

GigWatch

Studiecirkel via ABF – del 2

Innehåll:

- Silvio Lorusso (2019): Kapitel 2 från boken *Entrepreariat*
- Nick Srnicek (2017): Utdrag från boken *Platform Capitalism*
- Transportarbetaren (2020): [Bzzt ersätter kollektivavtal med "egenanställningar"](#)
- The Verge (2019): [How Silicon Valley's successes are fueled by an underclass of 'ghost workers'](#)

Extraläsning:

- Silvio Lorusso (2019): Kapitel om Fiverr från boken *Entrepreariat*
- LO (2018): Utdrag ur *F-skattesystemets skuggor*
- Gigwatch (2020): [Gigekonomin är en kapplöpning mot botten](#)

Frågor att fundera över:

- Går vi mot en arbetsmarknad där fler och fler jobb blir gig?
- Arbetsrätten har undergrävts under flera årtionden, men det är bara nyligen folk börjat prata om en "gigifiering" av arbetsmarknaden. Finns det en poäng med att prata om gigifiering i stället för prekarisering?
- Vad tycker du om begreppet plattformskapitalism? Är det användbart? Vad blir konsekvensen av att ens "arbetsplats" är en digital plattform snarare än en fysisk plats?
- Vad är kopplingen mellan entreprenörskap och prekariat enligt författaren? Hur förhåller sig prekära arbetare själva till sin livssituation enligt honom?
- I Platform Capitalism skriver Nick Srnieck "*far from representing the future of work or that of the economy, these models seem likely to fall apart in the coming years.*" Vad tror du?

ORIGIN STORY

Let me start with a brief confession. A few years ago, for reasons concerning the apartments I lived in more than my own achievements, I was interviewed for one of Italy's major national newspapers. During the interview, the purpose of which was to produce a collective portrait of cosmopolitan youth, I spoke of my life as a student in various European cities. I enthused about the doctoral research I was doing and did not hide the difficulty of finding work in my own country. A few days later I happened across the newspaper. I searched through the various interviews, each headed by an icon reflecting the degree of satisfaction of the interviewees, until I found mine: a sad face accompanied the title "What happened to our dreams?". To my astonishment, I, who considered myself somehow in control of my own destiny, had been reduced to a victim, a mere statistical fact, a generational cliché: I had been *outed* as a precarious worker. So, instead of doing what I would normally do (feeding my ego by posting the article everywhere I could on social media), I did nothing.

And yet, as I realised later, that portrait was not so far from reality. After all, I had actually sent dozens of CVs around and at the time I was living on a not very substantial scholarship that was soon to run out. Before long I would have to start once again the tedious process of public relations, applications, portfolio, LinkedIn — a few years older and a little less energetic. Would I still be capable of promoting my own *personal brand*? The light cast by the article certainly wouldn't help me. According to the philosopher Byung-Chul Han, "[t]oday, we do not deem ourselves subjugated *subjects*, but rather *projects*: always refashioning and reinventing ourselves". The article had identified me, perhaps for

the first time, as a subjugated individual rather than an autonomous project in progress, or at least not only as that. Truth aside, which image was it better to adopt? The precarious or the entrepreneurial one? An image that admits uncertainty and fears exhaustion, or one that merely celebrates free enterprise and individual determination? And what if the seemingly opposing images were instead two sides of the same perverse coin? We'll call this coin: *entreprenariat*. Now it is perhaps easier to *come out*, that is, to publicly come to terms with one's own status. But first we need to take a good look at the relationship between entrepreneurial resolve and precarious hesitation. That's what I aim to do in this book.

Mixing entrepreneurship with precariat,¹ *entreprenariat* is a neologism that aptly defines the reality that surrounds me (and therefore represents me): a play on words that becomes a tweet that becomes a blog that becomes a book.² Giving value to even the tiniest idea: isn't this part of the entrepreneurial imperative that the *entreprenariat* describes and prescribes? Some theorists suggest reclaiming entrepreneurship, highlighting the cooperative effort on which it is based rather than the heroic individualism to which it is generally associated. This book, while sharing this intent, remains an individual project (however individual any expression of thought may be). This means that I take full responsibility for the ambiguities and limits it contains; but it also means that the *entreprenariat* dictates do not concern

1 The word 'precariat' is itself a portmanteau that combines precariousness and proletariat.

2 I found that the term 'entreprenariat' was also employed by Ph.D. candidate Jason Netherton in a peculiar workshop given in 2016 and entitled "The *Entreprenariat*: Recording Artists in Extreme Metal Music Proto-Markets". Unfortunately, I wasn't able to obtain much information about it besides the abstract (<http://www.events.westernu.ca/events/fims/2016-11/the-entreprenariat-recording.html>).

everyone in the same way. Therefore, rather than making it a universal category and risking “taking a holiday in someone else’s misery”, I have tried to identify the relationships between entrepreneurship and precarity in contexts that are in some way related to me. Although, as sociologist Ulrich Bröckling claims, in the informal economies of some regions of Africa, Latin America and Asia, dedicating oneself to entrepreneurial activity in the broad sense is often the only way to survive.

This book is about entrepreneurs. But it is not the typical hagiography of visionaries like Steve Jobs or self-made men (alleged or otherwise) like Elon Musk. Nor is it a self-help manual. No, this book describes the sources of compulsions and inhibitions of the so-called microentrepreneurs: students, freelancers, the unemployed (and sometimes even employees) forced to develop an entrepreneurial mindset in order not to succumb to the growing precariousness that involves both the economic and existential sphere. Welcome to the precariat, where the entrepreneurial spirit is a curse rather than a blessing.

This book investigates the effects of a mutation that went hand in hand with the eulogy of first creativity and then innovation ratified by policy makers: entrepreneurship, a mindset originating from a specific practice, has turned into *entrepreneurialism*, a widespread system of values so deeply rooted as to be imperceptible. Occupying a level of what Mark Fisher has defined as “capitalist realism” is entrepreneurial naturalism: enterprise as an innate human quality. Meanwhile, precarity has become the norm for a substantial section of the population, settling on the existing like a physical agent in the atmosphere. The result is a common feeling based either on fear or blind enthusiasm: the inability to fully

determine what's next radicalises the experience of the present. The future is Medusa-like: in order not to turn to stone, we must put ourselves on the line and relentlessly make new personal investment. We can't look at the future in its eyes and yet we can't ignore it, so we must only deduce it from our short-term present. We must innovate ourselves. When idleness is denied, risk-taking becomes unavoidable.

Entrepreneur or precarious worker? These are the terms of the cognitive dissonance experienced by new workers (not exclusively those whose work is predominantly cognitive), immersed as they are in a sort of collective hypnosis that turns existence into a shaky project in perennial start-up phase. Within this setting it is time itself that implodes, as the increasingly detailed measurement of an abstract concept of productivity marks the fragmented periods of self-employment, offering us a fleeting impression of control. While the informal spaces of nomadic work (airports, stations, bars, kitchens and bedrooms) transform the city into a permanent office, the actual workplace becomes a playground for eternal college students. The pressure of the entreprecarariat does not just demand the constant upgrade of traditional professional skills, but it invades the realm of character, making good humour, optimism and cordiality a competitive advantage to cultivate through meditative practices and behavioural psychology in the form of mobile apps.

The internet doesn't help, as we discover exploring a series of digital platforms that incorporate entrepreneurial dynamics while taking advantage of widespread precariousness: from social networks like LinkedIn, which make a feature out of competitiveness and mimetic desire, to online marketplaces such as Fiverr, which mediate freelance work around the globe — Berlin or Banga-

lore, it makes no difference — to sites like GoFundMe, which fundraise for emergency situations or conditions of hardship, ranging from an unpaid internship to cancer.

Is there no other choice then but to resign oneself to such a life in *permanent beta*? Or, on the contrary, is it possible to reject the entrepreneurial gospel by reclaiming the demands raised by the precarious viewpoint? Do art and irony serve any purpose? While expressing some reserve about these instruments, the book does suggest some possible ways of achieving this enterprise. Trying to avoid both victimhood and euphoria, borrowing the language of branding and subverting the stereotypical registers of entrepreneurship (such as the motivational industry and the managerial jargon, within an *in vitro* representation of the ideal office), *Entreprenariat* is the mirror of a society in which everyone is an entrepreneur and nobody is safe.³

³ I decided to maintain most references applicable to the Italian situation included in the original edition of the book. This is to show that entrepreneurialism is not only a doctrine embraced by US and UK business schools, but a 'common sense' that amalgamates with local beliefs. After the initial publication I had the chance to expand my research on the subject while further reflecting on it. Traces of this activity can be found mostly in the footnotes, which can be interpreted as a *posteriori* ruminations on the original content.

What do we talk about when we talk about precarity? Providing a single answer is impossible and probably counterproductive as it would involve an inevitable oversimplification. What is more, the literature is vast and derives from widely varying contexts. The issue of precarity touches Italy and France, as well as the United States, Venezuela and Japan. People fight under the banner of the precariat in Finland, Spain and the United Kingdom. Journalists and academics speak of precariousness, just as do politicians, workers and students. Often the tone is one of grumbling, sometimes it is resentful, only rarely optimistic. The spectre of precariousness also haunts a series of generational labels: the US boomerang generation, the French Génération Tanguy, the Italian VAT population, the Airbnb generation,¹⁰ NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), and finally the generic, although often disparaging, Millennials. A set of semantic classifications denoting uncertainty, disillusionment, future void, anxiety and discomfort.

Film directors have dealt with precarity from a sometimes explicitly critical viewpoint, as did Italian Paolo Virzì in *Your Whole Life Ahead of You*. This 2008 film is a disheartening portrait of a brilliant young graduate trapped in a dead-end job as a receptionist, hostage to the team building exercises on the agenda in an environment permeated by 'the new spirit of capitalism' — as sociologists Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello had named it a few years earlier. More often though the precarious condition remains in the shadows, emerging

¹⁰ *Generazione affittacamere* in Italian, as Filippo Lubrano calls it on [Linkiesta](#): a generation of people who inherited a house from their parents and derive a small income by renting it out.

only in the shape of a moral fairy tale made palatable by a happy ending that confirms the merits of an unshakable work ethic. This is what happens in Gabriele Muccino's 2006 *The Pursuit of Happyness*, inspired by the life of millionaire entrepreneur Chris Gardner. The film follows the adventures of an ambitious but penniless black man (played by Will Smith) who, despite having a son to support, a wife who leaves him and a rent he is unable to pay, manages to successfully carry out his internship (unpaid) in a prestigious financial advisory firm, beating the competition to finally get a much sought-after position as a broker on a permanent contract.

Although precarious work is now an all-too familiar concept all over the world, Italy has played a special role in establishing it as such. In the mid-2000s, EuroMayDay, an international event held to coincide with Labour Day, played a catalysing role. Reflected in popular culture (complete with proto-meme San Precario, patron saint of precarious workers), it led to a series of theoretical manifestos, such as the 2004 *Bio/Pop Manifesto of the Metroradical Precariat* and a monographic issue of the British magazine *Mute*, on the cover of which was a contemporary Virgin Mary nursing her baby while at work in a call centre. What allegory could be more effective for what is known as cognitive precarity? Call centres say a lot about how work has changed in the last few decades, with their low-cost temporary work initially carried out within the borders of Italy and then partially relocated to Eastern Europe. Even today call centres offer a temporary outlet for those who go abroad to study, or are simply in search of their own fortune. Although they're still with us, new symbols of precarity are emerging powerfully. Just think of food delivery riders, part of the wider purgatory known as the gig economy, who, equipped with high-vis jackets and branded bags, speed across

the city like the new sandwich men. Compared to that of the receptionist, precarious workers in the gig economy have fewer apparent constraints and more flexibility: there is no apparent real-life boss to monitor the work, given that the checking systems are all on the smart-phone. No formal space is shared with colleagues and relationships are mainly with an abstract entity.

Precarious Trajectories

At first sight, precariousness seems to be nothing new. As architect Francesco Marullo points out, Max Weber was already using the term *prekär* in 1918 to indicate the conditions of young German researchers at the mercy of free labour, before they were able to land a paid job. Weber considered it to be positive given that it guaranteed a high turnover and greater dynamism in knowledge production. What has changed today? What is strictly understood as work — with its set of relationships, conditions and constraints — tends to evaporate when it becomes the ambience of our lives. However this is not all there is to precarity. It is therefore necessary to build a further interpretation that includes the existential dimension and the discourse taking place in the public sphere. The precarity issue involves media narratives, advertising, marketing and interactions mediated by digital platforms, as well as their effects on personality and social relationships. If, as we have seen, entrepreneurship is something more than a job, so precarity, even when rooted in working relationships, involves multiple aspects of living. What follows is therefore an attempt to outline an inevitably non-exhaustive map of the wide-ranging considerations on precarity, seeking out the work of authors who do not always make explicit reference to it. The aim is to circumscribe the precarity issue by examining its various qualities. Can we speak of precarity as an experienced process

or an acquired status? Does precarity indicate a class, a generation or a mere state of affairs? To what extent is one precarious? And how does the precariat internally deal with competition to escape the fate predetermined by its name? Finally, can the precariat forge the tools for its own collective emancipation?

However, before going into a detailed examination of precarity, it is worth mentioning Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's definition, which has the advantage of not being intrinsically connected to work. For Berardi, "[p]recarious is [sic] person who is able to know nothing about one's own future and therefore is hung by the present and praises God to be rescued from the earthly hell (the term precarity derives from praying)". When he does go into the specifics of work, however, Bifo highlights a paradox: the erosion of the constraints of work dependence certainly does not create autonomy, but in fact a more subtle and anxious form of subjugation — an originally marginal condition, which is gradually affecting an increasingly large part of the population. In addition to this definition, Berardi coined the term "cognitariat": if the proletariat's only property was their offspring, for the cognitariat it becomes the totality of their own cognitive faculties, expressed through language and creativity. Cognitarians are alienated from their main product, language, and from their peers, due to de-territorialisation and discontinuities that prevent them from implementing permanent forms of social organisation. What cognitarians experience is more than a temporary phase, as precarity — Bifo tells us — is the name of the era that follows modernity.

Another line of thought relating to precarity is rooted in the work of Judith Butler, an American philosopher who sees *precariousness* as inherent to human life.

Butler claims that since existence itself is precarious, this ontological characteristic should be a starting point for a way of life that rejects individualistic autonomy and adopts interdependence. Isabell Lorey, a political theorist based in Berlin, uses Judith Butler's ideas to define "three dimensions of the precarious": a level (*precarity*) constituted by the various political, social and legal responses to the first is superimposed on the previously mentioned *ontological precariousness*. Finally, there is the dimension of *governmental precarisation*, that is, the relationship between the dynamics of precarisation, government and self-government. Lorey stresses the fact that nowadays governmentality takes place *through* the precarious, and not against it. In her *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing takes up the theme of existential precariousness suggesting that precarity, rather than being an exception, represents the norm for our times and defines it as "the condition of being vulnerable to others".

The End of Life Narratives

Published in 1998, Richard Sennett's *The Corrosion of Character* offers a good insight into the effects of the new working conditions, and, consequently the new social ones, on personality. The American sociologist's analysis is based on a clear historical division marked by the introduction of flexibility. Although flexibility lies at the core of Sennett's focus, the detrimental effect on personality implicit in the title offers an answer to the issues flexible work raises. Flexibility acts primarily on *character*, understood as "the ethical value we place on our own desires and on our relations to others". Sennett believes character to be a broader category than personality because it is not limited to the individual sphere but involves social relationships and behaviour: it's a

conduct. The short and exceptional era of pre-flexibility Sennett identifies punctuates a history of crises. During the relative well-being of the economic boom that took place in various Western countries, it was legitimate to imagine life and career as linear progressions made up of cumulative results, an idea that reflected the economic growth and advancing technological progress. The routine and solid objectives of a perhaps monotonous, but also stable career provided the opportunity to interpret one's own existence as a road to be travelled, a *career* in the original sense. The advent of flexibility marked the collapse of these foundations and with them the loss of the value of experience (seniors are denigrated by juniors), of the clarity of authority and the visibility of power relationships.

To introduce his thesis, Sennett does not give us the story of a poor person, but the partially reworked tale of a successful consultant, son of an immigrant janitor. Father and son respectively represent a 'before' and an 'after'. Unlike the educated son, the various worries of the janitor do not include losing control of his own life, a fear that — states Sennett — is an essential part of the curriculum of contemporary workers. While work shatters into a series of 'projects', inner life floats adrift, since it is no longer guided by a clear ethical conduct. The same happens with social relations, continuously interrupted by frequent travel and job changes. Nowadays it is clear to everyone that the difficulty of creating a coherent life narrative in a society "composed of episodes and fragments" — a society in which the long term is an exception and the only constant is change — does not only regard wealthy consultants, but it brings together different social strata, even though they are affected in different ways. The challenge then becomes that of giving meaning to one's existence, which is less difficult

for those who identify fully with what they do, in spite of the material conditions in which they do it, or those who have a qualification recognised by their professional peers. In Sennett's view, the current generalised uncertainty differs from the past in that it does not derive from the awareness of a looming disaster.

To Sennett, there are two sides to change: if on the one hand it causes anxiety and fear, on the other it becomes a goal to pursue that acquires value in itself. It follows that a willingness to risk ends up coinciding with a sense of autonomy, because, as writer Erica Jong puts it, "the trouble is, if you don't risk anything, you risk even more". If not to risk is tantamount to failure, stability becomes a kind of "living death". But what does it mean to risk? It often means taking on types of structural difficulty as if they were the result of personal choices, thus transferring the responsibilities of institutions to individuals. Sennett does not limit his gaze to those subjected to change, but also examines those who approach change with confidence and enthusiasm. The sociologist encountered various specimens at the Swiss town of Davos, home to the World Economic Forum. Sennett sees the boss of Microsoft as a prime example of one who feeds on change (in 1998 at the peak of his entrepreneurial success and nowadays a much appreciated philanthropist). What distinguishes Bill Gates from his predecessors is a "tolerance for fragmentation". But not everyone has the same *resilience* as the techno-philanthropist and is therefore forced to develop different strategies to deal with a disorientation caused by the constant shuffling of the cards. Among these is irony: "An ironic view of oneself is the logical consequence of living in flexible time, without standards of authority and accountability", comments Sennett.

Alienation in the Making

British economist Guy Standing, who worked for over thirty years at the International Labour Organization, claims that the precariat is not yet a class-for-itself, but a class-in-the-making, with its social risks, including the emergence of waves of hatred and violence and an escalation of the far right. For this reason, the precariat is a “dangerous” class, as suggested by the title of his principal contribution to the subject: *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. Standing sees precarious work as “a distinctive bundle of insecurities” which, as Sennett also claims, directly bears the risks sustained in the past by the system. What characterises the precariat and the movements that identify with it is an ambivalence between a sense of penalisation and some sort of ‘heroism’. Precarious workers are divided between those who feel they’re a victim of a change to which they are subjected, and those who feel they are interpreting a cultural and institutional renewal moving in a different direction. In other words, in Standing’s view there are “groaners” who are allergic to precarity and “grinners” who go along with it cheerfully. Standing highlights the fact that in the public debate the sense of exploitation generally predominates, while only rarely does the emancipatory potential of precarity emerge. Added to this is the rather romantic image of a class that rejects bourgeois materialism and the tedium of the so-called soul-crushing job. The precariat is also diametrically opposed to the proletariat, in that it is characterised by an *informal* status:

Many entering the precariat would not know their employer or how many fellow employees they had or were likely to have in the future. They were also not ‘middle class’, as they did not have a stable or predictable salary or the status and benefits that middle-class people were supposed to possess.

But who are the precariat? To Standing, this class-in-the-making is populated both with adolescents and the elderly, migrants and single mothers. The wide range of groups is hardly surprising given that a quarter of the population, it seems, is precarious and the figures are on the rise. Guy Standing identifies seven socio-economic groups and places the precarious in between the *proficians* — recognised professionals who jump from one project to another without difficulty — and the unemployed. Given that as a rule precarious workers have no way of identifying themselves with their work, they experience a “status discord”, a contrast between an imagined status (perhaps in relation to their own family standards and educational level) and the real one, with a low income, instability and lack of professional recognition. An important distinction also emerges between job and professional role: it is not enough to guarantee temporary workers a permanent job unless the role is suited to their skills and ambitions. Role is crucial, since it goes beyond actual work: identity as a whole nowadays tends to coincide with one’s own training, and when this does not match one’s function at work there is a sense of *dysfunction*. Given that social and professional variables are dynamic, precarity can also be seen as a process:

To be precariatized is to be subject to pressures and experiences that lead to a precariat existence, of living in the present, without a secure identity or sense of development achieved through work and lifestyle.

On an emotional level, what characterises the precariat according to Standing are four A’s: anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation. The first two derive from a sense of individual and social insufficiency, particularly in view of the constant bombardment of signs of success online

and on tv. While anger and anomie are produced by social identification, it is uncertainty about the future that generates anxiety. Finally, alienation arises from the need to produce those signs of success and self-mastery that in turn generate more anger and anomie. In this vicious circle, precarity is seen as a fall. It is a movement that betrays the passivity of the individual. Precarity means *being moved* and therefore is synonymous with a loss of control. Given the circularity of these emotions, it is not surprising that the precariat is fighting itself by producing a self-image made up of opposing factions: the underemployed stigmatise the unemployed who in turn want to knock the former off their perch. Faced with the difficulty of constantly updating skills and undergoing new training, the precarious worker lives in a state of paralysis, exacerbated by the fact that their will and *willingness* has to be continually demonstrated. Thus the training itself (including education) starts to resemble something of a scam, given that, alone, it is not enough to keep the promises of professional fulfilment and relative well-being. To this, the educational institutions respond with the rhetoric of *employability*, claiming to offer the skills and aptitude necessary to find a job.¹¹

Expectations vs. Reality

In his *Teoria della classe disagiata*,¹² published in 2017, Raffaele Alberto Ventura rarely speaks of precarious

11 This concept is reflected in various policies aimed at reforming education in Italy: from the recent implementation of the school-work alternation programme to the three skills Silvio Berlusconi based his 2001 electoral campaign on: 'English', 'internet', 'enterprise' (it was the three I's in Italian: *inglese, internet, impresa*).

12 The title of Ventura's book refers to Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, published in 1899. According to Ventura, "conspicuous consumption", a defining feature of the economic relationships of a high-status class, can now be observed in other strata of the population. However, what is nowadays conspicuously consumed is positional and aspirational, given that it's not necessarily meant to maintain one's status but can also be an instrument to achieve such status.

workers in explicit terms, yet his work often returns to the existential malaise detected by Sennett. Furthermore, he takes a close look at Standing's status discord, which he terms as "class dysphoria". To use Standing's language, one could say that Ventura's aspirational class¹³ is simply middle class precarity-in-the-making, seen however through the lens of positional strategies implemented by its own members and the institutions that represent them. These strategies are mostly counterproductive, doomed to failure, desperate even. Ventura positions the aspirational class in the final stage of the so-called 'opulent' societies, split between Keynesian nostalgia and threats of austerity: the stage of collapse. He shares some of the various characterisations of the precariat with the previous authors: besides the idea of anomie and malaise sparking resentment he, Like Standing, has a critical attitude towards education. Whereas Standing highlights how higher education in particular is no longer able to keep its promise of a job, Ventura sees it as a generator of dissatisfaction which, to paraphrase Ivan Illich, teaches people to "think rich and live poor" and produces a "fratricidal struggle" for the few places in the sun. *Prëkar* anyone?

Ambiguities similar to those of the precariat characterise the aspirational class. Ventura sometimes speaks of a generation, as a "class within a generation", or of a "large part of the middle class". Belonging to the middle class, as well as the ambition to be part of it, plays a decisive role in the processes of identifying the aspirational class. It certainly does not consider itself proletariat,

13 ——— 'Aspirational class' is also the phrasing adopted by Elizabeth Currid-Halkett in *The Sum of Small Things*. Currid-Halkett's main focus is the consumer habits of a new elite defined more by cultural capital than by income. According to the author, the consumption of this aspirational class is inconspicuous (organic food, yoga classes, podcasts, etc.), yet it produces general lifestyle shifts.

being “too wealthy to give up its aspirations, but too poor to be able to achieve them”. Indeed, aspirations that translate into “positional consumption” (whether it be a master’s degree in creative writing or an unpaid internship), feed the economic engine of the aspirational class. According to Ventura there is nothing fanciful in this, since the only way not to descend a few steps of the social ladder is to try to climb it. Positional consumption (consumption in that it produces costs) “serves to establish social roles and access to resources”. Giving up this kind of consumption means avoiding risk but, as we said earlier, this only actually increases said risk.

Unfortunately, however, the prestige afforded by such consumption is inherently relative, that is, it exists as a yardstick: one only needs to think of the social value of a degree today compared to fifty years ago. So what the aspirational class lives in is above all an “existential condition”, which is tantamount not to poverty, but to relative misery. Relative to what? To a planned, expected or simply imagined personal realisation. In this sense, the aspirational class contains features typical both of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Much like the former, it means to preserve its status and like the latter, it constantly feels threatened by Marx’s notorious reserve army. The aspirational class shares the same generalised conflict as the nineteenth-century romantic artist, whose ideals are in constant struggle with reality, understood here simply as economic reason. The aspirational class knows that “one does not speak of money” yet it is all too aware that, as Virginia Woolf said, “intellectual freedom depends upon material things”. While Ventura does prove sympathetic in some ways, he also launches a sharp attack, which is worth reading in full:

we see ourselves on the side of the oppressed,

but perhaps we are nothing but failed oppressors [...] It feels good to jump on the bandwagon of the defeated, the oppressed, and the exploited. It is convenient to proclaim oneself cognitive workers and to join the struggle of the international proletariat against capitalism. Anything, so as not to admit that it could be us at the front, among the ranks of the “enemies of the people”.

While living on the backs of the true victims of global capitalism, the aspirational class perpetuates its perverse game, facing a real “class euthanasia”, brought about in various ways. Some become proletarians, others prefer to pursue their career over reproducing, many emigrate and, finally, still others take their own lives. Is it best to decide collectively to give up individual dreams? This is not very likely, given that “in the hysteria of the middle class that is watching itself die, collective solutions do not seem feasible”. Among these, Ventura suggests in a whisper the possibility of defining “an exit strategy of self-representation”, refuting the socially constructed self-image in favour of reality, but only individually, because self-representation cannot be ruled by decree.

Damnation and Liberation

After considering the work of authors who make reference to it in some way, it is now time to return to the origins of the precariat movement. We will therefore round off with *General Theory of the Precariat* by Alex Foti, one of the main activists in the ChainWorkers collective and a key organiser of EuroMayDay. Published in 2017, his essay traces the development of this parade, offering the diagnosis that precarity came about due to decades of neoliberal policies, and providing some political and cultural directions for the growth of the movement. According to Foti, the precariat is neither a class-in-the-

making nor the latest evolution of the working class nor even is it specific to recent generations, but instead it represents what work itself has become. Precarity is therefore a reality that is progressively extending to society as a whole. It is the times we live in that are precarious, poisoned by a seemingly chronic and permanent global economic crisis, a “great recession”.

If, as the author warns, “precariousness is the new reality”, who belongs to the precariat? Among its ranks are telephone operators, fast food workers, freelance programmers, supply teachers and so on. Although it is not a strictly generational problem, Foti sees young people as the vanguard of the precariat, as they make up the majority of it and are the only cohort able to come together under this flag. Thus creating value from their main assets of high cultural potential and relational capital. Foti sees the precariat as already in control of the new means of production: computers connected to the net. The precariat is indeed underpaid, under-employed and under-protected, but also over-educated and therefore over-exploited. Foti’s precariat is young, mainly urban and multicultural. It is divided into creative class, logistics workers, service class and unemployed; with some individuals often belonging to one or more of these categories.¹⁴ In this sense, the *temp* represents the precarious worker par excellence. Not even students are excluded: less a category protected from the gales of the world of work than potential members of the precariat (an Italian banner against school-work alternation

¹⁴ *Contra* Foti, cultural theorist Angela McRobbie disputes the assimilation of creative workers within the ranks of the precariat. Such association justifies a vain hope: the unification of a novel working class. Furthermore, it obscures the section of the population for which labour has always been precarious, such as catering work. Therefore, instead of precarisation, McRobbie speaks of a “middle-classification” of the creative workforce, as it internalises middle-class values such as professionalism and passion for the job.

read “exploited today, precarious tomorrow”). Finally, Foti divides workers according to the various degrees of intensity of precarity characterising their existence, with the highest being that suffered by migrants, and the lowest for workers blessed with a permanent contract.

The author is keen to point out (as does Ventura) that precarity does not necessarily mean poverty, although it is its main threat. And this is where the question of fear as an economic engine becomes central as the precarious are afraid of plummeting into a social abyss and, as a result, experience the sensation of falling that Standing describes. Foti’s precariat does not include, as other analysts claim, the workers exploited in the sweatshops of global semi-peripheries, but is instead rooted in the metropolises of the Global North with their high rate of infocapitalism. It is the precariat that lives in Bushwick in New York, Kreuzberg in Berlin, Isola in Milan... So we are not talking of 99% of the world population, but of 15-25%. To Standing’s seven-class division, Foti responds with a simpler one made up of four: the elite, the salariat, the precariat and the underclass. In view of the xenophobia of the two upper classes, Foti sees a possible alliance between precarious workers and the underclass. To Foti, it is certainly not the precariat that is fomenting right-wing populism (as Standing subtly claims), neither is it consumed by a kind of generalised ‘yearning resentment’ (as Ventura suggests). As evidence of this, Foti points to the resurgence of the left, as embodied by Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders, which feeds on the enthusiasm of the Millennials. The sad passions belong rather to the salariat, who viscerally fear precariousness, unlike the precariat who knows no other way of life.

Yet even the precarious have something to complain about: Sennett’s flexibility becomes *flexploitation*, a

schizophrenic form of exploitation that makes individuals “quantum workers”, subject to an unpredictable combination of various levels of employment. It is a working condition that affects the existential dimension, populated by stress, anxiety and social exclusion. To heighten frustration, there is the awareness of being collectively indispensable but individually disposable. But for Foti there is a positive side: precarity may be damnation and exploitation, but it is also liberation. Of course, it deprives young workers of their rights, but at the same time it undermines a work ethic that has now become meaningless. Precarious workers seem therefore to be the only political subject able to stand up to the elites that brought about the 2008 crisis. While unions and political parties are heading towards oblivion, the precariat must make use of a populist policy based on the redistribution of wealth, multiculturalism and environmental ethics. Foti views the precariat as creating greater social worth because it is forging a new culture of protest, expressed through movements such as Black Lives Matter and Fight for \$15. Therefore, besides chronicling the emergence of precarious work and analysing its political and economic causes, *General Theory of the Precariat* is a call to arms, an invitation to form a global union, the Precariat Syndicate, of a populist, feminist and eco-social matrix. What is the recipe for improving the fate of the precariat? A 4-day working week, a universal basic income of at least \$1000 a month, a minimum wage of \$15 an hour and the immediate occupation of the city.

Navigating Disorientation

At this point, it seems useful to reflect on the various stances on precarity so as to be able to compare and comment on them in greater detail. First of all we need to clarify what the precariat means in terms of compo-

sition. Alex Foti's classification, less ambiguous than Standing's, simplifies the task: the precarity dealt with here does not necessarily coincide with poverty and mainly involves urban areas, where the economics of services and logistics combine with those of knowledge and creativity. Precarity disproportionately involves the young because for them it represents the norm rather than an exception. Chicchi and Simone rightly pose a question that rhetorically reveals precarity as the young's new normal: "Are the latest generations [...] still willing to interpret and define their social condition on the basis of an idea of precarity mainly as mutilation and deprivation?". The purpose of this definition is not to exclude other segments of the population but to help make the precariat a category that can be analytically effective. Over-extension would empty it of meaning. Furthermore, the specific aim of this book is to examine the relationships between precarity and entrepreneurialism. Naturally, the entrepreneurial culture described earlier mainly relies on youth precarity: it is the young who find themselves faced with the (often only apparent) choice between a purgatory of temporary jobs and constructing their own professional independence. Furthermore, the very idea of youthfulness is mobilised by entrepreneurialism. We see that, for example, in the way working in the gig economy is promoted as an activity for young, dynamic people. However if, as Foti claims, the precariat is at odds with the salariat, the contrast is somewhat blurred: family ties, and therefore economic bonds, link the precariat to the salariat.

That said, it is worth underlining that the disruption caused by flexibility does not only involve a specific segment of the population. Sudden and constant change involves everyone, but only a few manage to ride the wave and indeed benefit from it. And this is perhaps

the only aspect that seems to remain unchanged. Precarity is the name we give to this kind of “changeless change”.¹⁵ According to Sennett, the resulting fragmentation destabilises one’s self-image and limits its construction. Many simply ignore or even reject the circumstances that determine their own story. In doing so they often create an idealised personal narrative to the detriment of the material reality that lies behind it. In other words, they claim to be artists, journalists or entrepreneurs regardless of the income these activities actually generate. In this sense, the issue of precarity seems to be linked not only to work but also to the need to build and maintain one’s identity.

The misalignment between individual expectations and material reality (what we earlier called status imbalance and then class dysphoria) widens the gap between cooperation and competition. Internal struggles fomented by professional competition, social atomisation and artificial division into castes and subclasses prevent the precariat from becoming a cohesive movement. The precariat’s biggest problem, that of creating a ‘we’, clashes with the overwhelming entrepreneurial imperative to produce, affirm and manage a ‘me’. If, as Ventura maintains, the way to circumvent precarisation is to stand out, how can one hope to create lasting alliances and movements? Will it then be the task of the underclass alone, who have no hope of redemption in terms of job prestige, to bring about the revolution? All that remains is to make precarity something to be proud of, through a rejection of the tedium of work or as a perverse form of virtue signalling (the public display

¹⁵ The expression (included in the endorsement for Nicole Aschoff’s *The New Prophets of Capital*) is by Naomi Klein, who defines changeless change as “the kind of innovation that simultaneously upends current practices and studiously protects existing wealth and power inequities”.

of one's social commitment). However, even in this case we are faced with a huge obstacle, and that is the sense of victimism that hovers over precarity. After the initial enthusiasm of EuroMayDay, the mediatic pity for the precariat conflicts with the accumulation of social and relational capital needed, ironically, to get out of precarity. It's not only "passionate work", to use Angela McRobbie's concept, that stifles precarious antagonism; it's the entrepreneurial imperative that bans it. The ambivalent status of the precariat makes it the perfect sacrifice, since it is a victim forced to deny being one.

Could it be culture that will unite the precariat? If this were to be the case, we first need to specify what constitutes the high cultural potential of the precarious youth Alex Foti speaks about. What is the common culture among the metropolitan precariat? Fragmented and diverse as it is, is contemporary culture capable of building bridges and creating alliances rather than isolation and niches? Apart from the odd explosion of solidarity and participation, the cultural baggage shared by the precariat, consisting in good amounts of self-irony and cynicism, is not so much a subversive power as a catalyst for unhappiness. In a review of a sociological study led by Gianfranco Zucca, Paolo Mossetti defined today's twenty-year-old Italians as "precarious natives", describing how the perception of risk has created new workaholics. They have adopted a novel lifestyle whereby working everywhere and all the time is normal. Homes become offices, and every post on social media can end up acting as a sounding board for the success of others. With gritted teeth and a forced smile, the precarious natives hide the drawbacks of often non-remunerated self-employment to 'pursue their dreams'. Cultural baggage and digital networks, the armory of the precariat according to Foti, become weapons *against*

the aspirational class Ventura speaks of, as these tools serve to discipline, contain and appease it.

How do the points of view of the authors discussed relate to one another? Sennett senses and dissects a key aspect of being precarious: individual disorientation. Standing sends out a warning: the anger of the precariat will soon turn into class hatred. Compared to the latter and to the usual talk about precarity Foti's *General Theory* shows optimism: the precariat can and must become a movement guided by an eco-populist policy. Ventura, on the other hand, hides his pessimism behind analysis. But one element that Foti and Ventura have in common is that they both reject a victimistic narrative. While Foti calls upon the precariat to arm itself, Ventura invites the aspirational class to face up to its own contradictions. By suggesting a comparison with what he calls "the real wretched of the Earth", Ventura denies the fact that one can be oppressor and oppressed at the same time, thus tending to rule out any kind of collective action. Rather than opting for the best analysis, it seems more productive to merge the various perspectives into an idea of precarity that takes into account both the way in which flexibility influences the personality, and the gap that exists between one's function in society and their perceived status. This idea should not a priori deny the possibilities of cooperation among the precariat but at the same time it needs to face up to its intrinsic controversies. Precarious movementism and the thesis of the aspirational class are useful to each other. Aspiration helps clarify the reasons why the precariat has difficulty becoming a class-for-itself, while the idea of a global precariat movement serves to challenge the harsh self-criticism and the pessimism contributing to the submissiveness of the aspirational class.

Platform Capitalism¹

Capitalism, when a crisis hits, tends to be restructured. New technologies, new organisational forms, new modes of exploitation, new types of jobs, and new markets all emerge to create a new way of accumulating capital. As we saw with the crisis of overcapacity in the 1970s, manufacturing attempted to recover by attacking labour and by turning towards increasingly lean business models. In the wake of the 1990s bust, internet-based companies shifted to business models that monetised the free resources available to them. While the dot-com bust placed a pall over investor enthusiasm for internet-based firms, the subsequent decade saw technology firms significantly progressing in terms of the amount of power and capital at their disposal. Since the 2008 crisis, has there been a similar shift? The dominant narrative in the advanced capitalist countries *has* been one of change. In particular, there has been a renewed focus on the rise of technology: automation, the sharing economy, endless stories about the ‘Uber for X’, and, since around 2010, proclamations about the internet of things. These changes have received labels such as ‘paradigm shift’ from McKinsey and ‘fourth industrial revolution’ from the executive chairman of the World Economic Forum and, in more ridiculous formulations, have been compared in importance to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. We have witnessed a massive proliferation

1 From Nick Srnicek (2017), *Platform Capitalism*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 36–92.

of new terms: the gig economy, the sharing economy, the on-demand economy, the next industrial revolution, the surveillance economy, the app economy, the attention economy, and so on. The task of this chapter is to examine these changes.

[...]

A key argument of this chapter is that in the twenty-first century advanced capitalism came to be centred upon extracting and using a particular kind of raw material: data. But it is important to be clear about what data are. In the first place, we will distinguish *data* (information that something happened) from *knowledge* (information about why something happened). Data may involve knowledge, but this is not a necessary condition. Data also entail recording, and therefore a material medium of some kind. As a recorded entity, any datum requires sensors to capture it and massive storage systems to maintain it. Data are not immaterial, as any glance at the energy consumption of data centres will quickly prove (and the internet as a whole is responsible for about 9.2 per cent of the world's electricity consumption). We should also be wary of thinking that data collection and analysis are frictionless or automated processes. Most data must be cleaned and organised into standardised formats in order to be usable. Likewise, generating the proper algorithms can involve the manual entry of learning sets into a system. Altogether, this means that the collection of data today is dependent on a vast infrastructure to sense, record, and

analyse. What is recorded? Simply put, we should consider *data* to be the raw material that must be extracted, and the *activities* of users to be the natural source of this raw material. Just like oil, data are a material to be extracted, refined, and used in a variety of ways. The more data one has, the more uses one can make of them.

Data were a resource that had been available for some time and used to lesser degrees in previous business models (particularly in coordinating the global logistics of lean production). In the twenty-first century, however, the technology needed for turning simple activities into recorded data became increasingly cheap; and the move to digital-based communications made recording exceedingly simple. Massive new expanses of potential data were opened up, and new industries arose to extract these data and to use them so as to optimise production processes, give insight into consumer preferences, control workers, provide the foundation for new products and services (e.g. Google Maps, self-driving cars, Siri), and sell to advertisers. All of this had historical precedents in earlier periods of capitalism, but what was novel with the shift in technology was the sheer amount of data that could now be used. From representing a peripheral aspect of businesses, data increasingly became a central resource. In the early years of the century it was hardly clear, however, that data would become the raw material to jumpstart a major shift in capitalism. The incipient efforts by Google simply used data to draw advertising revenues away from traditional media outlets like newspapers and television.

Google was performing a valuable service in organising the internet, but this was hardly a revolutionary change at an economic level. However, as the internet expanded and firms became dependent on digital communications for all aspects of their business, data became increasingly relevant. As I will attempt to show in this chapter, data have come to serve a number of key capitalist functions: they educate and give competitive advantage to algorithms; they enable the coordination and outsourcing of workers; they allow for the optimisation and flexibility of productive processes; they make possible the transformation of low-margin goods into high-margin services; and data analysis is itself generative of data, in a virtuous cycle. Given the significant advantages of recording and using data and the competitive pressures of capitalism, it was perhaps inevitable that this raw material would come to represent a vast new resource to be extracted from.

The problem for capitalist firms that continues to the present day is that old business models were not particularly well designed to extract and use data. Their method of operating was to produce a good in a factory where most of the information was lost, then to sell it, and never to learn anything about the customer or how the product was being used. While the global logistics network of lean production was an improvement in this respect, with few exceptions it remained a lossy model as well. A different business model was necessary if capitalist firms were to take full advantage of dwindling recording costs. This chapter argues that the new

business model that eventually emerged is a powerful new type of firm: the platform. Often arising out of internal needs to handle data, platforms became an efficient way to monopolise, extract, analyse, and use the increasingly large amounts of data that were being recorded. Now this model has come to expand across the economy, as numerous companies incorporate platforms: powerful technology companies (Google, Facebook, and Amazon), dynamic start-ups (Uber, Airbnb), industrial leaders (GE, Siemens), and agricultural powerhouses (John Deere, Monsanto), to name just a few.

What are platforms? At the most general level, platforms are digital infrastructures that enable two or more groups to interact. They therefore position themselves as intermediaries that bring together different users: customers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers, and even physical objects. More often than not, these platforms also come with a series of tools that enable their users to build their own products, services, and marketplaces. Microsoft's Windows operating system enables software developers to create applications for it and sell them to consumers; Apple's App Store and its associated ecosystem (XCode and the iOS SDK) enable developers to build and sell new apps to users; Google's search engine provides a platform for advertisers and content providers to target people searching for information; and Uber's taxi app enables drivers and passengers to exchange rides for cash. Rather than having to build a marketplace from the ground up, a platform provides the basic

infrastructure to mediate between different groups. This is the key to its advantage over traditional business models when it comes to data, since a platform positions itself (1) between users, and (2) as the ground upon which their activities occur, which thus gives it privileged access to record them. Google, as the platform for searching, draws on vast amounts of search activity (which express the fluctuating desires of individuals). Uber, as the platform for taxis, draws on traffic data and the activities of drivers and riders. Facebook, as the platform for social networking, brings in a variety of intimate social interactions that can then be recorded. And, as more and more industries move their interactions online (e.g. Uber shifting the taxi industry into a digital form), more and more businesses will be subject to platform development. Platforms are, as a result, far more than internet companies or tech companies, since they can operate anywhere, wherever digital interaction takes place.

The second essential characteristic is that digital platforms produce and are reliant on 'network effects': the more numerous the users who use a platform, the more valuable that platform becomes for everyone else. Facebook, for example, has become the default social networking platform simply by virtue of the sheer number of people on it. If you want to join a platform for socialising, you join the platform where most of your friends and family already are. Likewise, the more numerous the users who search on Google, the better their search algorithms become, and the more useful Google becomes to users. But this generates a cycle whereby

more users beget more users, which leads to platforms having a natural tendency towards monopolisation. It also lends platforms a dynamic of ever-increasing access to more activities, and therefore to more data. Moreover, the ability to rapidly scale many platform businesses by relying on pre-existing infrastructure and cheap marginal costs means that there are few natural limits to growth. One reason for Uber's rapid growth, for instance, is that it does not need to build new factories – it just needs to rent more servers. Combined with network effects, this means that platforms can grow very big very quickly.

The importance of network effects means that platforms must deploy a range of tactics to ensure that more and more users come on board. For example – and this is the third characteristic – platforms often use cross-subsidisation: one arm of the firm reduces the price of a service or good (even providing it for free), but another arm raises prices in order to make up for these losses. The price structure of the platform matters significantly for how many users become involved and how often they use the platform. Google, for instance, provides service likes email for free in order to get users on board, but raises money through its advertising arm. Since platforms have to attract a number of different groups, part of their business is fine-tuning the balance between what is paid, what is not paid, what is subsidised, and what is not subsidised. This is a far cry from the lean model, which aimed to reduce a company down to its core competencies and sell off any unprofitable ventures.

Finally, platforms are also designed in a way that makes them attractive to its varied users. While often presenting themselves as empty spaces for others to interact on, they in fact embody a politics. The rules of product and service development, as well as marketplace interactions, are set by the platform owner. Uber, despite presenting itself as an empty vessel for market forces, shapes the appearance of a market. It predicts where the demand for drivers will be and raises surge prices in advance of actual demand, while also creating phantom cabs to give an illusion of greater supply. In their position as an intermediary, platforms gain not only access to more data but also control and governance over the rules of the game. The core architecture of fixed rules, however, is also generative, enabling others to build upon them in unexpected ways. The core architecture of Facebook, for instance, has allowed developers to produce apps, companies to create pages, and users to share information in a way that brings in even more users. The same holds for Apple's App Store, which enabled the production of numerous useful apps that tied users and software developers increasingly into its ecosystem. The challenge of maintaining platforms is, in part, to revise the cross-subsidisation links and the rules of the platform in order to sustain user interest. While network effects strongly support existing platform leaders, these positions are not unassailable. Platforms, in sum, are a new type of firm; they are characterised by providing the infrastructure to intermediate between different user groups, by displaying monopoly tendencies driven by network effects,

by employing cross-subsidisation to draw in different user groups, and by having a designed core architecture that governs the interaction possibilities. Platform ownership, in turn, is essentially ownership of software (the 2 billion lines of code for Google, or the 20 million lines of code for Facebook) and hardware (servers, data centres, smartphones, etc.), built upon open-source material (e.g. Hadoop's data management system is used by Facebook). All these characteristics make platforms key business models for extracting and controlling data. By providing a digital space for others to interact in, platforms position themselves so as to extract data from natural processes (weather conditions, crop cycles, etc.), from production processes (assembly lines, continuous flow manufacturing, etc.), and from other businesses and users (web tracking, usage data, etc.). They are an extractive apparatus for data.

[...]

Lean Platforms

[T]oday's lean platforms have returned to the 'growth before profit' model of the 1990s. Companies like Uber and Airbnb have rapidly become household names and have come to epitomise this revived business model. These platforms range from specialised firms for a variety of services (cleaning, house calls from physicians, grocery shopping, plumbing, and so on) to more general marketplaces like TaskRabbit and Mechanical

Turk, which provide a variety of services. All of them, however, attempt to establish themselves as the platform upon which users, customers, and workers can meet. Why are they 'lean' platforms? The answer lies in an oft-quoted observation: 'Uber, the world's largest taxi company, owns no vehicles [...] and Airbnb, the largest accommodation provider, owns no property.' It would seem that these are asset-less companies; we might call them virtual platforms. Yet the key is that they do own the most important asset: the platform of software and data analytics. Lean platforms operate through a hyper-outsourced model, whereby workers are outsourced, fixed capital is outsourced, maintenance costs are outsourced, and training is outsourced. All that remains is a bare extractive minimum – control over the platform that enables a monopoly rent to be gained.

The most notorious part of these firms is their outsourcing of workers. In America, these platforms legally understand their workers as 'independent contractors' rather than 'employees'. This enables the companies to save around 30 per cent on labour costs by cutting out benefits, overtime, sick days, and other costs. It also means outsourcing training costs, since training is only permitted for employees; and this process has led to alternative forms of control via reputation systems, which often transmit the gendered and racist biases of society. Contractors are then paid by the task: a cut of every ride from Uber, of every rental from Airbnb, of every task fulfilled on Mechanical Turk. Given the reduction in labour costs provided by such an approach, it is no wonder that Marx wrote that the

'piece-wage is the form of wages most in harmony with the capitalist mode of production'. Yet, as we have seen, this outsourcing of labour is part of a broader and longer outsourcing trend, which took hold in the 1970s. Jobs involving tradable goods were the first to be outsourced, while impersonal services were the next to go. In the 1990s Nike became a corporate ideal for contracting out, in that it contracted much of its labour to others. Rather than adopting vertical integration, Nike was premised upon the existence of a small core of designers and branders, who then outsourced the manufacturing of their goods to other companies. As a result, by 1996 people were already voicing concerns that we were transitioning to 'a "just-in-time" age of "disposable" workers'. But the issue involves more than lean platforms. Apple, for instance, directly employs less than 10 per cent of the workers who contribute to the production of its products. Likewise, a quick glance at the US Department of Labor can find a vast number of non-Uber cases involving the mislabelling of workers as independent contractors: cases related to construction workers, security guards, baristas, plumbers, and restaurant workers – to name just a few. In fact the traditional labour market that most closely approximates the lean platform model is an old and low-tech one: the market of day labourers – agricultural workers, dock workers, or other low-wage workers – who would show up at a site in the morning in the hope of finding a job for the day. Likewise, a major reason why mobile phones have become essential in developing countries is that they are now indispensable in the

process of finding work on informal labour markets. The gig economy simply moves these sites online and adds a layer of pervasive surveillance. A tool of survival is being marketed by Silicon Valley as a tool of liberation.

We can also find this broader shift to non-traditional jobs in economic statistics. In 2005 the Bureau of Labour Statistics (BLS) found that nearly 15 million US workers (10.1 per cent of the labour force) were in alternative employment. This category includes employees hired under alternative contract arrangements (on-call work, independent contractors) and employees hired through intermediaries (temp agencies, contract companies). By 2015 this category had grown to 15.8 per cent of the labour force. Nearly half of this rise (2.5 per cent) was due to an increase in contracting out, as education, healthcare, and administration jobs were often at risk. Most strikingly, between 2005 and 2015, the US labour market added 9.1 million jobs – including 9.4 million alternative arrangement jobs. This means that the net increase in US jobs since 2005 has been solely from these sorts of (often precarious) positions. Similar trends can be seen in self-employment. While the number of people who identify as self-employed has decreased, the number of people who filed the 1099 tax form for self-employment in the United States has increased. What we see here is effectively an acceleration of the long-term tendency towards more precarious employment, particularly after 2008. The same trends are observable in the United Kingdom, where self-employment has created 66.5 per cent of net employment after 2008 and is

the only thing that has staved off much higher levels of unemployment.

Where do lean platforms fit into this? The most obvious point is the category of independent contractors and freelancers. This category has registered an increase of 1.7 per cent (2.9 million) between 2005 and 2015, but most of these increases have been for offline work. Given that no direct measures of the sharing economy are currently available, surveys and other indirect measures have been used instead. Nearly all of the estimates suggest that around 1 per cent of the US labour force is involved in the online sharing economy formed by lean platforms. Even here, the results have to take into account that Uber drivers probably form the majority of these workers. The sharing economy outside of Uber is tiny. In the United Kingdom less evidence is presently available, but the most thorough survey done so far suggests that a slightly higher number of people routinely sell their labour through lean platforms. It is estimated that approximately 1.3 million UK workers (3.9 per cent of the labour force) work through them at least once a week, while other estimates range from 3 to 6 per cent of the labour force. Other surveys suggest slightly higher numbers, but those problematically include a much larger range of activities. What we can therefore conclude is that the sharing economy is but a small tip of a much larger trend. Moreover, it is a small sector, which is premised upon the vast growth in the levels of unemployment after the 2008 crisis. Building on the trends towards more precarious work that were outlined earlier, the crisis caused unemployment in

the United States to double, while long-term unemployment nearly tripled. Moreover, the aftermath of the crisis was a jobless recovery – a phenomenon where economic growth returns, but job growth does not. As a result, numerous workers were forced to find whatever desperate means they could to survive. In this context, self-employment is not a freely chosen path, but rather a forced imposition. A look at the demographics of lean platform workers seems to support this. Of the workers on TaskRabbit, 70 per cent have Bachelor's degrees, while 5 per cent have PhDs. An International Labour Organization (ILO) survey found that workers on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (AMT) also tend to be highly educated, 37 per cent using crowd work as their main job. And Uber admits that around a third of its drivers in London come from neighbourhoods with unemployment rates of more than 10 per cent. In a healthy economy these people would have no need to be microtasking, as they would have proper jobs.

While the other platform types have all developed novel elements, is there anything new about lean platforms? Given the broader context just outlined, we can see that they are simply extending earlier trends into new areas. Whereas outsourcing once primarily took place in manufacturing, administration, and hospitality, today it is extending to a range of new jobs: cabs, haircuts, stylists, cleaning, plumbing, painting, moving, content moderation, and so on. It is even pushing into white-collar jobs – copy-editing, programming and management, for instance. And, in terms of the labour market, lean platforms have turned what was once non-

tradable services into tradable services, effectively expanding the labour supply to a near-global level. A multitude of novel tasks can now be carried out online through Mechanical Turk and similar platforms. This enables business, again, to cut costs by exploiting cheap labour in developing countries and places more downward pressure on wages by placing these jobs into global labour markets. The extent to which lean platform firms have outsourced other costs is also notable (though not novel); these are perhaps the purest attempts at a virtual platform to date. In doing so, these companies have been dependent upon the capacities offered by cloud platforms. Whereas firms once had to spend large amounts to invest in the computing equipment and expertise needed for their businesses, today's start-ups have flourished because they can simply rent hardware and software from the cloud. As a result, Airbnb, Slack, Uber, and many other start-ups use AWS. Uber further relies on Google for mapping, Twilio for texting, SendGrid for emailing, and Braintree for payments: it is a lean platform built on other platforms. These companies have also offloaded costs from their balance sheets and shifted them to their workers: things like investment costs (accommodations for Airbnb, vehicles for Uber and Lyft), maintenance costs, insurance costs, and depreciation costs. Firms such as Instacart (which delivers groceries) have also outsourced delivery costs to food suppliers (e.g. Pepsi) and to retailers (e.g. Whole Foods) in return for advertising space. However, even with this support, Instacart remains unprofitable on 60 per cent of its business, and that is before the rather large costs of office

space or the salaries of its core team are taken into account. The lack of profitability has led to the predictable measure of cutting back on wages – a notably widespread phenomenon among lean platforms.

This has also prompted companies to compete on data extraction – again, a process optimised by the access afforded by platforms. Uber is perhaps the best example of this development, as it collects data on all of its rides, as well as data on drivers, even when they are not receiving a fare. Data about what drivers are doing and how they are driving are used in a variety of ways in order to beat out competitors. For instance, Uber uses the data to ensure that its drivers are not working for other taxi platforms; and its routing algorithms use the data on traffic patterns to plot out the most efficient path for a trip. Data are fed into other algorithms to match passengers with nearby drivers, as well as to make predictions about where demand is likely to arise. In China, Uber monitors even whether drivers go to protests. All of this enables Uber to have a service that is quick and efficient from the passenger's point of view, thereby drawing users away from competitors. Data are one of the primary means of competition for lean platforms.

Nevertheless, these firms are still struggling to be profitable and the money to support them has to come from the outside. As we saw earlier, one of the important consequences of the 2008 crisis has been the intensification of an easy monetary policy and the growing corporate cash glut. The lean platform

boom is, fundamentally, a post-2008 phenomenon. The growth of this sector is reflected most clearly in the number of deals made for start-up companies: VC [venture capital] deals have tripled since 2009. Even after excluding Uber (which has an outsized position in the market), on-demand mobile services raised \$1.7 billion over the course of 2014 – a 316 per cent increase from 2013. And 2015 continued this trend towards more deals and higher volumes. But it is worth taking a moment to put the funding of lean platforms in context. When we look at the lean platforms for on-demand mobile services, we are primarily discussing Uber. In terms of funding, in 2014 Uber outpaced all the other service companies, taken together, by 39 per cent. In 2015 Uber, Airbnb, and Uber's Chinese competitor, Didi Chuxing, combined to take 59 per cent of all the funding for on-demand start-ups. And, while the enthusiasm for new tech start-ups has reached a fever pitch, funding in 2015 (\$59 billion) still paled in comparison to the highs of 2000 (nearly \$100 billion). Where is the money coming from? Broadly speaking, it is surplus capital seeking higher rates of return in a low interest rate environment. The low interest rates have depressed the returns on traditional financial investments, forcing investors to seek out new avenues for yield. Rather than a finance boom or a housing boom, surplus capital today appears to be building a technology boom. Such is the level of compulsion that even non-traditional funding from hedge funds, mutual funds, and investment banks is playing a major role in the tech boom. In fact, in the technology start-up sector, most investment

financing comes from hedge funds and mutual funds. Larger companies are also involved, Google being a major investor in the ill-fated Homejoy, while the logistics company DHL has created its own on-demand service MyWays, and firms like Intel and Google are also purchasing equity in a variety of new start-ups. Companies like Uber, deploying more than 135 subsidiary companies across the world, are also helped by tax evasion techniques. Yet the profitability of these lean platforms remains largely unproven. Just like the earlier dot-com boom, growth in the lean platform sector is premised on expectations of future profits rather than on actual profits. The hope is that the low margin business of taxis will eventually pay off once Uber has gained a monopoly position. Until these firms reach monopoly status (and possibly even then), their profitability appears to be generated solely by the removal of costs and the lowering of wages and not by anything substantial.

In summary, lean platforms appear as the product of a few tendencies and moments: the tendencies towards outsourcing, surplus populations, and the digitisation of life, along with the post-2008 surge in unemployment and rise of an accommodative monetary policy, surplus capital, and cloud platforms that enable rapid scaling. While the lean model has garnered a large amount of hype and, in the case of Uber, a large amount of VC, there are few signs that it will inaugurate a major shift in advanced capitalist countries. In terms of outsourcing, the lean model remains a minor player in a long-term trend. The profit-making capacity of most lean models

likewise appears to be minimal and limited to a few specialised tasks. And, even there, the most successful of the lean models has been supported by VC welfare rather than by any meaningful revenue generation. Far from representing the future of work or that of the economy, these models seem likely to fall apart in the coming years.

Conclusion

We began this chapter by arguing that twenty-first-century capitalism has found a massive new raw material to appropriate: data. Through a series of developments, the platform has become an increasingly dominant way of organising businesses so as to monopolise these data, then extract, analyse, use, and sell them. The old business models of the Fordist era had only a rudimentary capacity to extract data from the production process or from customer usage. The era of lean production modified this slightly, as global 'just in time' supply chains demanded data about the status of inventories and the location of supplies. Yet data outside the firm remained nearly impossible to attain; and, even inside the firm, most of the activities went unrecorded. The platform, on the other hand, has data extraction built into its DNA, as a model that enables other services and goods and technologies to be built on top of it, as a model that demands more users in order to gain network effects, and as a digitally based medium that makes recording and storage simple. All of these characteristics make platforms a central model for extracting data as raw material to be used in various ways. As we have

seen in this brief overview of some different platform types, data can be used in a variety of ways to generate revenues. For companies like Google and Facebook, data are, primarily, a resource that can be used to lure in advertisers and other interested parties. For firms like Rolls Royce and Uber, data are at the heart of beating the competition: they enable such firms to offer better products and services, control workers, and optimise their algorithms for a more competitive business. Likewise, platforms like AWS and Predix are oriented towards building (and owning) the basic infrastructures necessary to collect, analyse, and deploy data for other companies to use, and a rent is extracted for these platform services. In every case, collecting massive amounts of data is central to the business model and the platform provides the ideal extractive apparatus.

This new business form has intertwined with a series of long-term trends and short-term cyclical movements. The shift towards lean production and 'just in time' supply chains has been an ongoing process since the 1970s, and digital platforms continue it in heightened form today. The same goes for the trend towards outsourcing. Even companies that are not normally associated with outsourcing are still involved. For instance, content moderation for Google and Facebook is typically done in the Philippines, where an estimated 100,000 workers search through the content on social media and in cloud storage. And Amazon has a notoriously low-paid workforce of warehouse workers who are subject to incredibly comprehensive systems of surveillance and control. These

firms simply continue the secular trend of outsourcing low-skill workers while retaining a core of well-paid high-skill labourers. On a broader scale, all of the post-2008 net employment gains in America have come from workers in non-traditional employment, such as contractors and on-call workers. This process of outsourcing and building lean business models gets taken to an extreme in firms like Uber, which rely on a virtually asset-less form to generate profits. As we have seen, though, much of their profitability after the crisis has stemmed from holding wages down. Even the *Economist* is forced to admit that, since 2008, 'if the share of domestic gross earnings paid in wages were to rise back to the average level of the 1990s, the profits of American firms would drop by a fifth'. An increasingly desperate surplus population has therefore provided a considerable supply of workers in low-wage, low-skill work. This group of exploitable workers has intersected with a vast amount of surplus capital set in a low interest rate world. Tax evasion, high corporate savings, and easy monetary policies have all combined, so that a large amount of capital seeks out returns in various ways. It is no surprise, then, that funding for tech start-ups has massively surged since 2010. Set in context, the lean platform economy ultimately appears as an outlet for surplus capital in an era of ultra-low interest rates and dire investment opportunities rather than the vanguard destined to revive capitalism.

While lean platforms seem to be a short-lived phenomenon, the other examples set out in this chapter seem to point to an important shift in how capitalist firms operate. Enabled by

digital technology, platforms emerge as the means to lead and control industries. At their pinnacle, they have prominence over manufacturing, logistics, and design, by providing the basic landscape upon which the rest of the industry operates. They have enabled a shift from products to services in a variety of new industries, leading some to declare that the age of ownership is over. Let us be clear, though: this is not the end of ownership, but rather the concentration of ownership. Pieties about an 'age of access' are just empty rhetoric that obscures the realities of the situation. Likewise, while lean platforms have aimed to be virtually asset-less, the most significant platforms are all building large infrastructures and spending significant amounts of money to purchase other companies and to invest in their own capacities. Far from being mere owners of information, these companies are becoming owners of the infrastructures of society. Hence the monopolistic tendencies of these platforms must be taken into account in any analysis of their effects on the broader economy.

Transportarbetaren: Bzzt ersätter kollektivavtal med ”egenanställningar”

Mopedtaxiföretaget Bzzt har skyltat med fast lön och kollektivavtal. Nu sägs alla förare upp. Det som gäller nu är rakt ackord och så kallad egenanställning.

Så här står det på Bzzt sajt i dag 10 juli: ”Vi har tecknat kollektivavtal. Så förarna får schyssta löner och har möjlighet att själva påverka när och hur mycket de vill jobba. Det borde vara en självklarhet, men tyvärr är taxibranschen inte direkt känd för sina fantastiska anställningsförhållanden. Låt oss ändra på det!”

Bzzt-förarna kör personer och bud, plus mat för en plattform de samarbetar med. Verksamheten har länge gått knackigt, och med Corona försämrades ekonomin än mer. I en presentation som nu skickats till företagets anställda står det: ”Nu gör vi som övriga branschen”. Det innebär på att Bzzt går över till provisionslön och ”egenanställningsföretag”.

– Först sa företaget upp alla tillsvidareanställningar och gjorde om tjänsterna till visstider. Nu ska vi vara anställda på Cool company, som har ett väldigt konstigt upplägg, säger en anonym förare som är besviken på arbetsgivarens manöver.

Transportarbetaren har tagit del av anställningsvillkoren och anställningsavtalen hos Cool company. Förarna blir så kallade egenanställda, som är ett slags mellanting mellan en vanlig anställning och egenföretagare. Cool company verkar i praktiken som ett bemanningsföretag eller en underentreprenör. På det sättet rundar Bzzt kollektivavtalet med Transport. Något som företaget inte hymlar med.

Med den prissättning som gäller i Bzzt måste förarna hinna med drygt tre körningar per timme för att komma upp i kollektivavtalets timlön, på 123,23 kronor, Transportarbetarens källa uppger att det är närapå omöjligt. Under förarens årslånga anställning i företaget har i princip ingen nått upp till så många körningar.

– Jag tror att lönen kommer sänkas radikalt när vi går över till provision, säger föraren.

Den anställde radar upp försämringar. Från och med nu kräver företaget förstadagsintyg vid sjukskrivning. Skyddsombud blir en person som är anställd på Cool companys huvudkontor.

När idén om egenanställning säljs in till personalen presenteras det som en lysande affär. Förarna får hela 90 procent i provision. Men enligt Transportarbetarens källa är det många anställda som inte förstått att sociala avgifter ska dras på ersättningen. Dessutom ryker tjänstepensionen. Den blir i stället en frivillig insättning på ett Avanza-konto, från den egna lönen.

– Jag har pratat med flera kollegor som tror att lönen kommer att bli högre än vad den i verkligheten blir, säger föraren som Transportarbetaren träffat.

Bzzt har tidigare lyfts fram som ett exempel på att det går att göra så kallade gig-jobb på ett schysst sätt. Men riskkapitalet från investerarna har tagit slut och Bzzt har varit föremål för rekonstruktion i tre månader.

– Vi såg på en gång att vi inte kan ha kvar förare som är anställda. Det första vi gjorde var att kontakta Transport för förhandling, säger företagets vd Sven Wolf, som kallar situationen för ett misslyckande:

– Vi ville få det att fungera. Vi brinner verkligen för att vara framgångsrikt företag och en positiv kraft, både vad gäller klimat och miljö och sociala villkor. Kollektivavtal var en del av det pusslet. Sen har vi kämpat. Men vi har inte nog stora muskler för att vinna mot Uber och andra, som är några av världens största företag. De har vansinniga resurser och subventionerar sina tjänster.

Transportarbetaren har pratat med en förare som säger att det blir svårt om inte omöjligt att komma upp i samma lön som tidigare. Hur ser du på det?

– Vi tror definitivt att det ska gå att tjäna mer. Gör det inte det måste vi ändra ersättningen, annars försvinner förarna till någon annan. Det finns ju en konkurrens om de här personerna, säger Sven Wolf.

Vad är er relation till Cool company, är det ett bemanningsföretag eller en entreprenör?

– Från vårt perspektiv är det en underleverantör. Där förarna är anställda med allt vad det innebär.

Transports centrala ombudsman Mats H Andersson anser att Bzzt undantränger kollektivavtalets villkor och att den negativa spiralen av dåliga villkor i en utsatt bransch fortsätter nedåt.

– Det är för jävligt att människor blir tvingade att ta sina jobb till sämre villkor, säger Mats H Andersson.

Vad rekommenderar du förarna att göra?

– Jag kan inte rekommendera någon att ta anställning till de villkor som gäller på Bzzt. Tar de anställning i alla fall ser jag gärna att de organiserar sig i Transport. Då att vi kan se över möjligheterna att teckna bemannings- eller entreprenörsavtal med Cool company.

Vad har du att säga om den anställningsform Bzzt erbjuder, egenanställning?

– Det är precis som vilken anställning som helst, fast helt utan garantier eller trygghet.

The Verge: How Silicon Valley's successes are fueled by an underclass of 'ghost workers'

"Ghost work" is anthropologist [Mary L. Gray](#)'s term for the invisible labor that powers our technology platforms. When Gray, a senior researcher at Microsoft Research, first arrived at the company, she learned that building artificial intelligence requires people to manage and clean up data to feed to the training algorithms. "I basically started asking the engineers and computer scientists around me, 'Who are the people you pay to do this task work of labeling images and classification tasks and cleaning up databases?'" says Gray. Some people said they didn't know. Others said they didn't want to know and were concerned that if they looked too closely they might find unsavory working conditions.

So Gray decided to find out for herself. Who *are* the people, often invisible, who pick up the tasks necessary for these platforms to run? Why do they do this work, and why do they leave? What are their working conditions?

Gray ended up collaborating with fellow MSR senior researcher [Siddharth Suri](#) to write [*Ghost Work: How to Stop Silicon Valley from Building a New Global Underclass*](#) (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt).

The Verge spoke to Gray about her research findings and what they mean for the future of employment.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

Labeling data to feed to algorithms is one obvious example of ghost work. [Content moderation](#) is another. What are other examples?

Filling out surveys, captioning and translation work, any sort of transcription service. Doing web research, verifying location addresses, beta testing, user testing for user designs. Anything you can think of as knowledge work, like content creation, writing editorial, doing design. You name it. The list is endless. All of those are tasks that can be distributed online. It's all of the

things we're used to seeing in the office, and this is what it looks like to dismantle that as a full-time job and turn it into projects for myriad people.

Am I right in thinking that basically every tech company relies or has relied on ghost work?

I would be hard-pressed to find any business that sells itself as AI that either didn't deeply rely on ghost work to generate their basic product or isn't very much reliant on it today. There are so many startups and businesses out there, anything that calls itself "business insights" or "intelligence and analytics." That's using crowdsourcing or collective intelligence, and that's relying on ghost work. There is no way around the need for people to sift through the piles of what's called unstructured data.

Sometimes, people think that as technology gets better, we won't need this type of ghost work anymore. But you write that "the great paradox of AI is that the desire to eliminate human work generates new tasks for humans." So clearly you don't subscribe to that belief. Why not?

What might change are the specific tasks. Believing that AI will never need humans labeling data means believing that language will never change, style will never change. Service industries, especially, are so difficult to fully automate because being able to listen to somebody's voice and register that person's silent anger is such a human capacity. So there are cases when AI will, I argue, always fall short.

Engineers are always wonderfully optimistic about opportunities. As an anthropologist, I know how complicated it is to think cross-culturally about these questions. Even if we fairly reliably get to 100 percent of spoken English with a flat Midwestern accent, what about when you move into vernacular and slang and folks who will splice together languages and code switch? Anytime you see an autotranslation of a talk, you see the places where language breaks down, often around somebody's name.

Those are the kinds of computational problems that are intractably hard for AI to capture because there's not enough data consistently available to model what's going to be the next utterance that somebody is saying using Spanglish. We've already effectively automated all of the easy things.

One interesting thing you mention is that we don't have good labor statistics for how many people are doing ghost work. Why is that?

The biggest challenge is that the ways we count jobs are often in relationship to professional identities, or really clearly defined capacities or skills, and no one is oriented to a world of work that is project-based. We don't have the language to describe an image tagger or a captionist. One of the findings in our research is that people have really different mental models. They may or may not identify as self-employed. They may or may not identify as a journalist if they write for a content farm, and that might change whether they decide to answer a survey question to help us measure this workforce. Let alone the fact that ghost work is distributed around the globe, and there is no global bureau of labor statistics.

A key question in this book is: who are the people doing ghost work? So, who are they? It sounds like they could be almost anyone.

When we got our initial set of surveys back from the four different platforms we studied, it was clear that there were as many women as men, though they worked different hours. People had college educations, but that wasn't surprising because that maps on to knowledge work and information services broadly.

They are all of us. These are the folks who, for reasons of social capital, don't have access to a network that was going to boost them into the full-time job. That's the pattern I see sociologically or anthropologically. They're first-generation college-going more often than not. This is a group of people who don't have strong social ties to elites.

What are people's motivations for this work?

There's not one type of person doing this work and not one single motivation. There is a core group of people who are turning to this work, often because of other constraints on their time. People would say that they don't have time to commute and were going to be commuting for a comparably paid job at least two hours, and that was going to cut into the amount of money they could make. That's the calculus they're making here. So they're deciding to turn to this work and effectively. Once they've figured out how to make enough money on enough platforms, they cobble

together the equivalent of a full-time salary for them to meet their needs. We call those folks “always on,” and they’re turning this into full-time work by the number of income streams. But this group of people is a small percentage — 10 to 15 percent, depending on the platform. This is what the research tells us about all these platforms. The core group of people is doing the bulk of the work.

Then there are the “regulars,” a deep trench of people who can step in at any time. The regulars are the ones that enable the “always on” people because if the “always on” steps out, there are enough people in that pile of regulars who are going to be able to step in. They’re often caregivers, and they had other motivations; they were pursuing another passion project or they were going back to education and taking courses, and this gave them a means to be able to finance that.

Lastly, there is the long tail of experimentalists, which is the name we gave the people who try one or two projects, figure out that this is not for them, and leave. The most important part of doing anthropological work is we could meet the people who left and figure out why. And it had to do with never hooking into a community of peers to help lower their costs, feeling like they don’t have enough support, and that this was too difficult to figure out. And it was exhausting cognitively.

A feature of this kind of market is that anyone can work for anyone else. What happens in that kind of environment?

For anybody who becomes a regular or “always on,” they’re invested and bring the same framework they have to any job. It’s an amazing amount of self-policing because workers are invested in making sure that work comes back to the pool. They want to make sure their peers are doing well because, if not, that could work against their interests in getting the next job.

Businesses should be equally invested in this accountability in the supply chain. If they’re relying on lowering their costs of investing and what they need most is somebody who’s ready and willing and able to jump in for a project, the exchange is to create some mechanism that ensures that anybody who is entering is refreshed and has the opportunity to keep up. Otherwise, it’s not sustainable as a labor market.

But companies aren't doing that. They're not creating the accountability or trust or culture that would help the ghost workers.

If you talk to any of these companies, most of them believe that we're going to get this automated and think, "I just need these people for a little while." That's precisely our problem and that's historically been our problem since the Industrial Age: treating badly people who do the contingent work that can't quite be automated. We stop paying attention to these people and their work conditions, we start treating them as something that can be replaced eventually, and we don't value the fact that they're doing something that a mechanical process or computational process can't do.

I hate the parallel to horsepower. This is not like replacing horses with automobiles. People are not performing a mechanical task. They're extending something distinct about humans — their creativity and their interpretation.

What should we do to address this? What are the policy suggestions?

At the very least, it means valuing everybody's contribution. The first step is being able to identify the people who have contributed. In Bangladesh, it made a huge difference in textiles when companies selling products had to tell us who was involved in making the shirt on my back. There should be a clear record thanking anybody who contributes labor to an output or service. The consumer should always be able to trace back the supply chain of people who have had a hand in helping them achieve their goals.

This is about regulating a form of employment that does not fit in full-time employment or fully in part-time employment or even clearly in self-employment. I believe that this is the moment to say the classification of employment no longer functions. Anybody who's working age should have a baseline of provisions that are supplied by companies.

If companies want to happily use contract work because they need to constantly churn through new ideas and new aptitudes, the only way to make that a good thing for both sides of that enterprise is for people to be able to jump into that pool. And people do that when they have health care and other provisions. This is the business case for universal health care, for universal education as a public good. It's going to benefit all enterprise.

I want to get across to people that, in a lot of ways, we're describing work conditions. We're not describing a particular *type* of work. We're describing today's conditions for project-based task-driven work. This can happen to everybody's jobs, and I hate that that might be the motivation because we should have cared all along, as this has been happening to plenty of people. For me, the message of this book is: let's make this not just manageable, but sustainable and enjoyable. Stop making our lives wrap around work, and start making work serve our lives.