codifications—including race, gender, nation, class, citizenship, etc.— that are among the vectors of what is increasingly algorithmic governance.

#### At a time, it was possible to affirm rights to protect the worker’s soul but capitalism’s use of depersonalized time requires a reorientation to building alternatives as it infiltrates our psyche. State violence and crackdowns on worker’s strikes has led to an inability for bodies to create connectivity as a community.

Berardi, Franco, and Empson, Erik. Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-alpha Generation. United Kingdom, Minor Compositions, 2009. |Harun|

We have no future because our present is too volatile. We have only risk-management. The spinning of the given moment’s scenarios. – William Gibson, Pattern recognition In February 2003 the American journalist Bob Herbert published in the New York Times the results of a cognitive survey on a sample of hundreds of unemployed youths in Chicago: none of their interviewees expected to find work the next few years, none of them expected to be able to rebel, or to set off large scale collective change. The general sense of the interviews was a sentiment of profound impotence. The perception of decline did not seem focused on politics, but on a deeper cause, the scenario of a social and psychical involution that seems to cancel every possibility of building alternatives. The fragmentation of the present time is reversed in the implosion of the future. In The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism (1988), Richard Sennett reacts to this existential condition of precariousness and fragmentation with nostalgia for a past epoch in which life was structured in relatively stable social roles, and time had enough linear consistency to construe paths of identity. The arrow of time is broken: in an economy under constant restructuring that is based on the short-term and hates routine, definite trajectories no longer exist. People miss stable human relations and long-term objectives (1988). But this nostalgia has no hold on present reality, and the attempts to reactivate the community remain artificial and sterile. Precarious Rhapsody / 30In her essay “Precari-us?” (2005) Angela Mitropoulos observes that precariousness is a precarious notion. This because it defines its object in an approximate manner, but also because from this notion derive paradoxical, self-contradictory, in other words precarious strategies. If we concentrate our critical attention on the precarious character of job performance what would our proposed objective be? That of a stable job, guaranteed for life? Naturally no, this would be a cultural regression that would definitely subordinate the role of work. Some started to speak of ‘flexicurity’ to mean forms of wage independent of job performance. But we are still far from having a strategy of social recomposition for the labor movement to extricate ourselves from unlimited exploitation. We need to resume the thread of analysis of social composition and decomposition if we want to distinguish possible lines of a process of recomposition to come. In the 1970s, the energy crisis, the consequent economic recession and finally the substitution of work with numerical machines resulted in the formation of a large number of people with no guarantees. Since then the question of precariousness has become central to social analysis, but also in the ambitions of the movement. We began by proposing to struggle for forms of guaranteed income uncoupled from work, in order to face the fact that a large part of the young population had no prospect of guaranteed employment. The situation has changed since then, because what seemed a marginal and temporary condition has now become the prevalent form of labor relations. Precariousness is no longer a marginal and provisional characteristic, but it is the general form of the labor relation in a productive, digitalized sphere, reticular and recombinative. The word ‘precariat’ generally stands for the area of work that is no longer definable by fixed rules relative to the labor relation, to salary and to the length of the working day. However if we analyze the past we see that these rules functioned only for a limited period in the history of relations between labor and capital. Only for a short period at the heart of the twentieth century, under the political pressures of unions and workers, in conditions of (almost) full employment and thanks to a more or less strongly regulatory role of the state in the economy, some limits to the natural violence of capitalist dynamics could be legally established. The legal obligations that in certain periods have protected society from the violence of capital were always founded on the existence of a relation of a force of a political and material kind (workers’ violence against the violence of capital). Thanks to political force it became possible to affirm rights, establish laws and protect them as personal rights. With the decline in the political force of the workers’ movement, the natural precariousness of labor relations in capitalism, and its brutality, have reemerged. The new phenomenon is not the precarious character of the job market, but the technical and cultural conditions in which info-labor is made precarious. The technical conditions are those of digital recombination of info-work in networks. The cultural conditions are those of the education of the masses and the expectations of consumption inherited from late twentieth century society and continuously fed by the entire apparatus of marketing and media communication. If we analyze the first aspect, i.e. the technical transformations introduced by the digitalization of the productive cycle, we see that the essential point is not the becoming precarious of the labor relation (which, after all, has always been precarious), but the dissolution of the person as active productive agent, as labor power. We have to look at the cyberspace of global production as an immense expanse of depersonalized human time. Info-labor, the provision of time for the elaboration and the recombination of segments of info-commodities, is the extreme point of arrival of the process of the abstraction from concrete activities that Marx analyzed as a tendency inscribed in the capital-labor relation. The process of abstraction of labor has progressively stripped labor time of every concrete and individual particularity. The atom of time of which Marx speaks is the minimal unit of productive labor. But in industrial production, abstract labor time was impersonated by a physical and juridical bearer, embodied in a worker in flesh and bone, with a certified and political identity. Naturally capital did not purchase a personal disposition, but the time for which the workers were its bearers. But if capital wanted to dispose of the necessary time for its valorization, it was indispensable to hire a human being, to buy all of its time, and therefore needed to face up to the material needs and trade union and political demands of which the human was a bearer. When we move into the sphere of info-labor there is no longer a need to have bought a person for eight hours a day indefinitely. Capital no longer recruits people, but buys packets of time, separated from their interchangeable and occasional bearers. Depersonalized time has become the real agent of the process of valorization, and depersonalized time has no rights, nor any demands. It can only be either available or unavailable, but the alternative is purely theoretical because the physical body despite not being a legally Precarious Rhapsody / 32recognized person still has to buy food and pay rent. The informatic procedures of the recombination of semiotic material have the effect of liquefying the objective time necessary to produce the info-commodity. The human machine is there, pulsating and available, like a brain-sprawl in waiting. The extension of time is meticulously cellularized: cells of productive time can be mobilized in punctual, casual and fragmentary forms. The recombination of these fragments is automatically realized in the network. The mobile phone is the tool that makes possible the connection between the needs of semio-capital and the mobilization of the living labor of cyberspace. The ringtone of the mobile phone calls the workers to reconnect their abstract time to the reticular flux. It’s a strange word, that with which we identify the ideology prevalent in the post-human transition to digital slavery: liberalism. Liberty is its foundational myth, but the liberty of whom? The liberty of capital, certainly. Capital must be absolutely free to expand in every corner of the world to find the fragment of human time available to be exploited for the most miserable wage. But liberalism also predicates the liberty of the person. The juridical person is free to express itself, to choose its representatives, to be entrepreneurial at the level of politics and the economy. Very interesting. Only the person has disappeared. What is left is like an inert object, irrelevant and useless. The person is free, sure. But his time is enslaved. His liberty is a juridical fiction to which nothing in concrete daily life corresponds. If we consider the conditions in which the work of the majority of humanity, proletariat and cognitariat, is actually carried out in our time, if we examine the conditions the average wage globally, if we consider the current and now largely realized cancellation of previous labor rights, we can say with no rhetorical exaggeration that we live in a regime of slavery. The average salary on the global level is hardly sufficient to buy the indispensable means for the mere survival of a person whose time is at the service of capital. And people do not have any right over the time of which they are formally the proprietors, but effectively expropriated. That time does not really belong to them, because it is separated from the social existence of the people who make it available to the recombinative cyber-productive circuit. The time of work is fractalized, that is, reduced to minimal fragments that can be reassembled, and the fractalization makes it possible for capital to constantly find the conditions of minimum salary. How can we oppose the decimation of the working class and its systemic depersonalization, the slavery that is affirmed as a mode of command of precarious and depersonalized work? This is the question that is posed with insistence by whoever still has a sense of human dignity. Nevertheless the answer does not come out because the form of resistance and of struggle that were efficacious in the twentieth century no longer appear to have the capacity to spread and consolidate themselves, nor consequently can they stop the absolutism of capital. An experience that derives from workers’ struggle in recent years is that the struggle of precarious workers does not make a cycle. Fractalized work can also punctually rebel, but this does not set into motion any wave of struggle. The reason is easy to understand. In order for struggles to form a cycle there must be a spatial proximity of the bodies of labor and an existential temporal continuity. Without this proximity and this continuity, we lack the conditions for the cellularized bodies to become community. No wave can be created, because the workers do not share their existence in time, and behaviors can only become a wave when there is a continuous proximity in time that info-labor no longer allows.

#### Energy and desire become appropriated, forwarding the attention economy based on the destruction of the psyche. Exhaustion through radical passivity opens up the possibilities of a new civilization.

**Bifo ‘11**

Franco Berardi, Professor of Social History of Communication at the Accademia di Belle Arti of Milan, delightful Italian elf. “After the Future.” pg. 104-108

Time is in the mind. The essential limit to growth is the mental impossibility to enhance time (Cybertime) beyond a certain level. I think that we are here touching upon a crucial point. The process of re-composition, of conscious and collective subjectivation, finds here a new – paradoxical – way. Modern radical thought has always seen the process of subjectivation as an energetic process: mobilization, social desire and political activism, expression, participation have been the modes of conscious collective subjectivation in the age of the revolutions. But in our age energy is running out, and desire which has given soul to modern social dynamics is absorbed in the black hole of virtualization and financial games, as Jean Baudrillard (1993a) argues in his book Symbolic Exchange and Death, first published in 1976. In this book Baudrillard analyzes the hyper-realistic stage of capitalism, and the instauration of the logic of simulation. Reality itself founders in hyperrealism, the meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another, reproductive medium, such as photography. From medium to medium, the real is volatilized, becoming an allegory of death. But it is also, in a sense, reinforced through its own destruction. It becomes reality for its own sake, the fetishism of the lost object: no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denial and of its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal. [...] The reality principle corresponds to a certain stage of the law of value. Today the whole system is swamped by indeterminacy, and every reality is absorbed by the hyperreality of the code and simulation. The principle of simulation governs us now, rather that the outdated reality principle. We feed on those forms whose finalities have disappeared. No more ideology, only simulacra. We must therefore reconstruct the entire genealogy of the law of value and its simulacra in order to grasp the hegemony and the enchantment of the current system. A structural revolution of value. This genealogy must cover political economy, where it will appear as a second-order simulacrum, just like all those that stake everything on the real: the real of production, the real of signification, whether conscious or unconscious. Capital no longer belongs to the order of political economy: it operates with political economy as its simulated model. The entire apparatus of the commodity law of value is absorbed and recycled in the larger apparatus of the structural law of value, this becoming part of the third order of simulacra. Political economy is thus assured a second life, an eternity, within the confines of an apparatus in which it has lost all its strict determinacy, but maintains an effective presence as a system of reference for simulation. (Baudrillard 1993a: 2) Simulation is the new plane of consistency of capitalist growth: financial speculation, for instance, has displaced the process of exploitation from the sphere of material production to the sphere of expectations, desire, and immaterial labor. The simulation process (Cyberspace) is proliferating without limits, irradiating signs that go everywhere in the attention market. The brain is the market, in semiocapitalist hyper-reality. And the brain is not limitless, the brain cannot expand and accelerate indefinitely. The process of collective subjectivation (i.e. social recomposition) implies the development of a common language-affection which is essentially happening in the temporal dimension. The semiocapitalist acceleration of time has destroyed the social possibility of sensitive elaboration of the semio-flow. The proliferation of simulacra in the info-sphere has saturated the space of attention and imagination. Advertising and stimulated hyper-expression (“just do it”), have submitted the energies of the social psyche to permanent mobilization. Exhaustion follows, and exhaustion is the only way of escape: Nothing, not even the system, can avoid the symbolic obligation, and it is in this trap that the only chance of a catastrophe for capital remains. The system turns on itself, as a scorpion does when encircled by the challenge of death. For it is summoned to answer, if it is not to lose face, to what can only be death. The system must itself commit suicide in response to the multiplied challenge of death and suicide. So hostages are taken. On the symbolic or sacrificial plane, from which every moral consideration of the innocence of the victims is ruled out the hostage is the substitute, the alter-ego of the terrorist, the hostage’s death for the terrorist. Hostage and terrorist may thereafter become confused in the same sacrificial act. (Baudrillard 1993a: 37) In these impressive pages Baudrillard outlines the end of the modern dialectics of revolution against power, of the labor movement against capitalist domination, and predicts the advent of a new form of action which will be marked by the sacrificial gift of death (and self-annihilation). After the destruction of the World Trade Center in the most important terrorist act ever, Baudrillard wrote a short text titled The Spirit of Terrorism where he goes back to his own predictions and recognizes the emergence of a catastrophic age. When the code becomes the enemy the only strategy can be catastrophic: all the counterphobic ravings about exorcizing evil: it is because it is there, everywhere, like an obscure object of desire. Without this deep-seated complicity, the event would not have had the resonance it has, and in their symbolic strategy the terrorists doubtless know that they can count on this unavowable complicity. (Baudrillard 2003: 6) This goes much further than hatred for the dominant global power by the disinherited and the exploited, those who fell on the wrong side of global order. This malignant desire is in the very heart of those who share this order’s benefits. An allergy to all definitive order, to all definitive power is happily universal, and the two towers of the World Trade Center embodied perfectly, in their very double-ness (literally twin-ness), this definitive order: No need, then, for a death drive or a destructive instinct, or even for perverse, unintended effects. Very logically – inexorably – the increase in the power heightens the will to destroy it. And it was party to its own destruction. When the two towers collapsed, you had the impression that they were responding to the suicide of the suicide-planes with their own suicides. It has been said that “Even God cannot declare war on Himself.” Well, He can. The West, in position of God (divine omnipotence and absolute moral legitimacy), has become suicidal, and declared war on itself. (Baudrillard 2003: 6-7) In Baudrillard’s catastrophic vision I see a new way of thinking subjectivity: a reversal of the energetic subjectivation that animates the revolutionary theories of the 20th century, and the opening of an implosive theory of subversion, based on depression and exhaustion. In the activist view exhaustion is seen as the inability of the social body to escape the vicious destiny that capitalism has prepared: deactivation of the social energies that once upon a time animated democracy and political struggle. But exhaustion could also become the beginning of a slow movement towards a “wu wei” civilization, based on the withdrawal, and frugal expectations of life and consumption. Radicalism could abandon the mode of activism, and adopt the mode of passivity. A radical passivity would definitely threaten the ethos of relentless productivity that neoliberal politics has imposed. The mother of all the bubbles, the work bubble, would finally deflate. We have been working too much during the last three or four centuries, and outrageously too much during the last thirty years. The current depression could be the beginning of a massive abandonment of competition, consumerist drive, and of dependence on work. Actually, if we think of the geopolitical struggle of the first decade – the struggle between Western domination and jihadist Islam – we recognize that the most powerful weapon has been suicide. 9/11 is the most impressive act of this suicidal war, but thousands of people have killed themselves in order to destroy American military hegemony. And they won, forcing the western world into the bunker of paranoid security, and defeating the hyper-technological armies of the West both in Iraq, and in Afghanistan. The suicidal implosion has not been confined to the Islamists. Suicide has become a form of political action everywhere. Against neoliberal politics, Indian farmers have killed themselves. Against exploitation hundreds of workers and employees have killed themselves in the French factories of Peugeot, and in the offices of France Telecom. In Italy, when the 2009 recession destroyed one million jobs, many workers, haunted by the fear of unemployment, climbed on the roofs of the factories, threatening to kill themselves. Is it possible to divert this implosive trend from the direction of death, murder, and suicide, towards a new kind of autonomy, social creativity and of life? I think that it is possible only if we start from exhaustion, if we emphasize the creative side of withdrawal. The exchange between life and money could be deserted, and exhaustion could give way to a huge wave of withdrawal from the sphere of economic exchange. A new refrain could emerge in that moment, and wipe out the law of economic growth. The self-organization of the general intellect could abandon the law of accumulation and growth, and start a new concatenation, where collective intelligence is only subjected to the common good.

#### Thus, the plan: A just government ought to recognize an unconditional right of workers’ souls to strike.

#### Only a reorganization of working relations can act in opposition to the deregulation of labor, which produces the enslavement of the worker’s soul.

[Ivancheva](http://www.ephemerajournal.org/authors/mariya-ivancheva) 14, Mariya. “Revisiting Precarity, with Care: Productive and Reproductive Labour in the Era of Flexible Capitalism | Ephemera.” Ephemerajournal.org, 2014, www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/revisiting-precarity-care-productive-and-reproductive-labour-era-flexible-capitalism. |Harun|

Introduction The concept of precarity – a term describing the flexible and uncertain working and living conditions in the contemporary world – is often presented in opposition to the idea of stability. On the one pole stands the idea of a permanent job or career: a secure and stable life-long chain of economic pursuits and social relations that promise steady upward mobility across generations (Sennett, 1998: 9). On the other pole remains the hyper-flexible contractual labour and displaced life advanced by new forms of managerial capitalism. While precarious life and labour are a global and historical norm (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008), in recent years scholars have increasingly focused on precarious employment and living conditions in wealthy Euro-Atlantic states. A growing ‘precariat’ has been defined as people living in increased insecurity in relation to labour and production, distribution of resources and services, and relations to the state and voice in the decision-making process (Standing, 2014). Exploitative, violent and arbitrary working and living conditions – more commonly associated with women, marginalized groups, and people in the developing world (Mitropoulos, 2011) – has started to affect two groups protected by the post-war pact between labour and capital: the professional middle class and organised workers in the Global North. Paradoxically, it is only in this new context, that precarity is seriously taken into consideration and its discussion is projected from the contexts where it is a new exception, to those where it has been a norm. This produces an ironic twist. Having blocked the supposedly straight roadway of life and career prospects, considered as granted to workers in the former context, precarity has become the subject of anxiety and disdain. The stable career track is presented as the ideal to which we should all aspire. Thus, while precarity stands for allegedly new forms of labour and living, its opposite often is represented by a stalemate political imaginary of the return of a ‘golden age’ of consumer capitalism. Drawing on empirical studies from across different disciplinary fields and geographical areas, this paper seeks to re-examine theoretically the concept of precarity to better resist its manifestation within our life and workplaces. We argue that in order to overcome the false binary of flexibility-stability that constitutes the concept of precarity, and to address the inequalities created and exacerbated by it, we need to bring the concept of care into the discussion of precarious labour and life in more than one way. First, it is important to address the reality that both emotional caring and care sector work have been some of the most flexibilised, stigmatised, invisible, and exploited forms of work in human history (Federici, 2004; 2014). It is mostly done by women, migrants, minorities, and people from the Global South who are most often subject to different forms of symbolic, structural and physical violence as their labour is undervalued or unrecognised. Secondly, we need to acknowledge the limitation of the current discourses of forms of production, distribution, and relation to the state (Standing, 2014) and of the forms of mobilization (Shukaitis, 2013) they engender. These still focus predominantly on the productive rights and human freedoms of a highly individualized, rational, able-bodied, self-sufficient (male) citizen involved in remunerated productive labour. This focus neglects the importance of care that remains a central, yet often invisiblised condition in the sustaining of human life and community in and outside of work. Yet, bringing care into the discussion of precarity, we also argue that we should not collapse the distinction between productive and reproductive work. This should happen neither by claiming remuneration of emotional and care work, nor by blurring the line of distinction by resorting to arguments of affective and ‘immaterial’ modes of labour. Blurring this boundary, we claim, is no solution to the alienation and stratification at precarious workplaces. Drawing on Johanna Oksala’s critique (2016) of Michael Hardt and Tony Negri’s (2004) use of the concept of affective labour, we see it necessary to address the relation of care in precarious working and living conditions not by simply claiming remuneration and benefits for domestic and care workers. The International Wages for Housework Campaign (Federici, 1974) was radical not just in connecting pay with the recognition of social rights and the centrality of reproductive labour to production. It also showed how much capitalism depends on extraction of marginalised and unpaid reproductive work. Yet, moving from acknowledging this central contradiction of capitalism, while insisting on the material value of precarious forms of care work, we still claim that it is not just difficult (Lynch, 2007) but also potentially dangerous to attribute an exchange value to love, care, and solidarity cherished for their non-commodifiable and inalienable use value. It could mean attributing monetary value and extending the capitalist logic of competition and alienation into all domains of our life (Oksala, 2016). It could also mean endowing the traditional nuclear family with even more monetarized logic, and steering nuclear families in even steadier forms of competition for absorption of different forms of capital for their own home and generation, while extracting care needed at other spaces we inhabit. Instead, we call for a profound rethinking and eventual reorganisation of the productive domain around the concept of care. We argue that in order to move beyond the false dichotomy of flexibility-stability, which offers no solution to the current juncture of capitalist development, it is crucial to see the emancipating potential in a profound reorganisation of working relations. The abstract demand for liberal individualizing autonomy, which has been instrumentalised through new managerial systems and used by capitalism to steer workers into always more alienating work, needs to be suspended as a condition of oppression in itself. With Kathleen Millar (2014) we argue for a relational autonomy that sees human beings as profoundly dependent on desires for sociality, intimacy, and relations of care in both their lives and work. However, unlike Millar, we do not plead for a ‘politics of detachment’ of precarious workers distancing themselves from their jobs in order to navigate their caring lives. Against the ongoing managerial attempts to pit life against work, exploiting our out-of-work abilities (Fleming, 2013) while individualising and privatising (self-) care, we solicit an understanding of a life-work continuum, in which work should not be based on competition but on love, care, and solidarity. Only when radically opposed to the individualized, divisive, and invisiblised exploitation within patriarchal structures, can this new concept of work be used to build new collective subjectivities that recuperate the destroyed social fabric in the era of flexible capitalism. And while our life abilities and extra-work qualities (Fleming, 2013) as well as caring practices themselves (Ivancheva and Krastev, 2019) can be exploited to extract surplus from alienated workers and marginalised communities, it is important to nurture radical practices of care that overturn power dynamics, cut across hierarchies of casualization, and expand the horizons of resistance in increasingly toxic workplaces. The article follows in three parts, starting with a brief review of how the concept of precarity has developed as a subject of academic concern and a rallying point for collective action. In the first part we reflect on the political and economic dimensions of precarity, and their often ethnocentric and androcentric biases, within which care relations are most often silenced. In the second part we look at the ethical and social dimensions of precarity, which, as a politically-induced condition, can be damaging to individuals and groups. Bridging the politico-economic to the social aspects of precarity, we show how already marginalised or under-resourced social groups are disproportionately affected, physically, mentally and socially, by the negative consequences of precarity. In the third part we bring together the discussion of care and precarity; we look at how love, care, and solidarity work (Lynch et al., 2009) are invisibilised and subsequently undervalued in comparison to work that is considered directly economically productive. Drawing on empirical research, we look at how flexibilised and precarious labour is gendered, racialised and classed, and used to navigate the intersection of paid labour and complex care responsibilities. This article, produced in preparation to enhance on our own empirical research operationalising precarity within a project on new intersectional equalities in the academic workforce (Ivancheva et al., 2019), is based not on our own data, but on the review of an already existing wealth of empirical research on the subject. Such review helps us revisit the concept of precarity with fresh eyes and conclude that in order to challenge inequalities produced and exacerbated by precarious labour, there is a need to include love, care, and solidarity as central into any conceptualisation of and resistance against precarity. Rather than a narrowly defined focus on care only in romantic love and within the nuclear family, we envisage collective practices of care in our workplaces. In order to destabilize the current individualizing system of competition and life dominated by employment (paid work), it is not enough to create welfare institutions that pit working lives to lives-outside-work, or act as prosthetics to aid our expansive working lives. We aim to initiate a discussion on how to re-organise, instead, our very understanding of productive life-at-work and create ways to embed love, care and solidarity within working places as means of resistance against casualisation and exploitation. Only so, we can challenge from within the increasing care-lessness (Lynch, 2010) that working lives, and lives in general are exposed to. Precarious labour: Ethical and political dimensions Precarity has become a concept central to scholarly attempts to grasp the complex changes in working and living conditions in advanced capitalist societies. Used initially to designate the proletarialisation of white-collar workers (Weber, [1948] 2002), by the end of the 20th century it re-emerged in the struggles of student, unemployed, and flexible workers’ movements in Western Europe, who experienced the crumbling of the post-war welfare state and the Fordist labour regime (Bourdieu, 1997; Berardi, 2009). The ‘new deal’ between state and capital, achieved by organised labour earlier in the 20th century had left out part-time and temporary contract workers, women, migrant workers, and workers in the developing world, for whom precarity has been a norm rather than an exception (Nielson and Rossiter, 2008). Unemployment, flexibilisation and uncertainty now also became the predicament of a generation, whose parents had enjoyed guaranteed remunerated employment with benefits and securities. Activists and scholars related to this generation used ‘precarity’ as a frame of collective action against the neoliberal restructuring in public sector, privatization and market deregulation that marked the new crisis of capital (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008). Precarity as a claim Yet, the critique against precarity came together with such against a historical form of capitalist organisation through the state that was ripe in the post-war era. And whereas the so-called artistic critique of the post-war capitalism defied bread-and-butter social critique by uncritically embracing the drive for authenticity, freedom, and flexibility (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: x-xii), both stemmed from real concerns. The state bureaucracy was a tool of capitalist, imperialist, and patriarchal forms of social organisation. Secure employment carried out by men or increasingly by middle class women, was operating thanks to the invisible and unrecognized forms of reproductive and emotional labour (Fraser, 2013). The latter were not seen as equally important or remunerable to ‘productive’, paid employment (Federici, 2013). Critique against the oppressive state order was absorbed by capitalism in its next reincarnation (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007), and produced a new monster: neoliberal governance and new managerial labour organisation. By flexibilising labour and seemingly reducing state regulation, it created new ever more invasive and exploitable forms of work. Still, by holding the tension between working and existential conditions the term precarity addressed as a collective action frame both the need of secure and stable future, and the push for authenticity and freedom against the routinized bureaucratic discipline. Precarity as class distinction Recent debates on labour precarity have inevitably referred to Guy Standing’s work on ‘the Precariat’ (Standing, 2011; 2014), which suggests the emergence of ‘The Precariat’ as a new class within the contemporary class ladder. For Standing, the members of the Precariat experience precarity in three dimensions: in the relations of production, economic redistribution, and political participation and representation in relation to the state (ibid.). Standing sees potential for development of a Precariat class-consciousness based on shared anxiety, anger, anomie, and alienation (Standing, 2011: 19, 21), but recognizes the peril of multiple vulnerabilities dividing instead of uniting workers (ibid.: 25). However, in Standing’s writings care and reproductive labour do not receive significant attention except when linked to hospital workers or charity volunteers in crumbling welfare states (Standing, 2014). His analysis does not take into account the marginalized groups who have been historically excluded from production, distribution, and equal participation. Positing anxiety, anger, anomie, and alienation as the main condition of precarious workers, Standing remains fixed on those working in productive labour within advanced capitalist societies. And while Standing himself has called for a redefinition of work as productive only (ibid: 107-108), his texts never explore the connection between precarious work and reproductive work done predominantly by low-paid women and migrants. His focus on the commonalities of precarious work across contexts and classes has been criticised for disguising rather than disclosing existing inequalities including between precarious and industrial workers in developed countries, pitted against each other as rival ‘reserve armies’, and pushing precarious labourers to resort to ‘first-order loyalties of ethnicity, caste, race, and creed’ for affinity and struggle (Breman, 2013:135-137). Precarity as a global action frame Over the last decade scholars have discussed the serious limitations to precarious workers’ organising. Traditional unions have had an ambivalent role in this process, as the un(der)employed have traditionally been perceived as a weak link in workers solidarity as difficult to recruit and potential strike-breakers (Brugnot and Le Naour, 2011). In the Global North, research on precarious workers’ mobilising has shown that the huge variation of conditions and hierarchies in the precarious workforce challenge collective action frames (Mattoni, 2015). And even if frustrations with precarious work are shared across borders, the possibility to think of international strategies is undermined by country-to-country legislative differences: for instance differences between production-based and contract-based flexibility results in the reliance on different coalitions and action repertoires across seemingly similar cases (Vogiatzoglou, 2015). Against this background, Stephen Shukaitis articulates the need of struggles against precarity to focus on a more transversal, work-and-life relating experiences that can bring groups together to develop new forms of individual and collective autonomy, and ‘new modes of being and community that are not determined by labour’ (Shukaitis, 2013: 658). To do that, it is crucial to challenge the ethno- and androcentrism that underpin most scholarly work on the subject of precarity. Precarity as ethnocentric Critics have pointed out that the works on precarity mostly focus on the exceptionalism of the American case (Lee and Kofman, 2012: 389) or other Euro-Atlantic countries (Neilson and Rossiter 2008). Bret Neilson and Ned Rossiter (2008) state that rather than an exception, precarious labour is a global and historical norm. For them, European and North American movements’ and scholars’ use of precarity as a mobilizing and analytical frame has no resonance with the rest of the world where life and work stability and security are not experienced by the majority. For Ching Kwan Lee and Yelizavetta Kofman precarity takes different shapes in the Global South where deregulation, privatization, and market liberalization have led to assault not only on labour rights but also on life and livelihood of workers (Lee and Kofman, 2012: 390-392). Many post-colonial countries have produced novel forms of exploitation (Muehlebach and Shoshan, 2012). Some developmentalist states have done away with labour protection, causing mass internal migration and casualization or the opening special economic zones (SEZs), feeding off unregulated labour and ‘partial border citizenship’ (Lee and Kofman, 2012: 394-397). Precarity as androcentric The focus of labour studies and studies of precarity on the individual male and white worker, engaged in productive work has also been criticised. Shifting from a unionized factory worker to an artist or creative worker, this figure is idealised, respectively, as vanguard of the proletariat or of the ‘Precariat’ (Fantone, 2007: 9). Their polar opposite has traditionally been the ‘suburban housewife’ (Oksala, 2016: 281). Yet, as Silvia Federici (2004) has shown as a response to E.P. Thompson’s examination of industrial workers, ‘women’s work’ has been pushed out of the productive sphere and marginalized. This happened during the European Enlightenment process of the enclosure of the commons – used by women to support household consumption – and the push of peasants towards cities: the spaces of waged and timed labour. In this process, women became the indispensable – yet undervalued – double tool of capital: not regarded and remunerated as workers, their reproductive work was used to yield and bring up healthy workers. To force women into this situation, they were made legally dependent on the patronage of male breadwinners, denied control over their bodies, and witch-hunted for performing labour liberating them and their offspring from inextricable poverty (ibid.). The impact of early capitalist formation on the economic subjugation and coercion of women continues today. Housework remains informal, unwaged and largely unrecognized, even if increasingly commercialized (Federici, 2013). Women who entered the labour force since the interwar era have relied on flexible labour or the work of other often migrant women to ‘have it all’ – a job and a family (Fraser, 2013; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003; O’Hagan, 2015). Today women still form a large percentage of the labour force in part-time positions, and are times less likely than men to work full-time, progress in their careers, and be independent from bread-winning partners (OECD, 2015: 115, 176). New forms of debt have also emerged that produce ever further extraction from vulnerable female and feminised bodies (Gagyi, 2019; Cavallero and Gago, 2019). Decentering precarity Thus, with few exceptions the discussion of precarity has remained focused on productive rather than reproductive, and on material rather than on immaterial labour (Gill and Pratt, 2008). Important recent debates on the infringement of new technologies into human work still largely focus on precarious male workers in the Global North (Cant, 2019; Moore, 2017). Unsurprisingly then, precarity – a historical characteristic of women’s invisibilised, immaterial, and affective work – only became an issue of concern once it came to characterize ‘productive’ work in global capitalism (Oksala, 2016). Even then, the critics of precarious labour mostly focused on the creative and information industries, and the movements against precarious labour – on organising youthful, able-bodied, highly educated people with a relative lack of caring responsibilities (Gill and Pratt, 2008). While traditional Marxist feminists have long spoken of reproductive labour, the term was often used to include unwaged work to provide food, shelter, and care, inside, but not outside the traditional family structure (Gill and Pratt, 2008). More recent feminist analysis has included precarity-focused critique of other structures such as heterosexual marriage, maternity, care-work, and individualized self-exploitation (Fantone, 2007; Zechner, 2013; Coin 2017). While much of this critique addresses precarity in the lives and communities of the theorists – including through the focus on emotions and practices of care in social movements and artistic collectives (Zechner, 2013) – it opens debates on precarity to groups formerly absent from it: those living and working under extreme forms of feminized and racialized precarious conditions in global commodity chains. Johanna Oksala has more recently argued that a narrow focus on abolishing the division between productive and reproductive labour, or remuneration of reproductive work – eclipses a whole ethical aspect of both labour and care (Oksala, 2016: 296-297). ‘In an economic system, in which resources are primarily distributed to individuals according to their ability to compete in the economic game — as opposed to their need or their right…women’s reproductive labour can only ever be a handicap’ (Oksala, 2016: 299). The abolition of the distinction between productive and reproductive labour, then, sounds like a new threat to lift all determinations rather than suspend a condition of oppression (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). New struggles against precarity need to treat both already existing structural conditions of oppression that persist at workplaces, and the attempts of individualizing, profit-led working conditions to define all aspects of our lives. Instead of trying to abolish this distinction between reproductive and productive labour by bringing rationalities from the productive sphere into the personal and communal domain, the struggle against the negative aspects of precarity should bring systematically care work and affective labour into the workplace. This also requires the discussion of not directly labour-related aspects of precarity: those related to life and livelihood that are exposed to acute forms of inequality and care-lessness (Lynch, 2010) under advanced capitalism. Precarious life: Ethical and social dimension A focus on workers as independent, hypermobile actors solely occupied with income and welfare benefits, denies the fact that personal lives are complex, and that mobility decisions are made with affective realities in mind. Work and life outside the workplace are not neatly delineated. Isabell Lorey notes, ‘it is not only work that is precarious and dispersed [for precarious workers] but life itself’ (2015: 9). For Judith Butler, ‘precarity’ is ‘a politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death’ (Butler, 2009: ii). Franco Berardi insists that in order to understand the political economy of contemporary capitalism, we need to grasp the psychopathology of relations based on economic competition for maximum profit (Berardi, 2009). Mike Davies calls for a political analysis of precarity examining the physical or physic damage of precarious work: its impact on social integration, social transformation or their failure (Davies, 2013). Precarity creates increasing demands on mobility and flexibility. While flexible arrangements can contribute to workers’ mobility power (Alberti, 2014), they can also be manipulated by employers to implement exploitative organisational models of insecure labour and incessant work. Hence, there is not a ‘true flexibility’ but an ‘inflexible flexibility’: a rigid and a prescriptive vocation that displays greed and reverberates on the life of the individual (Morini, 2007: 48-9). Empirical research on different groups affected by such processes has shown their deep, divergent impacts. Political precarity and vulnerability Groups and populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and who experience routine aggression or lack of adequate protection by states, suffer precarity expressed as ‘maximised vulnerability’ and minimised equality (Butler, 2009: ii). Judith Butler speaks of ‘precarious life’, as not ‘recognisable, readable, or grievable’ (ibid: xiii). As well as equal access to resources, equal participation requires conditions of being recognized and listened to as a political subject: of being considered worthy of living, worthy of welfare, and of care as an integral human being (ibid.: iv). Thus, for persons and groups who are exposed to physical or symbolic violence and frequently unrecognised or misrecognised, precarity is a permanent state of induced competition: a zero sum game over scarce symbolic and material resources which determine who counts as a subject and who does not (Butler, 2009: iv). Under these conditions, access to rights and equality is possible only through assimilation to structures of violence (ibid.). Insurgence often becomes an only means of subaltern populations to fight back against the hard power of the state and the soft power of civil society, which impose oppressive legal frameworks and power structures (Chatterjee, 2004). Economic precarity and exploitation Beyond exposures to symbolic and physical violence, the market creates subtle, yet brutal mechanisms of cutthroat competition, exploitation, and exclusion by limiting the time to dedicate to love, tenderness, and affection (Berardi, 2009). The separation between life and work through the introduction of regular hours into a work routine and the division between employers’ time and ‘own’ time (Thompson, 1967: 60-61) is now a privilege. Under constant demands to perform a growing number of fragmented mental tasks, the body-mind of the contemporary worker is completely taken up; he or she is not treated as an integral individual but as package of abstract, depersonalised time, purchased and sold out by company owners via management (Berardi, 2009: 42; Moore, 2017). These conditions result in a dissatisfaction and stress as workers are constantly required to adjust to new standards and skill-sets (Standing, 2011: 124). More recently, a growing tendency to also treat out-of-work skills and social capacities of workers as yet another exploitable asset has blurred the life-work continuum at the advantage of work (Fleming, 2013). There is also a further sense of ‘wasted labour’ and ‘bullshit jobs’ (Graeber, 2018), combined with fear of having to remain stuck in their cycle because of scarcity. Starting a temporary contract, workers are worrying about and already searching for future work (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Reducing the value of life to the value of one’s paid work produces an existential angst. Workers’ mental and physical activities are in accelerated labour that leads to collapse, depression, and to low motivation, self-esteem, and sexual desire (Berardi, 2009: 37-38). This process negatively impacts workers’ health and wellbeing: it leads to fatigue, exhaustion, frustration, and the inability to plan ahead. Anxiety, insecurity and individualised shame often lead to burnout, substance abuse, physical, mental and emotional disorders (Gill and Pratt, 2008). Precarity and gender In relation to gender, the flexibility and mobility which have increasingly come to characterise precarious labour under capitalism are characteristics that have historically been associated with work designated as ‘female’ (Morini, 2007). While the number of women in paid employment has risen dramatically, women in the workforce have an increased likelihood of holding low quality jobs, along with immigrants, recent school leavers and workers considered to be ‘low-skilled’ (OECD, 2015). Women, who still try to accommodate paid work and unpaid domestic responsibilities, dominate fast-growing service sectors of the new economy (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009), and comprise the majority of part-time and flexible workers globally (OECD, 2015). All these inequalities considerably impact workloads and the ‘double-burden’ of paid labour and unpaid care or domestic work, as well as on income and career progression. Women also perform the larger share of affective labour and ‘emotion work’. Commonly depicted as unskilled, effortless and outside the labour process, emotional work remains unrecognised or dismissed as embodied, natural, immaterial (Bolton, 2009). It is obscured within the institution of the family ‘by privatising, feminising and naturalising much of the work involved in its reproduction’ (Weeks, 2011: 143). The moral imperative to care remains highly gendered in both paid and unpaid environments (O’Brien, 2007). This gendered division of labour has real consequences for political and economic participation for women. Precarity and mobility An increased expectation of mobility is another aspect of life, particularly for fixed-term, part-time, ‘underemployed’ and ‘casual’ workers. Liz Oliver writes about the relational impact of temporary labour even for those in relatively privileged ‘white-collar’ occupations as contract workers in scientific research. Geographic mobility extends the individual capacity to tolerate instability and requires decision-making that can be harmful for personal relationships or requires bringing partners, children, and extended family members across time and space (Oliver, 2012: 3860). Beyond change at work, and constant re-negotiation of career decisions, the end of each contract also means renegotiating friendships, family, and collegial relationships (ibid.). By changing countries, workers often curtail their previous social and professional networks. Many suffer loneliness and depression while others take on the responsibility of moving their whole families along or commuting across regional or national borders to make ends meet (Ivancheva, 2015). Women are particularly exposed to vulnerability with less access to permanent positions, and caring responsibilities both in and out of the paid labour force (Ivancheva, 2015: 42). While wealthier and middle class women find partial solutions in hiring care workers (O’Hagan, 2015), a global, and rural-urban, ‘care deficit’ emerges (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003). Daughters or mothers of care workers remain out of education or of work to take care of children or elders, while their respective mothers or daughters become caregivers to other people’s loved ones (Parreñas, 2005; Deneva, 2012). Precarity and ‘hostile environments’ As a temporal and spatial process that meshes with the requirements of the labour market at certain stages, migratory processes add a further dimension of precariousness via visa regimes that produce labour market immobility and insecurity. Migrants – and especially low paid migrants from the Global South – navigate within a new institutional environment. On top of their labour precarity, they have to deal with an employment and a racialised migration system. Precarity translates into an ‘institutionalised uncertainty’ that produces workers over whom employers have increased control (Anderson, 2010: 300). Precarity is in many ways exemplified in undocumented migrant workers, who are overrepresented in low-paid, poorly regulated sectors (Anderson, 2010; MRCI, 2015). For undocumented workers, where employment or residency could end suddenly and therefore time must be used ‘productively’, here is a keen sense of ‘living off borrowed time’ (Nobil Ahmad, 2008). Persons in these situations are often extremely confined within work and home spaces. The complexities and idiosyncratic character of the immigration and work permit systems across nation states, the use of agencies to hire workers, the ease with which in low-paid and poorly regulated sectors can become undocumented, all exacerbate precarity and related inequalities (Meszmann and Fedyuk, 2019). Precarity and automation Labour automation adds yet another aspect of precarity in relation to care. The threat of job loss of over 800 million jobs over the next two decades (Vincent, 2017) will also happen in parallel with the aging of a vast proportion of population in the developed world in need of care. What is more, as Tiziana Terranova has pointed out, even if automation frees time and energy, this surplus is incessantly ‘reabsorbed in the cycle of production of exchange value leading to increasing accumulation of wealth by the few’ (Terranova, 2014: np). And while care work has been discussed as unreplaceable by digital technologies, differentiated services for those able to pay and those unable to afford care would mean ever growing shortage of access to care labour for the latter, exposing them to new forms of alienation and affective precarity. Despite the rise of ‘the cyborg’, most work is still premised upon gendered, classed, and racialised labour that is downplayed as ‘unproductive’ or ‘immaterial’ (Caffentzis, 1999). The intersectional inequalities of precarity These examples show some of the ways in which precarity intersects with factors to destabilise life or increase vulnerabilities. However, in certain cases, hyper-flexible, though precarious working arrangements can help rather than hinder precarious lives. Kathleen Millar’s work shows how precarity helps in the conceptualising labour as ‘inseparable from issues of subjectivity, affect, sociality and desire’ (Millar, 2014: 35). Her ethnography of informal workers at a garbage dump in Rio de Janeiro, exemplifies how precarious labour can enable greater flexibility and self-determination in paid work. Through this, paid labour can be better interwoven with relationships and care responsibilities. While in some contexts unstable work ‘destabilises daily living’ and has a negative impact on income as well as public identity and social belonging, for the catadores working in the garbage dump amidst poverty and threat of violence, ‘unstable daily living destabilises work’ (ibid.: 35). For many workers, and particularly those with limited resources, a more stable affective and relational life trumps a more stable but highly restrictive and inflexible low-waged work. This process facilitates individuals and families to ‘relational autonomy’, to be able to ‘sustain relationships, fulfil social obligations, pursue life project in an uncertain everyday’ (ibid.: 35). Though low-status, dirty and difficult, employment at the garbage dump provides a method of navigating employment and earning income in the midst of other forms of social and economic precarity that go beyond the disruptions to routine and contingency associated with full-time, low-wage jobs. Thus, in spite of the vulnerabilities created and exacerbated by precarious working conditions, within the current system, highly flexible labour can be more compatible with care responsibilities for workers seeking to negotiate life within globally unequal geographic locations and oppressive social realities. In precarious living situations, flexibility holds the potential to facilitate greater self-determination and autonomy (Millar, 2014: 40), and that might not be possible within fixed working hours requiring full-time availability. A refocus on care and affective relationships in precarity gives a nuanced view of complex social realities. A binary conception of precarity-stability and fixed work-life boundaries masks lived experiences, as well as the social and historical contexts in which subjects operate. The vision of fixed life-work boundaries has also underpinned the classical Marxist notion of the working class as bearer of universal characteristics, transcending territory, culture, or lineage, in its strive towards a universal liberation from exploitation (Berardi, 2009: 62). Here, the notion of the working class avoids the discussion of workers as territorially and contextually bounded in their experience of belonging and caring relations. Precarity has not only been a constant feature of labour for the global majority; it has become a normalised feature of the life and work of those employed in certain poorly regulated sectors: care and domestic work, sex work, retail, catering and hospitality, agriculture and construction. Even in sectors dominated by men, work is gendered through distribution of domestic work, often done by women workers. They navigate a series of temporal, geographical and financial arrangements in the unequal terrain between unpaid care and paid labour. Not taking into account precarious living arrangements and care relations in the discussion of work creates further obstacles to conceptualising a transformative alternative in which oppressive hierarchies are not simply replicated, but challenged. Precarity and care: Rebuilding the social fabric Lynch et al. (2009) theorise the nature of affective care as constituting circles of care relations: primary care relations of love labour, secondary care relations or general care work, and tertiary care relations of solidarity work. Care is not an isolated sphere of activity. It is intertwined with economic, political and cultural relations (Baker et al., 2004). Inequalities in these areas of life exacerbate affective deprivations and the ability to perform love, care and solidarity (Lynch and Walsh, 2009: 41). In the context of precarious employment, greater energy and time is required to compensate for a lack of stability. A constant need to adapt feeds into an erosion of social relations (Anderson, 2010: 303), as well as of capacities to care to develop relationships of love and solidarity in and outside the workplace. Caution is needed against paternalistic and parochial ‘dark’ sides of care (Tronto, 1993), ascribing caregivers more authority over those receiving care, and more value to mother-child links rather than larger social interdependence. Yet, with Joan Tronto we employ a political concept of care that transcends individual rights and insists on responsibility of humans to each other. Access and time to care When it comes to love labour and affective work, paid and unpaid care work is subordinated to labour seen as more economically profitable or valuable, while affective and love labour are subordinated to labour that is considered ‘productive’. This is particularly so for persons in low-paid and precarious employment. In addition to the negotiation of environment and irregular working times, unstable employment or frequent changes of employer presents significant challenges to creating and nurturing social and affective relationships. Social and economic inequalities, exacerbated by precarious and unstable conditions, weaken the human capacity to perform affective work – the active doing of tasks and rituals that communicate affection, love, and care. In this process, those with less time and resources such as low-wage workers, those with multiple jobs, or persons with multiple caring responsibilities and little support, are disadvantaged. They experience constant deficit of time, as well as of the material, physical and emotional resources necessary for love and care (Hochschild, 2003). Thus, people in precarious living and working situations face additional barriers to creating and nurturing loving relationships, both in and out of work, than those who do not face these restrictions. Comparatively, persons with greater time, energy and resources are in a position of privilege and better equipped to manage the working day to include time for affective labour (Lynch et al., 2009; Claassen, 2011). The cost of care To make up for the growing lack of time for affective labour in the lives of the ever fewer workers privileged with stable employment, the caregiver has appeared on the scene of complex micro- and macro-politics. Paid and unpaid domestic labour and primary caregiving within families is still overwhelmingly performed by women (OECD, 2014). For those that can afford it, it is delegated to women with less access to the labour market, who are often poorer workers from minority or migrant background (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Anderson, 2010). The increased demand for outsourced care work and the commodification of such labour has resulted by what has been called a ‘care deficit’ as many workers migrate to perform care, domestic and affective work elsewhere (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002). This ‘extraction of care’ (Parreñas, 2003: 53) from peripheral to core countries, and from poorer rural areas to affluent urban centres (Deneva, 2012), means that wealthier countries and families benefit from such arrangements at the expense of the families of caregivers whose labour is often undervalued and underpaid (Gutierrez- Rodríguez, 2014; Parreñas, 2005). Competition vs. care A third way in which new flexibilised forms of work are related to the question of care concerns the new imperatives of social organisation that erode cooperation and solidarity (O’Flynn and Panayiotopolous, 2015). Social relations or potential bonds of collective care are ever more damaged though a culture of competition and individualism. In this environment precarity thrives as a self-sustaining ideological energy, hinging on our preoccupation with ‘our individuality, our unique destiny, our special distinctive abilities’ (Horning, 2012: np). That workers are increasingly required to simultaneously and constantly compete even when co-operating with peers and co-workers presents an emotional burden. It produces an environment hostile to dissent: while those who speak up are penalised, the others remain divided, and in constant fear (Courtois and O’Keeffe, 2015). This ‘universal competition’ results in further separation from networks of protection for workers (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: 427) and calls for care and self-care rebuild solidarity and the social fabric in social movements they form (Zechner, 2013). The status of love, care and emotional labour While care is increasingly outsourced, automated, and commercialised (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003, Oksala, 2016), it is still considered ‘unproductive’ and attributed lower status vis-a-vis other forms of labour. Following Oksala's (2016) argument on affective labour we argue that, while the remuneration and recognition of professional care labour is important, by itself it remains unable to tackle the enclosures of love, care, and solidarity work that produce precarity. The affective dimension of everyday life is further invisibilised by a more general approach to precarity that focuses on work alone. Even if certain forms of are attributed price and turned into a commodity, there will always be forms of love, care, and solidarity that will defy the market logic. Pushed even further into the private domain, they will be left to those less privileged groups – often migrant, low-income and minority women – whose marginality keeps them out of traditional sphere of exchange. One way to address this inequality is to examine the care needs of those providing care, and of all workers generally. Engagement with employers and building support networks within the workplace could allow a symbolic and material recognition of workers that in addition to financial remuneration. Only by incorporating care into an analysis of precarity, and resituating the centrality of love, care, and solidarity to individual and societal wellbeing, can the inequalities and injustices of precarious labour and life begin to be truly addressed. Productive vs reproductive labour Accounting for the double bind of precarity, it is important to take into account two disparate realities that are still an intrinsic part of this concept. Precarious work, rather than causing vulnerability, can provide a flexible foundation to precarious or unstable living, particularly when it serves to accommodate affective responsibilities. In such cases rebuilding the social fabric cannot start with a firm division between life and work identities, and champion ‘life’ as normatively positive, and ‘work’ as negative. Working lives and life outside of paid work are equally part of one’s integral life. They can be equally sources of positive and negative identification depending on the conditions under which they are experienced. In examining precarisation as political constituting, we should take into account that it is a contested field that should not be conceived of as necessarily negative: subjects are not only productive for the purpose of capitalist accumulation, but for communication, knowledge, creativity and affect (Lorey, 2015). Precarisation becomes a base on which workers can articulate desires and struggles for alternative forms of living, and to recompose work, life and relationships. The rejection of this division and the repositioning of love, care, and solidarity as an integral part of work can be seen as a way to reinvent a relational autonomy of workers that can replace individual autonomy as technique of new managerialism (Millar, 2014). Importantly, erasing the distinction between productive and reproductive, material and affective labour under the conditions of capitalism, is not an easy solution to our current predicament (Oksala, 2016). A ‘simple’ solution, such as offering more maternity leave and welfare benefits to women and caregivers will not solve the gender or global inequalities. On its own, allotting a price to care work, and affective labour, while relying on women’s unpaid role in reproductive work, will not offer a long-term solution either (ibid.: 299). While affect and care are increasingly commodified, they remain rare sites of resistance against the logic and moral of the market. A focus on paid labour neglects the reality that work and life outside paid work cannot be clearly delineated. Some forms of affective labour by their nature are inalienable or cannot be commoditised (Lynch, 2007). There is an urgent need to ground care and self-care in the workplace, not as a technology of further extraction, but as a sign of clear resistance against the individualising and alienating labour. The reorganisation of productive forces toward the building and maintenance of nurturing, affective relationships and bonds of solidarity and community is even more important in a context in which workers, focused on individual, everyday struggles, are seen as temporary and replaceable. In order to challenge the negative effects of precarity a recognition and redistribution of the capacity for love, care, and solidarity must be prioritised. Discussion In this article we worked on three interconnected levels. In the first part we critiqued some androcentric and ethnocentric tendencies in the debate of labour precarity. We then moved on to discuss the highly gendered and racialised aspects of care work, both affective labour and the professional (if not always professionalised) care work that is often done by those experiencing precarious working and living conditions. In this we emphasised that in relations of social reproduction, the ability to build communities and access relations of love, care, and solidarity, are crucial to subsistence and survival. In the last section we showed how the intersection of precarity and care illuminates how the monetisation of reproductive and care work, claimed by campaigns such as Wages for Housework, bears significant limitations. While it sheds light on the extraction of surplus from reproductive and care labour, it also brings an instrumental, calculative logic into domains of human life and livelihood that remain the last resource of resistance against capitalism. We claim that, reversely, care and affective labour should be brought into the core of productive work and used as a means of resistance and resilience against alienation. Considering a grounded understanding of precarity, which also reflects the affective aspect of our lives, means to also examine our understanding of what kind of subject and practices we envisage in struggles that would challenge precarity. Flexible employment has created both an impossibility for a shared labour identity, and a parallel craving for a ‘we’ (Sennett, 1998: 148). The latter is represented in a new emphasis on a defensive character of the nuclear family and the local and national ‘community’ which have become defensive spaces from which assaults are made against the imagined ‘other’– the subject envisaged behind one’s own working misfortunes. Clutching to networks of aid, however, is no longer such an easy solution, as flexible capitalism ‘radiates indifference, reengineering institutions in which people are treated as indifferent’ (Sennett, 1998: 146). Moving beyond the double bind of precarity and addressing related inequalities can only happen when positive communal identities and practices reorganise the current relations of production. This would involve placing the value not on individualised competition, but on collective solidarity, care, and love (Baker et al., 2004). There is a need to recognise symbolically, but also compensate and honour in very material terms those whose lives have always been vulnerable and marginalised, and whose labour and sacrifice has always been taken for granted. It is also very important to rethink the subjects that have thus far been envisaged as revolutionary subjects. Paradoxically, both the Marxian proletarian and the autonomous, rational actor championed by neo-liberalism feature indifference to the affective domain, ignoring the relational life of humans as interdependent, loving, caring and solidaristic beings (Lynch and Ivancheva, 2015: 18; Lynch, 1989). Focusing on subjects as independent, economic actors determined by their economic status, reinforces a ‘competitive individualism’ which underpins precarity, and is ‘no longer seen as an amoral necessity but rather as a desirable and necessary attribute for a constantly reinventing entrepreneur’ (Lynch and Ivancheva, 2015: 18). While it is beyond the scope of the article to give exact prescriptions of how this could work, we can speak of some basic lessons from our own experiences of bringing solidarity, care and love into a toxic workplace, where–similarly to multiple experiences in the neoliberal university – we were both profoundly precarious in different, intersectional, and often conflicting ways. Our differences – of professional rank and of salary within a vertically structured hierarchy; of financially unstable rootedness vs. financially stable displacement within our local life and work context; of being a white migrant or a national from a migrant background; of being feminists within a macho working culture that required self-promotion and cut-throat competitiveness – slotted us mercilessly into different, potentially antagonistic categories. These categories had divided many in our positions and us from other colleagues in previous jobs. They could have easily created serious cleavages either by producing hierarchy and disparity resulting in passionate envy, and destructive competition and adversity between us; or by instantiating cold disinterestedness in which life and work could only be lobotomised from each other with a sterile dexterity so they never intersected. It took everything from intentional and systematic everyday gestures of care, through to bigger efforts and sacrifices on behalf of both of us to be in solidarity with each other, against the vulnerability of our individual and shared positions and while resisting assimilation and co-optation into the oppressive structures in order to access individually better conditions. This was needed to start rebuilding an alienating working environment into something that between us felt like a safe space. From there we could be introspective with our own reactions of moments of conflict, and generous with each other. From there we could also reach out to others, producing slowly and despite all odds a caring community that spread our mutual care to other colleagues without expecting full reciprocity but with the expectation of respect for our efforts and the space we had built. Transgressing the life-work boundary and bringing a similar sensitivity to our workplace that we had in our friendships outside of it, was our strongest weapon against the divisive force of precarity. Thus, in order to challenge the universalistic underpinning in understanding of the working classes, and, for that matter, of any collective agent of social change, we suggest a more organic, grounded understanding of workers’ experiences is needed. It could entail organising through a shared analysis not of our strengths, but of our vulnerabilities and care needs. It could look like Jane McAlevey’s (2012) power structure analysis on the reverse – a less formal vulnerability structure analysis, aimed at building mutual understanding and trust at precarious workplaces. It could entail opening safe spaces among precarious workers for sharing-based analysis of individual vulnerabilities, strengths, caring commitments, and dis/comfort zones. Unlike a campaign where external forces are analysed, the point could be to open up about, share, and come to terms with our own strengths and weaknesses. Doing this could not be easy, but it could lead to trust building and ac/knowledge/ment of our own and others’ limits that underpin any realistic strategy against an oppressive power structure. Revisiting the debate of precarity with the concept of care, the article crucially insists on the distinction between productive and reproductive work in a landscape where care labour is pushed outside economic exchange, or exploited at the expense of productive activity (Federici, 2013). Through recognising, revaluing, and reintroducing care in the workplace, we suggest that a more holistic approach, rather than an artificial work-life divide, would nurture workers’ wellbeing and positive relationships. The recognition and remuneration of care labour is important, but making care workers better paid and more secure is not enough to bring transformation of the current system driven by a market logic. Instead, we claim that love, care, and solidarity should be integrated into the productive sphere, engaging all workers in producing practices of collective care at work, that can corrode the institutions and culture of carelessness in capitalist firms and neo-managerial public institutions. A sincere effort to go beyond precarity and the multiple inequalities it creates and sustains must include recognition of the necessity of non-alienating social production and reproduction.

#### From the 1905 Russian Soviets to the 1919 Turin factory councils to the occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt, the Indignados movement in Spain, and the 2012 Quebec student strike, the ability to strike has been able to create collective expressive spaces that combat the alienation experienced in the panicked world. Embodied engagement within assemblages produces indescribable feelings within ourselves that allow for love, friendship and care antithetical to the depressive nature of capital. As state violence impedes on our ability to organize, we find solutions like the plan to ensure the ability to empathize with one another.

Thorburn, Elise D., "Human-Machinic Assemblages: Technologies, Bodies, and the Recuperation of Social Reproduction in the Crisis Era" (2015). Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. 2897. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/2897> |Harun| \*bracketed for gendered language

Interpreting the recuperation of social reproduction through the assembly, broadly defined, requires contemplating the very act of assembling. Participation in the Quebec assemblies required a coming together, an embodied engagement with others. Such minimally-mediated interactions in collectively created sites constituted an affective space wherein encounters of the body could involve discussions, positions, analysis, ideas, and traditions. These all merged to create collaborative networks of solidarity. These personal and collective networks are necessary for organising large, powerful, and resistant events such as strikes. As Gerbraudo (2012) noted with regard to the Egyptian struggle, the size of the occupation of Tahrir square was due in no small part to the faceto-face interactions of people in their neighbourhoods and communities, in spaces of communal interaction. The militancy, determination, and longevity of the Quebec student strike is owed, almost entirely, to the insistence upon shared spaces of discussion and dissent. The strike offers us important lessons in the necessity of embodied and affective encounters in assembly movements – for the human component of the human-machinic assemblage. These encounters with others are fundamental in creating the foundations of an autonomous social reproduction: empathy, community, and care. Being together creates potential moments for the demonstration of collective care as well as collective resistance. Intimacies are developed in illegally taking up space in the streets, and these foster sense of shared resistance and risk-taking. These intimacies forge a sense of care and community that was reflected in one demonstrator loudly announcing, at a night march, “this movement is about love! It’s always been about love!” (Milstein, 2012c: np). Care and empathy are developed in the mere act of standing next to a stranger as you face down riot police, or as Milstein (2012c) asserts, pulling a stranger out of harm’s way and 210 then running into them again later at a random place and having the sense that you are old friends because of the experience you had shared. The creation of communities of care and empathy enacted in the streets was also reflected in the actual assemblies. For example, at UQAM people with children were encouraged to bring them to meetings, but further, the striking students collaborated with the UQAM daycare to provide a place for children to play while parents participated in assemblies. A forum was organised at UQAM on the idea of a social strike and a daycare was organised for this event also.103 Having a variety of spaces for embodied encounter was key to constituting socially reproductive spaces in the strike. Creating such varied sites – street demonstrations alongside assemblies, or day cares alongside forums and night marches, for example – for collective expression can serve to combat the alienation, exclusion, cynicism, and apathy often experienced in highly digitised, individualistic societies (Berardi, 2009; Berardi and Lovink, 2011; Hardt and Negri, 2012, Lazzarato, 2014). These shared moments of expression can deepen already existing networks of support and solidarity, and expand the possible agents of struggle. Such networks are deepened not only in joyful moments, but also in the moments of resistance to state violence. For many strike participants the violence experienced in facing police armed with tear gas, rubber bullets, flash bang grenades, and sound cannons catalyzed both emotional and political responses. In an interview Francois Grenier, a student who lost vision in one eye from a rubber bullet, stated that his experience of police brutality during the strike had changed his views of police and state authority. Of police, he said, “I see them as an armed person. A person who can be potentially dangerous” (Lakoff, 2013: np). Standing against these assaults strengthened a sense of 103 Interview with N. Jun 4, 2012. Montreal, QC. 211 solidarity amongst strike participants as well as those on the sidelines. In his diary entries charting his experience of the strike, Vincent Roy writes of his CEGEP’s struggle to maintain a hard picket and subsequent confrontations with police. The visceral togetherness of the struggle makes [them] him feel a part of a collective, a “we” who owe each other their allegiances. “From now on I belong to this movement” he writes, frustrated after a day of angry confrontations. Of his striking friends he says, “I can’t let them down because I know they wouldn’t let me down. And that’s our strength.”104 In together resisting the violences of the state, Milstein says, people begin to remember what they are capable of “from solidarity to courage, from mutual aid to direct action, from collective illegality in the face of repression to sharing this moment – the many exquisite moments – with each other in so many intimate ways” (Milstein, 2012c). This solidarity, mutual aid, and courage draws attention to an affective condition of the politics of assembling, and gestures towards expanding minoritarian politics. Such affective conditions can be encapsulated in Hardt and Negri’s (2000) invocation of communist joy. In Empire they note that there is an “irrepressible lightness and joy of being communist” (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 413), staking claim to constitutive being together as an affirmation of life and love against the misery of power (Thoburn, 2003). Such constitutive being together is concretised in assembly movements: being-together creates a collective assemblage which circulates through the flows, channels, and networks of an urban landscape without being subsumed into a singular hegemonic unity. This assembly, broadly construed as an assembly movement, is an entity both for and against, open to chance encounters and possibilities, and it is constitutive of new potential infrastructures. In the mere act of being together, of assembling, a foundation is 104 Roy’s diaries are published in the online e-book This is Fucking Class War. Available online at: http://thisisclasswar.info/roy.html (Accessed 26 Feb 2015). 212 laid for the reconstitution of an autonomous political sphere and the recuperation of care and social reproduction. Vincent Roy’s journal entries, published in the online post-strike collection This is Fucking Class War and entitled “The Joy of Striking,” demonstrate this exuberant for and against that is the product of resistant being-together. At the outset of the strike he writes in his journal (dated Feb 28, 2012) that he is simply a student who wants to “finish his CEGEP as quickly as possible” but will attend a General Assembly at the behest of a friend. Under a month later he has attended the large demonstration in Montreal and writes: “What a memorable day! I had never lived anything that gratifying, heartwarming, and stressful in my life.” His feelings of joy emerge from the assemblage that the strike has created – not just students in the march, he notes, he sees “workers, union members, ‘construction guys,’ young people and old people, English and French” all constituting a new class shared in their struggle against the state and for a different possible future. “It’s a day I am happy to have lived” Roy writes on March 22nd. 105 As the strike carried on, new assemblages of constituent resistance emerged, in the form of “casseroles” and neighbourhood assemblies, the Aseemblées Populaires Autonomes de Quartiers (APAQs). These assemblages contributed to a sense of spatial democracy: the casseroles were audio assemblies, the APAQs literal ones. Both asserted a democratic control over community space and contributed to processes of collective subject formation. The APAQs in particular, Lakoff (2013a) notes, kept alive the spirit of the student strike “in the hearts of many communities across the island of Montreal” (np). 105 The online text, This is Fucking Class War is neither copyrighted and dated, nor paginated. All quotations come from Roy, Vincent “The Joy of Striking” and is available at http://thisisclasswar.info/roy.html (accessed 26 Feb 2012) 213 Such embodied assemblages can also be read through Hardt and Negri’s visceral communist joy, as they reinstate the notions of community autonomy and power against the miserable authority of the state (Thoburn, 2003). The autonomously-organised casseroles followed the implementation of Bill 78 in May of 2012, when resistance to state authority became a community concern. In several Montreal neighbourhoods people took to the streets at 8pm and began to beat on pots and pans. In open defiance of government statutes, people paraded through the city reclaiming both urban and aural space. These “orchestrolls” were a sonic embodiment of the assembly, and helped celebrate resistance to power. They formed low-tech humanmachinic assemblages: simple tools of pots and pans carried into collected crowds to make noisy dissent, these casseroles formed temporary bubbles of affect. In this way they constituted some of the threads necessary for a broader autonomous social reproduction. The casseroles were opportunities for an “outpouring of emotion and relief,” and a “weighty sentimentality” (Sterne, 2012: np) that could be enacted publicly, as an assertion both of the commonality of feeling and the commonality of the space they claimed. They asserted the city as common, and made embodied “care” central to maintaining a collective ownership of the social and public space of the urban environment. As momentary adventures in creative protest, the casseroles created a foundation for a social reproduction. Such sentiments were even conveyed in one letter to the editor of Le Devoir: Now people greet and talk. Now neighbourhood meetings, discussions, vigils start up casually among neighbours on the steps and balconies of Montreal. The neighbourhood will be less and less alien. This is a true political victory! 214 We should repeat this friendly beating [the evocation of tapage doesn’t quite work as well in English] possibly in other forms, until the land is occupied by neighbours who recognize one another, encounter one another each day by chance, and have known one another over the years. That is how we live in a place that is how we become citizens. My heart swells with joy. As both assemblages of social reproduction, the casseroles expanded the struggle of students outwards throughout the city and the social, reclaiming public space, public education, and a sense of being together. They helped anchor recuperative social reproduction in process of class struggle. While incorporating myriad individuals into a collective space, they confirmed “the existence of something like a democratic public sphere” (Barney, 2012: np), a site of autonomous social reproduction wherein people act in embodied forms and do not just “talk (or link, or like, or tweet)” (Barney, 2012: np).

#### COVID generates more uniqueness for the aff – it’s imperative to engage in the “reprogramming of the social machine”.

Bifo and Petrossiants ‘20

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Andreas Petrossiants: To my mind, much writing on the pandemic is not giving enough attention to how statist approaches to propping up social reproduction carry the imperative to protect productive value, rather than lives; furthermore, government responses have been, across the board, a reactionary defense of work’s legitimation crisis. The US government’s paltry attempt at a temporary universal basic income, for example, is essentially a stimulus package for landlords, as rent payments have been forestalled, at best. The realities of the liberal welfare state died long ago, but liberalism’s incumbent mythologies have persevered, mutated, and grown stronger. Maybe now is when these myths will crumble once and for all? What do you see as the horizon of possibility at a time like this, when certain biopowers and tactics of modern social control age and grow obsolete, and the reaction to save them grows still more violent?

Franco “Bifo” Berardi: I see different conflicting possibilities. Most commentators stress the totalitarian effect of the present emergency. When people are frightened for their own life they accept limitations on freedoms they would not accept otherwise. Western media (particularly in the US) have harshly criticized the Chinese reaction to the outbreak, but in the long run we are discovering that the Chinese have been much more effective at containing the virus. In an article in El Pais, the German-Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han writes that Chinese people have a totally different approach to big data collection and ensuing forms of control.

The hypostatization of the concept of personal freedom in the post-Romantic Western world is put to question in the Chinese cultural context, as is the very concept of the “private sphere”—in that context it has no translation and no meaning. However, the rhetoric of Western democracy is based on a Eurocentric prejudice that the imminent danger of extinction is forcing under scrutiny. So, we should expect that the current pandemic is going to prepare us for the full integration of Western Romantic individualism and eastern Confucian collectivism under the aegis of capitalist exploitation. The full implementation of the capitalist nightmare.

Nevertheless, I know that, as Naomi Klein puts it, “if there’s one thing history teaches us it’s that moments of shock are profoundly volatile. We either lose a whole lot of ground, get fleeced by elites, and pay the price for decades, or we win progressive victories that seemed impossible just a few weeks earlier.” All of a sudden, the pandemic has reactivated the future as a space of possibility, because the automatisms (both technological and financial) that disabled political subjectivity in the past neoliberal decades have been broken, or at least destabilized.

The economic and social scenario that we are going to discover when we emerge from the present pandemonium is hardly imaginable. It will not resemble past recessions, because it will be a crisis of supply and of demand simultaneously, and because the collapse is exposing the prospect of stagnation that was already visible in the last ten years, notwithstanding the efforts of reviving economic growth. Growth has slowed to the point of creating a sort of “bad utopia” in recent decades. The reason was not a provisional crisis, but the exhaustion of the physical resources of the planet, notwithstanding technological increases of productivity. Paradoxically we have been unable to see the possibility of reducing work time because we have been obsessed with the superstitions of increased national productivity—which is not a measure of how many useful things we produce, but rather the measure of the accumulation of monetary value.

Now that spell is broken. Obviously, the economic slump, if not a full-blown economic catastrophe, that the pandemic will continue to provoke will demand reconstruction efforts, but we are in the position to decide what it is that we want to rebuild, and what we want to forget. We can abandon the extractive model, and adopt non-polluting technologies, for example. Most importantly, we can abandon a model in which consumption is mandatory.

Now, one thing is crystal clear: the main cause of the present distress is the primacy of private profit over social interests. Neoliberal destroyers of the healthcare system are responsible for today’s European and US nightmares. In Italy, neoliberal austerity has slashed one-fifth of intensive care units, and one-third of general practitioners. Private clinics have invested in expensive therapies for the rich while the impoverished public system has abandoned the production of sanitary masks. Nine percent of Italian doctors have been infected because they have been obliged to work in impossible conditions. The neoliberal pundits are now silent, those who destroyed the public system are hiding, but they will come back after the end of the pandemic. They must be impeached, so to speak—forced to show themselves; they must be treated as the fascists were treated after the end of WWII.

The nation state is dead

AP: In the US, it’s an absolute nightmare—we have 924,000 hospital beds across the country, but 2.3 million prison beds. In New York City, where I’m based, we’ve lost 20,000 hospital beds in the last 20 years because of the continual privatization of medicine. In this context, it’s perhaps not so surprising that many people across political affinities have become admirers of forms of authoritarian statism as certain governments have enforced strict lockdown measures, which are necessary. The equivalence is an illusion, however. But, then how do we advocate for a popularly-organized response to containing the virus, without propping up the power of the state at the same time?

FB: The neoliberal aggression on the public sphere cuts to public spending, right-wing talk against so-called “big government,” and so on have provoked a false conception: that if neo-liberal capitalism is anti-statist, then social opposition to austerity must necessarily be pro-State. I don’t think that we need a strong state to respond to this type of crisis or others; what we need is a strong coordination of grassroots social organizations—professional, cultural, educational, medical—that can become the concrete fabric of social reproduction. The current need for the centralization of public intervention in the emergency is an administrative, technical, and organizational question that need not be answered by a state formation.

The political function of the State is another thing, and I think that the political function of the Modern State will not be revived by the present emergency. Modern statehood, the legacy of the early modern absolute monarchies, have been theorized by philosophers like Thomas Hobbes and Niccolò Machiavelli as central protectors of the function of political decision. The concept of decision (from the Latin dēcīdere‎, choosing one possibility from among many) is philosophically crucial here. Decision implies the ability to know all the relevant events in the social sphere, and the ability to enforce a prospective choice. These two abilities (to know and to enforce) are no longer granted to political subjects, and we must reclaim them. The vast complexity of today’s networked reality has grown beyond the possibility of any exhaustive knowledge and of effective enforcing—it is centralized. So, we must envisage a non-centralized form of political action, a dissemination of decision-making to the multiplicity of social life. The project of a new sovereignty of the State, which is the core of the theoretical proposals by people like Ernesto Laclau, Jorge Aleman, Chantal Mouffe, Carlo Formenti, and many others, is a delusion. The nation state is dead, it has been killed by neoliberal globalization and can only be revived in the form of an identitarian, totalitarian form of violence against the multiplicity of prospects that belongs to new compositions of labor. The emergence of an even stronger, re-legitimized State is a dangerous possibility in the aftermath of the pandemic: a techno-totalitarian system of control of life and of language that we are already witnessing in China.

Reprogramming the social machine

AP: On the public sphere as a site of action, the pandemic emerged on the heels of anti-neoliberal uprisings in Chile, Hong Kong, Iraq, Lebanon, Spain, and elsewhere (many of which are attempting to continue and we hope will only grow). In short, the neoliberal order was already being questioned and organized against (in anti-capitalist and reactionary formations). You ask in your recent piece in Nero (published in English on the Verso Blog) whether this pandemic is the end of that story. Do you believe it is? As workers stage walkouts, even though they must continue working to survive? As incarcerated prisoners get sick and revolt, and are punished by the state further just for the prospect of wanting to live? Is it time for us to write new stories? I’m thinking of Amazon warehouse workers that organized a successful walkout in NYC to protest unsafe working conditions, and were punished for it. I’m thinking of nurses and other medical frontliners across the United States who are publicly questioning private medicine.

FB: The global revolt that erupted in the last months of 2019 was a sort of convulsion of the worldwide social body. These different rebellions were not able to find a common strategy—for now, at least. So, the convulsion resulted in a collapse. But, now we are in something like a paralysis that follows collapse. What we are feeling now is the fear of contagion, of boredom, and of the world that we’ll find when we’ll be allowed to go out again. However, fear can be a condition for catalyzing the change that we need. Boredom can be turned into creative desire for action, curiosity for something surprising, the expectation of the unexpected.

Mike Davis argues that global capitalism “now appears to be biologically unsustainable in the absence of a truly international public health infrastructure.” I would be more radical: global capitalism is unsustainable for human life altogether. And we must invest our imaginative energies in re-programming the social machine beginning from the present lock down. This virus is the opportunity that we were waiting for: the accident that makes possible a much needed reset of the global machine.

AP: I agree with you, but we should be careful not to fall for certain pitfalls in anti-capitalist discourse, as I’m sure you will agree. It’s long been a fetish on the left (from Trotsky to Žižek) to think that specific catastrophes allow for the emergence of new political possibilities and the development of new forms of counter-power, which can be true but shouldn’t be something we depend on for imagining strategy. You’ve written very convincingly on how to sidestep this anticipation, and rather think much more specifically about the crisis, and the chaos and noise that it produces. Naomi Klein, in a less sectarian way than those referenced above, wrote in the Intercept recently: “During moments of cataclysmic change, the previously unthinkable suddenly becomes reality.” I want to ask why other, slower forms of crisis (climate collapse, precarity, military occupation, and widespread ethnic cleansing) do not seem to have the same jarring effects, at least globally? Is it just because of the slowness of epistemic violence? Because the virus will affect wealthy parts of the world as well as the poor, that the wealthy cannot imagine themselves immune to this specific cataclysm? Because they can’t techno-engineer their way out of it, at least not yet?

FB: For decades, we have been obliged to work in dangerous conditions. Climate change and the degradation of the environment have not been stopped by protests and widespread awareness. Capitalism does not give a damn about protests and people’s awareness. But now it’s different: the living body of humanity (and the interactive mind) have been somewhat paralyzed by the presentment of the end: in short, a global trauma. Yesterday, the conditions for revolution were present: the sinking of democracy, the arrogance of the powerful, rampant poverty, violent exploitation, ecological devastation, and widely accessible information about what is going on. But, to quote the Invisible Committee: “Reasons do not make revolutions, bodies do.” Now something new has happened: bodies are obliged to stop their economic frenzy. Only trauma can provoke this sudden stop and this unavoidable change of direction. And the pandemic is the trauma that we needed. But, trauma is not enough. Trauma may also lead (and it generally does) to very bad choices—for instance the establishment of a techno-totalitarian system for the greater control of society, in this case. So, what is needed now is a period of active imagination to re-program that which may follow the halt, the big reset of the global machine.

#### Our methodology is one of worker inquiry – an intersection between abstract theorization and individual experiences that allows for material changes. Only through militant creativity in the university can we promote research that is often pushed to the margins.

Woodcock, Jamie. “Digital Workerism, a Framework.” The Fight Against Platform Capitalism: An Inquiry into the Global Struggles of the Gig Economy, by Jamie Woodcock, University of Westminster Press, London, 2021, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1ktbdrm.5. |Harun|

This book has argued that there is an emerging new global composition of platform work. It started with three examples that illustrate the dynamics that have underpinned this shift. They are: 1. The increasing connections between platform workers, showing that they are not isolated. 2. The lack of communication and negotiation from platforms, leading to escalating worker action around shared issues. 3. The internationalisation of platforms, which has laid the basis for new transnational solidarity. These different aspects are driven by the technical composition of platform work. They are also shaped by the shared social composition of platform work, particularly migration. This is underpinned by two key features of this work. The first is that platform work is indeed work, not some kind of flexible self employment. Platforms exert managerial control over workers, profiting from the surplus value extracted during the labour process. While platforms may pretend not to be employers, the labour process involves methods of control and surveillance that do not represent a break from the employment relationship. In fact, the actions taken by platforms to disguise their status as employers result in a sharpening of the contradictions of the labour process. Platforms minimise training, reduce support, refuse to provide equipment, deactivate workers without appeal, and refuse to negotiate. This means that workers have fewer institutional channels through which to deal with problems that emerge from the labour process. Instead, many workers increasingly turn to wildcat strike action to raise their grievances. The platform’s desire not to appear as an employer instead turns it into an even more hostile employer, sparking further worker resistance. The second feature is connected to this. Platform workers are workers. They are not disconnected small businesses plying their trade across a range of platforms. Across most platforms, flexibility is touted as a key reason to sign up. There is a pressing need to push back against the conception of flexibility that is promoted by platforms. Some claim that this is a difficult thing to do. However, Jason Moyer-Lee (2017), the general secretary of the IWGB, has put forward a clear response: ‘flexibility that works for the worker is a marvellous thing. What we do say is that these companies need to abide by the law. Just because some of their workers have flexible work arrangements, that doesn’t mean you can deny them basic rights.’ To return to the example from earlier in this book of the Deliveroo riders in Islington, there is clear evidence of what the platform’s ‘flexibility’ means for workers. I met these drivers on a strike called to protest against the inaction of the platform after the death of a driver. As noted earlier, one of the workers explained that: I spend my whole life on this bike. What kind of life is that? For £2.80 a delivery? I go home, shower and sleep, back out driving all day, seven days I week. I’ve been working since 2014, now I can barely make any money. It has to change … a rider is killed working for £2.80 a delivery, to risk your life for so little money. Another worker added ‘we don’t just want to mourn, we want action, change’. We discussed how dangerous it can be working for Deliveroo in this part of the city. Workers detailed the risk of robberies or road accidents. They felt that the police saw them as a problem, harassing them and becoming another risk in the work. Another worker arrived at the picket line outside a restaurant. He explained how he had been knocked off his moped, breaking his arm. He pulled back his sleeve to show the stitches needed after a metal plate was fitted. Deliveroo had done little to support this so-called self-employed independent contractor. He had brought his two young children along to show them the strike, joking with the other workers that now they were not working either. The claim of self-employment may, for now, absolve platforms such as Deliveroo from the legal requirements owed to workers, but it cannot cover up the callousness of this process. I have met workers in different countries with similar stories: a worker has an accident that was not their fault and they are left to bear the brunt of the platform’s risks. The contractual trick frees capital from its obligations, but it does not prevent the boiling of anger against them. For the owners and managers sitting in plush office spaces, this anger can seem so distant as to not exist. However, on the street corners and outside restaurants it can be seen rising to the surface. I met workers in Islington with an organiser from Hong Kong who was visiting London. Despite organising with workers who This content downloaded from 147.174.1.96 on Sun, 04 Jul 2021 04:37:46 UTC All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms Conclusion: Why Struggles Against Platform Capitalism Matter 87 are a twelve-hour flight away, he was able to quickly share stories and discuss the similarities of the work. On the surface, Deliveroo might look different in both countries, but there are shared concerns and grievances. In Islington, the crowd of Algerian workers stood around their mopeds, big coats on against the weather, with helmets tipped back on their heads. The conversation switched back and forth from English to Arabic, staying mostly in English when a Brazilian worker arrived. Echoes of the Algerian revolution could be heard in the conversation. So, too, did the protests in Hong Kong interact with the union organising. In both contexts, workers can find shared experiences. This book has sought to unpick the relationships that exist behind the app and the screen of platform work. Rather than starting with the platform, we have approached from the other direction. As Cleaver argued, we must begin from an ‘examination of workers’ actual struggles: their content, how they have developed, and where they are headed’ (1979, 58). In the context of transport platforms, this has involved tracing resistance and struggles across different national contexts. There is a convergence in the experience of work that can be found here, as platforms ‘have recruited large numbers of young and migrant workers, connected them via smartphone applications, ordered them to meet in specific places, attempted to immiserate their conditions without any space for negotiation, all the while claiming not to actually employ any of them’ (Cant and Woodcock forthcoming). Transport platform work provides the most developed examples of the three dynamics discussed above. First, there is widespread use of communication methods such as WhatsApp, with overlapping networks of workers that often intersect with migrant communities. Second, there have been waves of wildcat strikes across transport platform work. Third, these strikes have been connected both within countries and internationally. There are the beginnings of organic international coordination and organising in this work. These three dynamics are driven by the technical composition of this work. Platforms have reorganised previously existing forms of work across the city, removing the traditional workplace, managing the work through a reliance on piece rates and algorithms, while avoiding employment regulation through the use of self-employment status. These features create a shared experience of the work beyond national borders – both in the day-to-day of the labour process and also in how workers fight against it. These dynamics are also shaped by the social composition of many of these workers. Despite the platform’s fantasy that workers are isolated individuals and only a temporary inconvenience, they bring their lives and experiences with them into platform work. This includes previous experiences of resistance and struggle, as well as community and solidarity. All these are combining to form a potentially new political composition of platform workers, both in national contexts and internationally. There are, of course, significant differences between Uber drivers in London, Cape Town, Bangalore, San Francisco, and so on. But they are developing a collective This content downloaded from 147.174.1.96 on Sun, 04 Jul 2021 04:37:46 UTC All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms 88 The Fight Against Platform Capitalism subjectivity as Uber drivers. On this basis, new forms of organisation are coming to the fore. These are not just mobilisations against the injustices of platform work (Kelly 1998), but involve ‘labour-process-generated solidarity’ (Atzeni 2009, 15). There are other forms of platform work that require a worker to be in a particular place, for example cleaning and care, which are growing areas of platform work. The dynamics found in transport work are not as pronounced in these forms of work, with little evidence so far of open resistance and struggle. However, this does not mean that capital has succeeded in defeating worker agency. We can consider what kinds of ‘blockages’ (Roggero 2011) are preventing a political recomposition of workers in this context. The fact that recomposition has happened so quickly in transportation should not be taken as evidence that cleaners and care workers cannot struggle in this way. Instead, it shows that they too could wage a struggle against platform capitalism. These ‘blockages’ are clearly also present in the discussion of online work. There are even more challenges here than with cleaning and care work, with many workers physically isolated from each other, perhaps even separated by thousands of miles. However, this new technical composition of outsourced work has not removed the ability of workers to find new ways to connect with each other. Forums, social media, and digital communication have become the new watercooler or street corner for many of these workers. While this might not facilitate building connections as powerfully or as quickly as meeting faceto-face, it has contributed to the development of collective worker subjectivities on these platforms. Through the examples discussed earlier, particularly the Turkopticon intervention and the protests at Rev, resistance can be seen rising to the surface in this kind of work. The dynamics present in transport work are also present in online work, albeit taking longer to crystallise and develop. However, what the examples show is that workers are beginning to find ways to organise against platforms in this work. Why Does This Matter? Despite the increasing evidence of resistance in platform work, whether in transport or online, there remain important questions about how this can develop into worker power. The chapter on understanding platform resistance discussed the challenge of moving from strikes and protests to sustained forms of organisation and tangible victories. In many cases, this work could be assessed as having low bargaining power, with issues relating to low structural and associational power. Capital’s use of platforms has involved introducing a new technical composition that has sought to destroy – or limit – these forms of power. This includes refusing to employ workers, breaking up the labour process, the use of technology, new management techniques, and attempts at isolation. It is also exacerbated by the threat of automation, whether real This content downloaded from 147.174.1.96 on Sun, 04 Jul 2021 04:37:46 UTC All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms Conclusion: Why Struggles Against Platform Capitalism Matter 89 or imagined, that hangs over much of this work. However, it is worth noting Callum Cant’s conception of ‘internal’ structural power. Despite all of these changes, platforms still rely on the labour of workers: no pizzas are delivered by algorithms, after all. Workers can still find and develop forms of disruptive power to strike back at capital. There is also a risk of posing workers’ struggle solely in terms of the power they can wield in conventional terms at the bargaining table. If workers are found to be lacking these capacities, they can be written off as ‘unorganisable’. However, this misses how platform work – like other forms of work – is not a given but is produced by the conflict between workers and capital. It narrows these workers’ experiences and struggles to the platform they work for, cutting them off from other workers’ movements more widely. As Cant (2019) has argued, platform work is a laboratory for capital. It provides a testing ground in which new technical compositions are being experimented with. The success or failure of these tests has implications far beyond the platform economy. This is not to say that platform work should become the sole focus of attention. As Kim Moody warns, this could ‘trivialize the deeper reality of capitalism, its dynamics, and the altered state of working-class life’ (2017, 69). Workers’ inquiry, outlined in this book through the idea of digital workerism, provides a way to develop a deeper understanding of what is happening in platform work. This means understanding the struggles against platforms and their potential, but also learning how to fight new technology in the workplace. While platforms have transformed limited sectors of work so far, there are many other kinds of work that could be reorganised in this way. In particular, there are many public sector workplaces where platforms could be introduced. For example, universities increasingly rely on a supply of precarious workers to provide teaching, often in response to student numbers. It would not require much of a stretch of the imagination to see teaching being provided on a platform basis, with workers brought in just for classes or marking, and receiving numerical scores (as many already do). Similarly, with health and social care there has been an increase of precarious contracts. Platforms could offer a way to further drive down labour costs here. The fight of platform workers therefore matters beyond the immediate platform they are resisting. The ‘refusal’ (Tronti 2019) of these workers when they strike against platforms shows how these forms of technological surveillance, control, and attempted domination can be resisted. This shows up the strengths and weakness of capital’s use of technology in the workplace. It highlights how the imperatives of capital are written into the software and algorithms of these platforms. As Berardi reminds us, ‘in the beginning someone is writing the code, and others are supposed to submit themselves to the effects of the code written by someone’ (2013, ix). As he continues, ‘the pragmatic effects of the code are not deterministic, as far as the code is the product of code writing, and code writing is affected by social, political, cultural, and emotional processes’ (Berardi 2013, x). We are not trapped by algorithms, nor have they found a way to prevent This content downloaded from 147.174.1.96 on Sun, 04 Jul 2021 04:37:46 UTC All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms 90 The Fight Against Platform Capitalism resistance in the labour process. They are a product of the social relations within which they are made. As struggles of platform workers develop, they provide the opportunity to ‘reveal some of the contradictions over production involved in working with code, in parallel to labor conditions and class struggle more broadly’ (Cox 2013, 40). Here, new alliances across the supply chain are possible that can provide a glimpse of how technology could be used differently, while providing powerful weapons to disrupt capital’s technology. This book has also provided an example of experimentation with the ideas of digital workerism. Rather than starting with the platform or technology, it began from workers’ experience. From this perspective it is possible to develop a new understanding of platform workers’ struggles and the directions they are heading in. It also breaks the distinction between online and offline, showing that workers use a combination of these relationships to resist their work. Digital organising is no replacement for face-to-face organising, but it can be used to facilitate worker organising in new ways. Collective subjectivities and networks can be developed between workers located across the world. This highlights that ever ‘since hackers led digital systems on a line of flight from their military origins the Internet has had an ambivalent political virtuality’ (Dyer-Witheford, 2012, 2). Clearly, the internet has been used to develop a new technical composition of platform work, but it can also form part of ‘an electronic fabric of struggle’, used by workers against capital (Cleaver 1995). Digital technology also provides new ways to undertake and circulate workers’ inquiry – as well as workers’ struggle. Despite the challenges of the technical composition of platform work, the use of technology also brings workers into contact with each other. As Romano Alquati (quoted in Roggero 2010) has argued previously, ‘political militants have always done conricerca [coresearch]. We would go in front of the factory and speak with workers: there cannot be organization otherwise.’ Therefore workers’ inquiry (or co-research) should involve finding the factory gates for workers today. For Deliveroo this might mean street corners or restaurants, while for other workers this might be located online. Digital technology provides opportunities for workers’ inquiry beyond just doing inquiries with digital workers (Brown and QuanHasse 2012). The widespread use of smartphones and messaging – alongside posting on social media more generally – indicates that many of these workers are producing and consuming information in new ways. WhatsApp groups are filled with commentary on the work, as well as discussions of struggles against it. The co-writing projects in Notes from Below have been able to use digital tools to facilitate writing and editing with workers without being located in the same room. Similarly, technology allows for these inquiries to be widely read and shared. Digital workerism needs to be alive to the strengths and weaknesses of technology. This means critically analysing the way technology emerges from existing social relations and the acts within them. In relation to platform work, this means understanding how different technologies have been used to discipline and control workers, while also seeing that they have played a role in facilitating new dynamics of international solidarity and struggle. Technology is understood within the specific technical composition of platform work. However, the use of this technology has also revealed a counter-tendency in which workers can take advantage of this new technical and social composition to recompose politically on a higher level. There is, however, nothing automatic about tendencies. As Roggero argues: From the revolutionary point of view, tendency doesn’t mean the objectivity and linearity of the path of history, and doesn’t have anything to do with foreseeing the future. It’s best to leave meteorologists to predict the rain, as militants we must create storms … So tendency means the capacity to grasp the possibilities for an oppositional and radically diverse development within the composition of the present. Tendency is like prophecy: it means seeing and affirming in a different way something which already exists virtually. (2020, 8–9) Digital workerism is not just about analysing the role of technology within the technical composition of work (although this is, of course, important), but is also about the role of technology in class struggle. This is not an argument that platform work and automation have broken the contradiction between labour and capital. That is clearly not true. Instead, the leap to a new political composition can show the different potential uses of technology. Where Next? Alternatives to platform capitalism will come from the struggles of platform workers. However, one of the common arguments about platform work is that capital has made itself redundant through the setting up of platforms. For example, so the argument goes, now that the model has been established, why is it necessary for capital to own and control the platform, seeking monopoly rents? The response has been a call for platform coops (Scholz 2016), using alternative apps. This is often presented as a shortcut to another way of working: just kick capital out of the relationship and workers will be free from the problems of the platform labour process. The first issue with this is that a platform coop would be very unlikely to get the levels of investment that capitalist platforms have had – and even if it did, this would denature its worker-led values. As argued by Englert et al., a platform coop: would have to compete with – and indeed out-compete – a capitalist platform like Uber. While an ethical platform might seem to be an easy This content downloaded from 147.174.1.96 on Sun, 04 Jul 2021 04:37:46 UTC All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms 92 The Fight Against Platform Capitalism sell versus a company like Uber, the latter has a vast marketing budget and already has the user base. The ability for venture capital platforms to run at a loss to ensure monopoly (or near monopoly) status, means that they have the resourcing to be vicious competitors. The only successful alternatives have been able to operate when regulators or legal changes have banned capitalist alternatives. (2020, 141) This approach, as well as many other ideas cooked up by academics and other commentators, understands the current organisation of platform work as a problem. It involves proposing an organisational and technological, but not a political, solution. To use Hal Draper’s (2019) terminology, these are interventions devised and implemented ‘from above’. They often care little about workers’ experience or their struggles. It is worth noting that there are examples of worker-driven coops, but these are few and far between. This approach misses the potential of platform workers’ struggles to contribute to a wider fight against capital. Englert et al. (2020) have pitched this as contributing to a struggle for digital socialism. Drawing again on Draper we can identify ‘socialism from above’ that is ‘handed down to the grateful masses in one form or another, by a ruling elite which is not subject to their control’ (2019, 10). On the other hand, ‘socialism from below’ begins from the ‘view that socialism can be realized only through the self-emancipation of activized masses in motion, reaching out for freedom with their own hands, mobilized “from below” in a struggle to take charge of their own destiny, as actors (not merely subjects) on the stage of history’ (Draper 2019, 10). The struggle of platform workers can contribute to the formation of a digital socialism from below. These workers are fighting against the leading edge of capitalist technological innovation, often subjected to the most advanced forms of control. As argued before, these workers are not isolated test subjects, but instead are forming new subjectivities against platform capital. They can build alliances along the supply chain, both with other workers involved in the services they are providing, but also with the tech workers needed to develop these new technologies. This highlights the class nature of digital technology. Platforms cannot be understood simply as something neutral that needs to be taken into cooperative ownership. Instead this is about wrenching technology and all of its missed potential away from capital and the ‘Californian ideology’ (Barbrook and Cameron 1996). Instead of platform coops, we could imagine ‘platform expropriation’: The hypothesis of this strategy is that a transferal of capital ownership from bosses to workers in the platform sector, achieved through an escalating cycle of political struggle (a cycle that has already been the subject of significant inquiry), would be the optimal way to prevent market competition from undermining different forms of worker-run platforms. This transformation of ownership, however, is not enough in and of itself. Management of the platform has to be placed in the hands of both tech and delivery workers, in conditions of workers’ control. But rather than commodity production under workers’ control, which would remain just a strange form of distributed ownership capitalism, the real socialist possibility in such a reorganisation lies in the decommodification of the platform through its integration into a programme of universal basic services. Rather than maintaining the current market niche of food delivery to relatively well-off urban white-collar workers, this people’s Deliveroo would be actively re-designed to produce the greatest possible social use value. By taking control over their daily activity, exploited platform workers could increasingly become the co-producers of a decommodified urban food system – one premised on the socialist transformation – and collectivisation – of the relations of social reproduction. (Cant, quoted in Englert et al. 2020, 141–2) These are latent possibilities in the struggle against platform capitalism. But these kinds of changes could only be won through a sustained struggle from below. Here we can imagine platforms coops across a range of versions, from those proposed ‘from above’ as a solution to the problems of platform capitalism, to class-struggle-driven platform coops ‘from below’, with a whole range of alternatives in between. Instead of focusing on the particular form of the alternatives, it is helpful to understand the process of getting there. This might involve forging new alliances between platform workers, the labour movement, and other currently ‘unorganisable’ workers. There are experiences and important lessons than can be shared between each of these groups. Workers’ inquiry can provide snapshots of these different struggles. It can provide insights into the struggles of transport platform workers from London, Bangalore, São Paulo, Cape Town, San Francisco – and how these are beginning to converge. Online workers, too, are finding ways to overcome the technical composition of platform work. It is not the role of this book to chart the future of the fight against platform capitalism, or indeed what comes after it. This fight will be led and shaped by platform workers themselves. Their struggles might take the form of waves of strike action, starting cooperatives, seizing the means of production, or creative tactics and strategies yet to be seen. They might focus on building worker power within or beyond platforms. Only one thing can be said for certain: it is through the struggles of platform workers that alternatives can be articulated and won. To return to a crucial but too often overlooked argument from Marx: the worker ‘acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature’ (1867, 283). As Lebowitz has argued, this ‘coincidence of the changing of circumstances and self-change’ provides the basis through which the ‘old subjects, the products of capital, go beyond capital’ (2003, 180). This is why there can be no shortcuts in the struggle against platform capitalism. It is precisely through the process of fighting against platform capital that it can be overcome. The labour process and the technical composition of platform work, as well as the social composition of workers beyond the platform, has laid the basis for a powerful new political composition. Throughout this book, the framework of digital workerism has been used to highlight the increased communication between platforms workers, a propensity to resist and take action, and increasingly international connections being forged in practice. It also provides a way to connect with the resistance and organising that is beginning to emerge across platform work. After all, the stakes of these struggles matter both for platform workers and the workers’ movement more widely. To again paraphrase E. P. Thompson (2013, 8), platform workers were present at their own making. They are present now, leading the fight against platforms, and their struggles will shape the future beyond platforms as well.

#### Thus, the ROB is to engage with the best attuning project that promotes militant creativity.

Woodcock, Jamie. “Digital Workerism, a Framework.” The Fight Against Platform Capitalism: An Inquiry into the Global Struggles of the Gig Economy, by Jamie Woodcock, University of Westminster Press, London, 2021, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1ktbdrm.5. |Harun|

The Practice of Digital Workerism A wide range of traditional – and much less traditional – academic research has gone into writing this book. In particular, it draws on three long-running research projects. The first is a project with Deliveroo and Uber drivers in the UK, which has been ongoing since 2016. In a sense this has been an ethnographic project, engaging with workers in their own context, in the back of cars, outside restaurants, on the street, in meetings, at protests and strikes. It draws on four years of accumulated conversations, chats, opinions, perspectives, and so on. At points, it has also meant formal interviews, surveys, and other elements that might be found in more traditional academic research – as well as co-writing (see Waters and Woodcock 2017). The second is a more traditional academic project. While based at the Oxford Internet Institute, I worked on a series of research projects that focused on comparing working conditions on platforms in South Africa (mainly in Johannesburg and Cape Town) and India (Bangalore). This involved extended periods of fieldwork with platform workers in those three cities, carrying out structured formal interviews that were closer to surveys, as well as semistructured interviews. Part of this also involved interviews with platform operators and managers. This fieldwork also provided the opportunity to engage in less formal academic practices, providing the opportunity to speak with workers and worker organisations in both South Africa and India. The projects also involved international travel to a range of other countries, which provided the opportunity to do this research elsewhere, including in the US, Canada, Germany, Argentina, Brazil, Belgium, Switzerland, Greece, Italy, and France. The third is a collaborative project with the IWGB (Independent Workers Union of Great Britain), building upon the previous two. In conjunction with the union, we successfully secured funding for a project on ‘Transnational Organising Strategies for App-Based Drivers’. Starting in September 2019 and running until February 2020, this involved developing a two-day international conference for app-based drivers. This provided an opportunity to connect the drivers and organisations from the other research projects through a face-to-face meeting. I contributed to the project in two ways: supporting outreach with drivers and assisting with the design and organisation of the conference, held in January 2020 in the UK. All of this research is in the background of the book, whether drawn on explicitly or not. However, the research also involved looking across each of these projects, trying to identify the dynamics, contradictions, tensions, and tendencies emerging in platform work. It takes in the findings of these conventional projects, but also looks for other moments of research and co-research with platform workers. This has taken the form of joint writing at some points, but also many conversations with platform workers. It is these experiences of work that provide the foundation for this book. The argument that builds in This content downloaded from 147.174.1.96 on Sun, 04 Jul 2021 02:06:04 UTC All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms 24 The Fight Against Platform Capitalism this book is not just a matter of reflecting a patchwork of different stories and experiences. It is an argument about how platform work is – and will continue to be – transformed by platform workers themselves. There is, of course, a paradox in writing this down in the format of a book. This is that platform work is continuously mutating and developing – particularly under the pressure of new forms of worker power, the counter-offensives of capital, and new regulation. The dynamics outlined in this book are subject to continual change. There is no doubt that things will have shifted by the time this book is published. The main argument in this book, however, relates to digital workerism – how and why workers’ struggle matters. Some of this matters for academic debates (some of which are directly addressed and criticised in the book), but most of it is significant beyond these limited and often self-referential debates. After all, the debates that platform workers are having across the world are much more useful and interesting. This builds on the longer tradition of workers’ inquiry: that workers’ experience matters, not only for understanding capitalism, but also for how we fight against it. As Marx (1845) reminds us, this is not about interpretations, but about trying to change the world. The practice of digital workerism is also about what research can do, in and against the university, to support platform worker struggles. This means thinking about what research means in the contemporary university. A large part of this involves fighting against the current way of thinking about research: that it must produce a certain number of journal articles and a measurable ‘impact’. It means challenging the university ethics review boards that actively discourage this kind of research process (while simultaneously allowing all kinds of corporate consultancy) by emphasising legal liability or the need to separate the researcher and the ‘subject’ that emerges from the reams of forms needed to do research (Badger and Woodcock 2019). Instead we need to ask: what is the point of doing research about work? And if the answer is not to support workers in struggles to change their own conditions, then we have already picked the wrong side. This does not mean that academics should become some species of ivory tower Leninists, but it does mean thinking about how the resources and materials of the university can be put into the service of workers’ movement – with, of course, academic workers as part of those movements themselves. There are powerful examples of how academic interventions can do this, for example Lilly Irani and Six Silberman’s Turkopticon project (2013) with Amazon Mechanical Turk workers, which will be discussed later. Digital workerism begins from the intervention, working backwards in the case of this book, rather than starting from research. This is also why this book is published in a format that is free to read. Digital workerism is therefore intended as a correction to other ways of approaching platform work. For example, as Englert et al. argue: This content downloaded from 147.174.1.96 on Sun, 04 Jul 2021 02:06:04 UTC All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms Digital Workerism, a Framework 25 The rapid growth of the gig economy and platform work has provided a focus for new forms of digital workerism. As discussed previously, platform work has become symbolic of many of the far reaching – and potential future – changes in work. Too often, the focus is not on new forms of class composition this entails, but becomes narrowly concerned with technologies and algorithms. (2020, 136) Instead, this book builds on a growing set of militant practices. These include Callum Cant’s project with Deliveroo (2019), my own project with videogame workers (Woodcock 2019b), as well as an increasing number of workers’ inquiries from Notes from Below and other publications. These are experiments about the possibilities of digital workerism. They start from the detailed analysis of class composition, in which digital technology plays a role, shaping and being shaped by class struggle. Digital workerism provides a basis for the analysis that follows. This book starts from the stories and experiences of platform workers. It is inspired by the workerism of the past, of contemporary practices of workers’ inquiry, as well as Roggero’s powerful arguments for what this means: Those who choose the individual path will die alone. That which distinguishes the militant is the hatred for that which they study. The militant needs hatred to produce knowledge. A lot of hatred, studying the core of that which they hate most. Militant creativity is above all the science of destruction. So political practice is either pregnant with theory, or it isn’t political practice. We need to study in order to act, we need to act in order to study. And to do the two things together. Now more than ever, this is our political task. (2020, 19) The hatred here is driven by hearing platform operators who claim that they are not employers. From those enriching themselves on the labour of others, exploiting legal loopholes, forcing workers to take on the risks of the business, immiserating them with false promises of something better. It is about finding moments of strength about how the current state of things can be destroyed. As Nick Dyer-Witheford reminds us: ‘Cybernetics was from its start the creation of war’ and ‘future proletarian struggles should adequate themselves to wartime’ (2015, 204). It is to this that we now turn.

#### Striking is not a one-off event but a generative process that allows for the creation of new communities.

Petrossiants, Andreas. “The Art of Mutual Aid - Architecture - E-Flux.” E-Flux.com, 2021, www.e-flux.com/architecture/workplace/430303/the-art-of-mutual-aid/. |Harun|

‌2. Breaking the Cycle of Crisis and Recuperation The standard story of mutual aid is that it is born in response to crisis. This is, at least, how crisis management and liberal, capitalist ideology puts it. All the same, it is partly, demonstrably true. After Hurricane Sandy in New York, for instance, autonomous and horizontalist networks from Occupy Wall Street were able to quickly shift their focus to aid under the banner of Occupy Sandy. But mutual aid should not only be understood as a reactive phenomenon. Kropotkin certainly didn’t see it that way; his theory came in response to conversative sociologists and evolutionary psychologists who erroneously appropriated Darwin’s studies to suit capitalist historiography and vice versa. Kropotkin saw collective forms of survival as part of “an instinct that has been slowly developed among animals and men in the course of an extremely long evolution, and which has taught animals and men alike the force they can borrow from the practice of mutual aid and support, and the joys they can find in social life… It is the conscience—be it only at the stage of an instinct—of human solidarity.” But beyond universalist and biological notions of mutual aid’s intrinsic qualities—evincible as they may be and as vexing as they are to contemporary scientists desperately seeking a reconciliation between altruism and the perceived “naturalism” of the market—a quick glance at history shows that mutual aid structures also anticipate crises and mitigate them when they arrive. By its very constitution, the capitalist nation state must be quick to absorb that collective preparation, take responsibility for it, lest it become clear that the state cannot provide, that it is in fact unnecessary and harmful. Described succinctly by Graeber and Grubačić: The late nineteenth century and early twentieth saw the foundations of the welfare state, whose key institutions were, indeed, largely created by mutual aid groups, entirely independently of the state, then gradually coopted by states and political parties. Most right and left intellectuals were perfectly aligned on this one: Bismarck fully admitted he created German social welfare institutions as a “bribe” to the working class so they would not become socialists. City governments across the United States have already begun instituting publicly funded “mutual aid” jobs. But, how can this be seen in any another way than the first step to absorbing collective power to render it powerless? To anticipate this process, some specificity is required. Asad Haider, for example, makes a helpful distinction between “neutralization” and “co-optation,” or recuperation. He writes: What I mean by neutralization is a force which renders opposition ineffective. It is distinct from the potentially moralistic idea of co-optation, which presumes some authentic belonging of the object. Opposition is neutralized not through appropriation, but through the formulation of an effective reactant and the transformation of each element into a new compound… Neutralization comes from the top. It contains and redirects opposition into the harmonious diversity of the system. Taking this framework, it becomes clear that for forms of collective care to become neutralized as popularly accepted functions of the state, they must first be co-opted. Once accepted as such, they can then be subject to austerity. And as with most forms of statist neutralization, it is done through the carceral apparatus. As Peer Illner puts it: “States have been quite happy to let communities perform this type of [mutual aid] work for free, as long as they don’t organize politically in a way that threatens local governments.” In the US, perhaps the most cited historical example of this was the recuperation of the Black Panther Party’s (BPP) Free Breakfast for School Children Program, which FBI director J. Edgar Hoover described as one of the biggest threats to American power. After extrajudicially murdering, framing, and incarcerating members of the BPP, the federal government soon implemented its own breakfast for kids program built on the framework of the Panthers. However, following the pattern sketched above, the US’s program is today “failing to live up to its potential.” According to a study by the Food Research and Action Center, “the program is falling short by at least ten million students, if not more.” In his book Disasters and Social Reproduction: Crisis Response Between the State and Community, Illner argues that mutual aid risks allowing the state to shirk its “duties” by relying on mutual aid parallel to this process of absorption. This argument, however, is itself dangerous, and clumsily puts (at least part of) austerity’s blame on those creating networks to survive, somewhat like how liberals and “professional activists” may blame demonstrators for police violence if those in the street do not conform to sanctioned forms of protest. The goal of mutual aid should be to wrestle tasks from the state while defending against their capture. Another common misconception with mutual aid can be found in Illner’s writing on the 2021 blizzard in Texas. Referencing the International Wages for Housework Campaign (WfH), he claims that mutual aid organizers on the ground in Texas could ask to be remunerated (by the state, ostensibly) for their work. However, this argument forgets that Silvia Federici’s seminal text for the movement was titled “Wages Against Housework,” not as it is so often reproduced “Wages for Housework.” That distinction is crucial. Though there were multiple branches with differing opinions, Federici and her comrades in WfH were less interested in this ultimately statist socialist demand to get paid for housework, but rather in abolishing the wage and the necessity to be paid in order to survive in the first place. Maintenance work isn’t going anywhere: it takes “all the fucking time,” as artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles put it perfectly in 1969. But wages should, and could. The work in Texas as well as other mutual aid networks appearing today make those possibilities clear. One of the most promising proposals to break out from the cycle of aid, recuperation, austerity, and incarceration, was proposed during the pandemic by the Queens cultural hub Woodbine as an alternative to “disaster communism.” Bridging the work of caring for one another with the work of building our own infrastructures, they propose “disaster confederalism” that would provide “the conditions for a kind of infinite strike in which communized resources and infrastructures have a crucial role to play, not only in immediate material survival but in building bases of autonomy for a citywide network of dual power.” Here, rather than embracing the subsumption of mutualist work to the logics of the wage, the goal is in producing self-sustaining and cooperative forms of engagement with one another outside of those logics. Responses to the question "What changes would you like to see after the pandemic?" in Art Work During a Pandemic (2021). 3.