The Contested Convergence of
Precarity and Immaterial Labour

by

Greigory de Peuter

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Name: **Greigory de Peuter**

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Examining Committee:

Chair: **Dr. Barry Truax**
Professor, School of Communication

_____

Dr. Yuezhi Zhao
Senior Supervisor
Professor, School of Communication

_____

Dr. Richard Gruneau
Supervisor
Professor, School of Communication

_____

Dr. Nick Dyer-Witheford
Supervisor
Associate Professor, Faculty of Information &
Media Studies, University of Western Ontario

_____

Dr. Alison Beale
Internal Examiner
Professor, School of Communication

_____

Dr. Vincent Mosco
External Examiner
Professor, Department of Sociology, Queen's University

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Abstract

Labour has tended to be a relatively neglected subject in critical scholarship on communication and culture. One pathway for working against this tendency is a current of analysis and activism confronting the problematic of precarity. Circulated at the start of the 21st century by autonomous activists in Europe, the concept of precarity is defined in this dissertation as experiential, financial, and social insecurity exacerbated by the flexibilization of employment under conditions of post-Fordism (e.g., contract-based employment, freelance work, self-employment). Precarity is, I contend, a valuable conceptual tool for struggling over the meaning of contemporary transformations in the world of work. It illuminates an underside that hegemonic discourses on media, information technology, and cultural work—such as those surrounding free agency, the creative economy, the flat world, and the creative class—have been criticized for downplaying. Historical political economic context is provided through a discussion of the uneven transition from Fordist to post-Fordist capitalism. Points of departure for the inquiry are drawn from streams of labour analysis within the political economy of communication and autonomist Marxism. The dissertation is structured in two main parts. The first section profiles select aspects of the multiform precarious immaterial workforce animating industries associated with the vaunted creative economy. It introduces a schema of precarious labour personas—the autonomous worker, the precog, and the cybertariat—to explore some of the manifold mechanisms and quotidian manifestations of precarization. The second part argues that although the flexibilization of labour since the 1970s was an attempt by capital to decompose the counter-power of segments of the working class, the spread of precarious working conditions in the post-Fordist core has not entirely exhausted dissent. Through creative public protest, experimental workers' organizations, and policy proposals, working people within and beyond immaterial production milieus have begun to collectively respond to precarity. I argue that precarity and cognate terms are not only linguistic devices that workers themselves are using to name a qualitative feature of their labour and life conditions. These terms also signal a promising laboratory of labour solidarity, organization, and imagination within and against flexploitation.

For my mom and dad.

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Introduction

Labour Blind Spot

Over the past decade a growing number of scholars have lamented the sparse attention that labour, work, and employment have tended to receive within intellectual traditions devoted to the critical study of communication, media, and culture (Maxwell 2001; Maxwell and Miller 2005, 261-266; Mosco 2009, 117, 138, 233). "[T]he question of labour," as media theorist Tiziana Terranova (2004, 76) writes, "has become marginal for media studies as compared to questions of ownership (within political economy) and consumption (within cultural studies)." Academic investigation of, say, media moguls, news content, or Internet cultures has been prodigious, yet, historically, the labour that brings these into being has been a topic of relative neglect. So strong is the tendency to examine media messages, information technologies, or cultural products in isolation from the work that goes into their production and consumption that political economists Catherine McKercher and Vincent Mosco (2006a, 493) have diagnosed "labour" as a "blind spot of western communication studies."

Authors writing from within political economy—the tradition that has arguably done the most to problematize the labour blind spot—have offered at least three explanations for the apparent lack of research interest in labour issues. A first explanation, according to Mosco (2009, 139-140), is a tendency in the discipline of communication studies to locate its "object" of analysis "within the sphere of consumption and this," he argues, "has contributed to a focus on the relationship of audiences to texts more than on the media labour process." Inattention to labour was one of the hot-button issues in a notorious academic dispute in the mid-1990s in which political economists and cultural studies scholars were pitted against each other (see "Colloquy" 1995). Political economist Nicholas Garnham (1995, 64-65), for example, zoomed in on what he charged was the "overwhelming focus" in cultural studies "on consumption rather than production and on the cultural practices of leisure rather than those of work." Garnham's concern about disinterest in the point of production and the class relations therein had a strong conjunctural dimension. He suggested that much of the writing in cultural studies at the time identified social empowerment with the consumption of commodities—at the very historical moment that governments were taking increasingly bold steps to restructure their societies along free-market lines. Garnham contended that, in a climate of ascendant neoliberalism, cultural studies "played politically into the hands of a Right whose ideological assault has been structured in large part around an effort to persuade people to construct themselves as consumers in

opposition to producers" (ibid., 65). While the criticisms of cultural studies that were raised in this debate often suffered from a caricaturized version of the field, interventions such as Garnham's nonetheless highlight an unwitting ideological implication of the labour blind spot.

A second explanation pertains to the etymology of the category of labour itself. Dan Schiller (1996, xi) begins his intellectual history of the place of labour in communication and cultural studies by noting that, over the past century and more, social thought has drifted from a more holistic definition of "labour"—as, in Schiller's conception, "the species-specific capacity for human self-activity to which speaking and thinking, as well as action and energy, are alike integral." From the point of view of this expansive definition, the activities of labour would bridge production *and* consumption, hand *and* head, waged work *and* non-waged work. However, the possibilities for thinking along these more "integrative" lines grew distant, Schiller argues, as "labour" came to be gradually identified with an ever more "restricted range of human effort: physical toil or, later, wage work or, most recently, the endeavors that transpire within heavy industry" (ibid., x). Schiller suggests that communication and cultural studies inherit this 'semantically contracted' sense of labour. His analysis leads to the conclusion that "formal thought" about communication in the 20th century has traveled in divergent directions as far as the category of labour is concerned: on the one hand, scholars implicitly presume that labour is a concern distant from the ostensibly ephemeral nature of cultural and communication processes and practices; on the other hand, there is a tacit privileging of "intellectual labour as a separate sphere—via 'culture' and 'information' respectively" (ibid., xv).

A third explanation for the labour blind spot identifies the influence of wider ideological forces. It is captured by Richard Maxwell (2001, 2, 3) when he refers to the "mist of enchantment" which "[encourages] us to forget about the work in culture": a system of commercial popular-culture fetishizing "an elite corps of culturati located in the world's richest regions"; an ideology locating creativity primarily at the individual level; and the tendency to associate media with leisure, the digital with the ethereal, or "culture" with "primarily an aesthetic realm." These, Maxwell's line of argument suggests, are among the deep-seated forms of common sense that render invisible the demanding, collective, quotidian, and international labour involved in sustaining the spectacle on a daily basis.

It should also be noted that although political economists have been most vocal about the labour blind spot, this tradition is not immune from the tendency to neglect work. Despite its hallmark emphasis on production, the political economy of communication, as Mosco (2009, 140-141) recounts in his map of the field, has excelled in the unpacking of ownership structures, institutional levers of control, and the

commodification of content, while the commodification of labour and the labour process has received comparatively less attention.

The issue of the labour blind spot, and the need to challenge it, is not confined, however, to redressing a gap in academic literatures. It is simultaneously a political matter. As Richard Barbrook (2006) illustrates through the seventy-some entries featured in his compendium *The Class of the New*, there is a lengthy and lively modern bipartisan tradition of nominating, labeling, and frequently celebrating a specific group of workers—particularly those engaged in creative, intellectual, or technical labour—as harbingers of potentially seismic social change, often construed as occupational arrows pointing towards future paths of enhanced individual and collective freedom.

Better known 21st century representatives of this tradition include Richard Florida (2003, 2007), the urban economist who neutralizes the radical lineage of the word class with his exceedingly popular coinage, the "creative class," broadly designating a developing legion of arts, design, entertainment, and science workers propelling contemporary wealth creation, discovering meaningful work, receiving generous compensation, and embodying liberal values; the business author Daniel H. Pink (2002) salutes "free agents" for ditching traditional full-time employment to prosperously combine passion, autonomy, and income as independent contractors, entrepreneurs, or freelancers; and Thomas L. Friedman (2007, 7), *The New York Times* columnist and free-trade advocate, champions the ascendancy of "global knowledge work," from high-tech outsourcing to Web 2.0-style collaboration, which, he gambles, is inexorably leveling the planetary economic playing field, ushering in what he boldly calls "the flat world." The positions of Florida, Pink, and Friedman are, of course, varied and complex. What they share in common, however, is a broadly affirmative stance, in the sense that each author discerns in a current labour-market trend—more creativity-oriented jobs, more high-tech outsourcing, more independent work arrangements—genuine evidence of or latent prospects for more rewarding, better paying, and more democratic livelihoods. Unless the assignment of meaning to labour is to be ceded to business perspectives, the Left requires conceptual tools with which to engage in a contest over meaning about contemporary transformations affecting the world of work.

This dissertation is a modest attempt to counteract the labour blind spot tendency. Without asserting its primacy over other lines of inquiry, labour's marginal status in fields devoted to the study of communication and culture is problematic not least because it occludes a condition of possibility for—and a site of struggle in—an economic order whose character is increasingly defined as culturalized, informatized, and communicative (du Gay and Pryke 2002; Hardt and Negri 2000; Dean 2009). A host of terms entering our vocabulary—*creative class* and *free agent* but also *permalancer*, *crowdsourcing*, *turkers*, *goldfarmers*, *the independent workforce…*—register a set of material

transformations underway in the rhythms of work and the forms of labour at the start of the 21st century. Reflected in this emergent lexicon are two shifts in particular: a deviation from the traditional model of the permanent full-time job as a way to access labour-power, and the expansion of work revolving around cultural creativity and information and communication technologies. The contested convergence of these—which I frame as *precarity* and *immaterial labour*—is the subject of this dissertation. In what follows in this chapter, I set out to locate this inquiry in the traditions and debates that inspire and inform it. First, however, it is necessary to situate this study in some historical political economic context.

Post-Fordism

Since the 1970s there has been, according to David Harvey (1990, 189), a "sea-change" in the way capitalist societies operate. Harvey's sweeping examination of capitalist transformation in the 20th century in *The Condition of Postmodernity* is presented in the now familiar narrative of an uneven historical transition from "Fordism" to what Harvey terms "flexible accumulation," or to what other political economists theorize as "post-Fordism" (Amin 1994). The ideal-type categories of Fordism and post-Fordism are not without their problems, and I will comment on some of these in the conclusion to this section. They are nonetheless useful conceptual tools for registering something of the extent of change that has occurred in capitalist economies in the past three or four decades—without losing sight of significant historical continuities, including that of an economic order rooted in profit accumulation, the exploitation of labour, and social inequality. Following established critical political economic accounts (Aglietta 2000; Gibson-Graham 2006; Harvey 1990, 2005; Lee 1993; Webster 1995), this section offers a highly schematic outline of the concepts of Fordism and post-Fordism, touching upon three broad themes that bear most directly on the concerns of this dissertation: the organization of production, the nature of employment relationships, and the role of government.

The discourse of Fordism and post-Fordism derives from the Regulation School of political economy (see Jessop 1997). One of the fundamental concerns of Regulation theorists is how an economic system that requires the continual expansion of surplus value is perpetuated over a relatively long period. Capitalism, they observe, faces the problem of balancing production and consumption: individually, a corporation may seek to boost its profit by trimming its workers' wages; collectively, however, businesses require those same workers to be equipped with the consumption power to buy the goods they produce. Some level of equilibrium between production and consumption must therefore be achieved for profitability to be maintained and hence capitalist crisis averted.

Regulation theorists propose two inter-related categories in an attempt to explain how stability is brought to the capitalist accumulation process. A 'regime of accumulation' designates the prevailing organization of production, including the nature of the labour process, production technologies, firm structure, wage rates, consumer markets and so on. A 'mode of social regulation' refers to the vast extra-economic infrastructure undergirding a regime of accumulation. It encompasses, among other elements, social norms, political attitudes, state policies, and a variety of institutional arrangements. The Regulationist line of argument posits that capitalist reproduction depends on evolving a regime of accumulation that interacts with a complementary mode of social regulation so to secure steady, sustained, and expanding financial value generation.

Fordism, named after the pioneering industrial experiments of Henry Ford, is the regime of accumulation that was in place in advanced capitalist economies for most of the first three-quarters of the 20th century, reaching its apogee in the decades following the Second World War. The idea of Fordism was introduced by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1971, 279-318) in his essay "Americanism and Fordism," which contended that the entrance to Europe of US assembly-line methods, typically associated with the factories of Ford, wrought profound changes in the socialization of the workforce, the role of the state, artistic movements, and the definition of gender roles. It was, however, the Regulation theorists, notably Michel Aglietta (2000), who developed Fordism into a comprehensive framework for apprehending mutually constituting economic, political, social, and technological dimensions of American capitalism in the early to mid-20th century.

In production, Fordism depended on assembly-line factories and increasingly high levels of mechanization. Its core industries were devoted to the manufacture of standardized material goods, with automobiles, housing, and appliances key commodities of an evolving mass-production system. Output was oriented towards mass consumer markets, supported by an ascendant mass-mediated marketing-communication apparatus connecting individual desire to the world of commodities. With regard to corporate structure, the paradigmatic Fordist firm is the large, bureaucratic, vertically integrated national company. Relying on expensive single-purpose machinery, Fordist factory methods were notoriously Taylorized, the production process fragmented into component steps so to ensure optimal efficiency. That logic corresponded to a routinized, deskilled, and monotonous labour process carried out by a predominately male blue-collar workforce. Asking little in the way of workers' discretion, Taylorism, as Gramsci (1971, 302) argued, was an attempt to "[break] up the old psycho-physical nexus of qualified professional work, which demands a certain active participation of intelligence, fantasy, and initiative on the part of the worker." If the inhumanity of the Fordist worksite rivaled that of its capitalist predecessors (Lee 1993, 78), its architecture of production was

nonetheless ambivalent: managers at the helm of large-scale industry could not escape their dependence on dense spatial concentrations of unskilled workers, "[i]ndividually interchangeable but collectively indispensable" (Wright 2002, 107)—and always potentially antagonistic to a Fordist machine that unwittingly generated favourable conditions for the formation of class solidarity.

A preliminary indication of quintessentially Fordist employment conditions is the relatively high earnings of mass-production workers, the wider context of which is the class compromise between segments of labour and of capital. Politically, this entailed capital's reluctant recognition of the legitimacy of organized labour, on the condition that its more radical elements be purged or disciplined. Economically, the implications of the class compromise were prefigured by Ford's introduction in 1914 of a five-dollar-day for eight hours work. As well as payback for those willing to submit to Taylorist drudgery, this wage policy reflected a macro-economic understanding that the feasibility of mass production hinged on an equally mass purchasing power capable of acquiring the goods churning out from the assembly lines. The classic definition of Fordism is therefore the calibration of mass production and mass consumption. In the bargain struck between capital and labour, one of workers' tools of struggle, the wage, becomes instrumental to capitalist development (Baldi 1972). So although the Fordist era is characterized by immense advances in the unionization of industrial workforces, the collective bargaining agreements that were struck in this period frequently displayed a concessionary pattern whereby labour obtained wage gains in exchange for increasing its productivity. Ceding control on the shop floor to managers bent on intensifying the pace of production, workers parlayed their enlarged pay packets into consumer purchases, fuelling a virtuous circle of mutually expanding mass production and mass consumption. It is that Fordist algorithm that underwrote much of the economic growth in the postwar years immortalized as capitalism's golden age.

An anchor of the Fordist order, and a capstone of its class settlement, was the "standard employment relationship" (see Vosko 2000, 19-26). This ideal-type model of employment designates a "full-time continuous employment relationship where the worker has one employer, works on his or her employer's premises under the employer's direct supervision, normally in a unionized sector, and has access to social benefits and entitlements that complete the social wage" (Vosko 2008, 132). Legislation governing access to social welfare provisions, such as unemployment insurance, was often written around the norm of standard employment (Vosko 2000). The standard employment relationship is an historical product of the introduction of labour standards, the recognition of workers' rights (e.g., associational rights), and the extension of social protections that were formally recognized in the Labour Charter of the Treaty of Versailles, evolved in the New Deal era, and ascended in the aftermath of the Second

World War (Vosko 2000, 19-26). Reflecting both the counter-power that the best-organized working-class groups had accumulated in the early decades of the 20ᵗʰ century and the fear that was conjured up by the prospect of revolving socialist revolution, the extension of the standard employment relationship provided an unprecedented level of income guarantees, job security, and social protection to working people, initially workers in core industrial sectors and, later, to workers in the public service (ibid., 23).

Standard employment came to be understood as a social contract. Employers would meet "reasonable expectations for job security and benefits, such as health insurance and pension plans. In return, employees were expected to offer their loyalty and their best efforts" (Barley and Kunda 2004, 9). So although the standard employment relationship is a mechanism of labour control in the sense that it assures employers reliable access to labour-power and assures capital steady growth by increasing workers' power in the marketplace, it is nonetheless a hard-won gain for the labour movement in terms of a redistribution of wealth and security at a time when the hardship of the Great Depression was not yet a distant memory. Ingraining the notion of the job-for-life or the cradle-to-grave employee, the standard employment relationship was bound up with a stable world of work marked by predictable schedules, firm mutual obligations, binding collective agreements, strict job descriptions, and, perhaps, settled corporate hierarchies to steadily climb. In these and other ways, the standard employment relationship was another dimension of the social regulation of wage-earners in line with a new model of economic development—which again brings to mind the prescient comments of Gramsci (1971, 302), who spoke of Fordism as "the biggest collective effort to date to create, with unprecedented speed, and with a consciousness of purpose unmatched in history, a new type of worker…"

In terms of the role of government, Fordism departed from *laissez-faire* policies in favour of greater state intervention in the management of the economy and of public welfare. Consolidating in the wake of the Great Depression, the Fordist state was broadly Roosevelt-Keynesian in character, reflecting a consensus that some level of state planning was necessary to stabilize an evidently volatile capitalism. Abiding by Keynesian principles of macro-economic planning, governments were committed both to full employment to stave off social unrest and to an incomes policy that would bolster "effective demand" (Keynes 1964). Roosevelt's New Deal, especially the Social Security Act with its provisions for unemployment insurance and retirement pensions, would provide a model of a welfare state protecting the populace from unforgiving business cycles. So too were legislative frameworks put in place allowing union formation and regulating collective bargaining, albeit frequently guided in the economistic direction noted above. To fight unemployment, state funds were devoted to job-creating public works projects. Under Fordism, the state was also increasingly involved in the

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reproduction of labour power: according to Martyn Lee (1993, 82), "the widespread introduction of state-sponsored systems of education, housing, income maintenance and health-care would soon become the stabilising force *par excellence* of the new social structure; they would be seen to be the ultimate guarantor of a popular consensus, an effective mandate for the new regime of accumulation." While incarnations of the welfare state varied widely, Harvey, referring to postwar societies across much of Western Europe, North America, and Japan, remarks:

> What all of these various state forms had in common was an acceptance that the state should focus on full employment, economic growth, and the welfare of its citizens, and that state power should be freely deployed, alongside of or, if necessary, intervening in or even substituting for market processes to achieve these ends. (Harvey 2005, 10)

Under Fordism, a tripartite compact among big capital, big labour, and big government allowed business to afford incremental rises in wages and finance the welfare state that in turn supported the education of the intellectual labour necessary to support an increasingly technological mass production system. Fordism is thus conceived as more than an economic arrangement, but a whole way of social life, integrating factory work discipline, the production of consumerist subjectivities, and expanding state presence in the management of society. It reshaped work and leisure time around the standard nine-to-five job. It codified gender relations around the nuclear family and the social division of labour between the male 'breadwinner' and the female 'housewife' given over to domestic care, shopping, and childrearing. It provided a social safety net to countless standard workers and their families. These and other components of Fordism came together neither in a grand scheme nor all at once, but through a protracted process spanning several decades. And while Fordist social formations were heterogeneous, it is generally agreed that capitalist societies in North America and Europe that exhibited some amalgam of the above-described characteristics enjoyed, for nearly twenty-five years after the Second World War, a period of relative affluence, profit, and consensus.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s Fordism was showing signs of strain. Stagnating consumer demand for big-ticket durable goods, new sources of international competition, rising unemployment, creeping inflation, and the oil shocks of the 1970s were among a variety of factors that would ultimately throw Fordism into economic crisis. It was becoming apparent that capital had grown vulnerable in the complex that evolved around its imperative. For starters, the Fordist model depended on unions' collaboration with management, including, implicitly, a degree of austerity in downtimes. The recalcitrance of labour was reflected, however, in the unrelenting demands that eventually resulted in a "world wide wage explosion" (Hobsbawm 1997, 284), which had

begun to blast into corporate profits by the late 1960s. The mood of labour had swung from the conciliatory to the combative. Even union leaders were seen to have "lost control" of a more militant rank and file (Silver 2003, 162) that "increasingly came to reject the contracts negotiated on its behalf," and, indeed, demanded more (Aglietta 2000, 198). High direct and indirect labour costs, as well as the taxes that Fordism's welfare state counted on, became increasingly burdensome to business.

Disaffection with standard employment relationships and Taylorized work processes flared out in multiple directions. The years 1968-1972 in particular witnessed a wave of labour unrest, as frustration with working conditions boiled over in costly wildcat strikes, absenteeism, and sabotage. The demand that most concerned managerial powers was that for greater participation and self-management in production (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 174-177). As high as the OECD, there were also concerns about a so-called "allergy to work" spreading among young people feared to have a growing distaste for industrial labour and a preference for marginality (cited in ibid., 174). Student-led social upheavals of 1968—in which critique of authority, hierarchy, and massification were central themes—could be an example of how the "aspirations of new generations are at odds with the 'deals' agreed by older generations" (De Angelis 2008, 9). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri assert as much when, referring to the cultural experimentation and social desires expressed in these tumultuous years, they write:

> The prospect of getting a job that guarantees regular and stable work for eight hours a day, fifty weeks a year, for an entire working life, the prospect of entering the normalized regime of the social factory, which had been a dream for many of their parents, now appeared as a kind of death (Hardt and Negri 2000, 273-274; see also Lorey 2006; Scelsi 1998, 204).

Frustration was not confined to standard workforces in factories, and it was often brewing for some time. Already in the 1950s staid business practices were challenged from within, including by professionals in cultural industries (Frank 1997). Disenchantment with the conformism of the mass consumer society that Fordism had perfected emanated from multiple social quarters (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 439-441), reflected in and anticipated by best-selling books of the fifties and sixties bearing titles like *Organization Man*, *The Hidden Persuaders*, and *One-Dimensional Man*. A surging feminist movement attacked the patriarchal logic implicit in the standard employment relationship, which institutionalized the role of women as providers of the boundless unpaid labour of reproduction (Dalla Costa and James 1972). And the civil rights movement gave visibility and voice to racialized social subjects disproportionately excluded from the material gains enjoyed by the workforces to whom standard

employment was first extended. As efforts were made to revoke the class compromise in the workplace and the larger social arena, strikes and social unrest were amplified, productivity tumbled further, and Fordist growth began to reverse itself into a downward spiral of diminishing profits and, by the early 1970s, full-blown recession.

The crisis of Fordism, according to Regulation theorists' line of argument, has given rise to attempts over the past thirty-odd years to construct a new regime of accumulation. There is little consensus on its precise complexion, let alone its arrival. Literature around post-Fordism does suggest, however, some basic points of agreement with respect to mutations in recent decades in the organization of production, the nature of employment relationships, and the role of government.

In production, post-Fordism strives to overcome rigidities in the Fordist model through various methods of flexibilization. Computerized labour-shedding production processes, for example, replace mechanical assembly lines. Small-batch production runs and just-in-time inventory systems allow for more exact calibration of output and demand, thereby tackling the problem of unused stock and unsold commodities that factored in the crisis of Fordism. Mass markets do not disappear in post-Fordism but, under mounting competitive pressure as well as consumer demand for de-massification, are supplemented by niche markets. Consumer groupings are produced according to ever finer demographic and lifestyle variables, a process that is coextensive with greater product differentiation and heightened responsiveness to fluctuations in taste.

In terms of corporate organization, many large companies responded to the profitability crisis of the 1970s by restructuring their operations through the 1980s and 1990s. A hallmark of restructuring was vertical disintegration, with the correspondent rise of the model of the lean networked organization. The latter is bound up with an increase in the contracting out of jobs previously completed in-house, and a concomitant expansion in small and medium-sized enterprises. Such a decentralization of production involves an "insecurities-and-risk-transfer chain" (Frade and Darmon 2005, 118), where lower-margin and higher-risk activities are generally assumed by smaller companies while larger firms retain control over higher-value production and distribution channels.

Industry is also geographically redrawn. American and West European industrial capital made incursions into the South from the 1950s and 1960s, but it was the labour dissent in the dominant countries in 1968-1972 that, according to Beverly J. Silver (2003, 160), lit the "spark in the take-off of the transnational expansion" of production that marked the decades to come. "Deindustrialization of formerly unionized core industrial regions" not only "disempowered labour" in those areas (Harvey 2005, 53), but simultaneously contributed to the installation of a new international division of labour. Transnational free trade agreements and provisions for foreign direct investment rendered corporate capital increasingly mobile, and more and more Fordist-type mass

manufacturing was relocated to less expensive and less unionized labour zones in Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, establishing a planetary subsystem of "peripheral Taylorism" (Negri 2005, 109).

The transition from Fordism to post-Fordism is also marked by shifts in commodification strategies. Stagnation in established industries and product lines sets off a search for what Silver (2003, 103-122) calls a "product fix." It is in this context that we might situate the observation by Harvey (1990, 157) of "a shift of emphasis from production of goods" in Fordism "to the production of events" in flexible accumulation. The merit of events to capital—the speed with which their use-value is exhausted (ibid., 156-157)—also partly accounts for the expansion of diverse forms of symbolic production in post-Fordist times (see Lash and Urry 1994). Knowledge creation, information management, perpetual technological innovation, and the aestheticization of consumption are among the watchwords of post-Fordist capitalism—particularly where the latter entwine with intellectual property as an increasingly paramount modality of accumulation. Coterminous with these apparent shifts in production are changes in the occupational structure. Over the past thirty-five years, popular thinkers have registered corresponding transformations in the world of work through terms from "knowledge class" (Bell 1973) to "symbolic analysts" (Reich 1991) to "creative class" (Florida 2003)—each of which asserts, in its singular way, the economic significance of new types of workforce and labour process. These cadre variously serve as engineers, feeders, and administrators of the communications and information infrastructure, which as Frank Webster (1995, 148) emphasizes in his assessment of post-Fordism, is integral to the management of dispersed production matrices, fickle consumer tastes, elaborate market dynamics, and, it must be added, multiplying content outlets in an age of digital networks.

With respect to employment patterns, in the post-Fordist period the standard employment relationship has undergone a "decline" (Vosko 2000, 27). Following recessionary times in the 1970s, employers were increasingly concerned to protect themselves from "the potentially devastating losses that result from the inflexible or fixed labour costs that were a primary cause of the crisis of Fordism" (Lee 1993, 113). Indeed, with its potentially legally binding incremental wage increases, fringe benefits, and job security, a standard workforce is costly to maintain. By the 1980s the model of the 'flexible firm' was a popular antidote prescribed in management circles (see Huws 2003, 96-97). It described an organization whose employee base is segmented between, on the one side, a 'core' of secure insiders whose conditions are closest to a standard employment relationship, and, on the other side, a 'periphery' of insecure outsiders who are deployed and disposed of as business conditions dictate. In an organization, as on the planet, the core and the periphery are reciprocally related, with the costs savings on the

latter—from reduced insurance contributions, holiday pay, redundancy compensation, maternity, training, and so on—subsidizing the material security of the former. What was a stopgap measure in economic downtimes became, however, a best practice in labour market design.

Since the late 1970s, writes political economist Leah Vosko (2000, 28), "the growth of nonstandard forms of employment began to outpace the growth of the (standard employment relationship) in many advanced welfare states." In 2002, more than forty percent of the working population in the European Union was in nonstandard employment (Frade and Darmon 2005, 109), the forms of which range from solo self-employment to part-time work, fixed-term contract, and temporary agency work (see also Gray 2004; Kalleberg 2000; Shalla and Clement 2007; Standing 2008). A "secure full-time job," as one German labour critic put it, has begun to feel like a "threatened privilege" (Ronneberger 2007). The logic of post-Fordist labour management is vividly captured by Anne Gray (2004, 3) who describes employers' desire to access labour like "water"—"a resource to be turned on and off at will." This system of "flexploitation," as Gray labels it, accomplishes a qualitative deterioration of the employment relationship as compared to the standard paradigm. Insofar as nonstandard work arrangements correlate with an absence of union representation, uncertainty about continuing employment, unpredictable schedules, discontinuity of income, a lack of benefits, or diminished access to entitlements, these ostensibly atypical forms of employment—whose common denominator is "the absence of security" (Vosko 2000, 28)—have been more precisely conceptualized as "precarious employment" (Vosko 2006). In the language of economists, flexible employment arrangements may provide capital with elevated labour-market efficiencies, but it is working people themselves who carry the burden of flexibility. This burden is not, however, equitably shouldered. Exposure to precarious employment is structured on lines of age, gender, and 'race,' with youth, women, and people of colour disproportionately represented in vulnerable work situations (see Cranford et al. 2003), making these all-too-familiar axes of social exclusion, and their intersection with class, the most "durable yardsticks" of who is more likely to be precariously employed (Mythen 2005, 144).

In terms of the role of government, post-Fordism appears to abandon a Keynesian orientation. It moves instead toward a "neoliberal state," whose *raison d'être* is "to facilitate conditions for profitable capital accumulation on the part of both domestic and foreign capital" (Harvey 2005, 7). The situation of labour in the dominant countries under neoliberalism is, to use the words of labour economist Guy Standing (2008, 19), "the reverse of what had occurred in the post-1945 era"; that is, stability is traded for insecurity, and the balance of power is sharply tilted to "employers relative to workers." If the Fordist state accepted trade unions as a corporatist partner, the neoliberalization of

industrial relations was boldly announced when Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan stood down striking workers in high-profile national labour disputes whose regressive conclusions have been interpreted as "the death knell" (Wallace 2007, 770) of the postwar compact. If the Fordist state advocated for full employment, post-Fordist polities tolerate higher levels of joblessness, arguably creating an atmosphere inhospitable to labour militancy. At the same time, organized business interests have urged governments to legislate greater flexibility in the labour market—by, for example, legalizing temporary help agencies or introducing new types of nonstandard contract—on the grounds that doing so would allow businesses to hire, and of course fire, in perfect synch with market conditions (see Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 503, 490; Harvey 2005, 203). If a Keynesian style incomes policy encouraged a rise in earnings so to prop up effective demand, in the post-Fordist period, "real wages, except for a brief period during the 1990s, stagnated or fell and benefits diminished" (Harvey 2005, 53), with the shortfall covered by growing levels of consumer debt. Finally, if the turn to neoliberalism may be understood as a "project to achieve the restoration of class power" lost in the Fordist era (ibid., 16), then the soaring incomes of economic elites derive not only from the bargain sell-off of public assets or generous corporate tax cuts, but also from the labour costs savings passed on to them through the institutionalization of precarious employment.

Neoliberalism has also transformed the conditions of labour more broadly. With the creation of a state that is more explicitly oriented towards servicing business interests, Fordist programs that provided a social wage have been eroding through retrenchment and re-regulation (e.g., the privatization of social housing, the introduction of user fees for public services, the conversion of unemployment insurance into workfare) (Lee 1993, 116). One of the results of this combination of austerity and marketization is, according to Standing (2008, 22), that individuals at either pole of the class structure are "detaching" from "state-based social protection": the elite is detaching by choosing private security and market paths to well-being, while the poor is detaching by facing more stringent eligibility criteria for reduced entitlements and services. An upshot, Standing suggests, is that neither group feels compelled by the notion of "social solidarity" expressed through the redistributive mechanisms of a welfare state (ibid.).

This point dovetails with the values orientation of a post-Fordist state. Inspired by the intellectual architects of neoliberal ideology, it was Thatcher who encapsulated a key tenet of neoliberal thought when she proclaimed that there "is no such thing as society, only individual men and women" (cited in Harvey 2005, 23). The freedom of the individual is, in the neoliberal view, "guaranteed by the freedom of the market" (ibid., 7), whereas government intervention is perceived as a threat to individual freedom (ibid., 5). The broader constellation of market values espoused by neoliberalism thus includes individualism, competitiveness, and entrepreneurialism (see Munck 2005). Moreover, the

neoliberal state tends to support innovations in technology and communication, because these both foster the informational infrastructure for globalizing markets and for expanding the reach of market exchange that neoliberal theory holds sacrosanct (Harvey 2005, 3-4). Finally, the post-Fordist state accommodates to globalization's imperative to optimal competitiveness (Webster 1995), both in the pro-business policies neoliberalism promotes domestically and globally and in the types of self-reliant "enterprising individuals" it values (Rose 1998, 150-168).

The notion of a Fordist/post-Fordist divide has proved controversial. Some argue that, according to the criteria of the Regulation School itself, post-Fordism is not a full-fledged regime of accumulation because it lacks a corresponding mode of social regulation lending it genuine stability (Tickell and Peck 1995). Others suggest that the Regulation narrative's emphasis on capitalist stabilization makes it difficult to conceive of disruptions to the prevailing socio-economic order (Gibson-Graham 2006). The most recurrent criticism, however, is that the category of post-Fordism runs the risk of exaggerating change at the expense of continuities (Webster 1995).

To take one example, feminist political economists have pointed out that contemporary capital's penchant for flexible labour does not represent a "radical break" with past practices (Vosko 2000, 27). The standard employment relationship was not universally extended. Not only was it initially concentrated in "core sectors" of industrial production and in the public sector (ibid., 23, 24), the standard employment relationship has historically been a "gendered norm," in that it was premised on and reinforced a "dualistic association with male breadwinning and female care-giving" (Vosko 2008, 132). Highlighting its narrow geographic scope and wide race-based exclusions, Nancy Ettlinger (2007, 323) stresses that labour market insecurity characterized "the lives of countless others during Fordism's apparent golden age"—'others' often "relegated to precarious employment" (Cranford et al. 2003, 459).

Many of the scholars making this corrective nonetheless recognize that the incidence of precarious employment is growing within the dominant countries, and have identified this tendency with the concept of the "feminization of employment" (Hardt and Negri 2009, 133-134; Morini 2007; Vosko 2000, 34). This refers not only to the entrance of more women into the waged labour force, but also to the growth of occupations traditionally associated with so-called women's work, and to the diffusion of the materially insecure and temporally flexible conditions of work to which women and migrants have been disproportionately subject historically.

Measured voices in the debates about post-Fordism have cautioned against "any exaggerated claim that we are already living through a new and fully mature regime of accumulation" (Lee 1993, 111; see also Harvey 1990). So while we must be careful to not overstate the extent of transformation that has transpired over the past thirty-five years,

interlocutors have argued that, by the same token, "to reduce those changes to mere superficial adjustments" denies "the very dynamism and revolutionary nature of capitalism" (Lee 1993, 112). In this respect, post-Fordism is perhaps better understood as an interstitial zone: post-*Fordism* and *post*-Fordism (Kline, Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter 2003, 66). Although this category cannot be used uncritically, then, the story it tells about an uneven transition from a Roosevelt-Keynesian style Fordist state to a neoliberal state, from a normative standard employment relationship to growth in nonstandard employment, and from material goods to non-material commodities and labour processes makes post-Fordism a useful concept for setting some historical context to this study. Next, however, it is necessary to identify some of the analytical points of departure for this inquiry.

Labour Standpoint

The claim that labour is a blind spot in critical communication and cultural research deserves qualification. Overstating the oversight risks concealing a counteracting analytical tendency. Since the late 1970s, *some* labour-focused research has been pursued within the political economy tradition and within fields on its borders, such as cultural studies and media sociology (e.g., Glasgow University Media Group 1976, 1980; Mattelart and Siegelaub 1979, 1983; Morley 1976; Mosco and Wasko 1983; Ryan 1992; Smythe 1981; Willis 1978). Work, workers, and workplaces nonetheless remained marginal subjects through to the 1990s. The research scale began to tip, however, around 2000. Since then, there has been a relative surge of interest in labour among scholars whose substantive concerns include information technologies, cultural production, and media systems (e.g., Aneesh 2006; Deuze 2007; Dyer-Witheford 1999; Gill 2002; Hesmondhalgh 2007; Lazzarato 1996; McKercher and Mosco 2006b, 2007; McRobbie 2002; Negus 2002; Ross 2003). Indeed, surveying recent trends in political economic scholarship, Mosco (2009, 118) could report that "a genuine labor standpoint has begun to emerge." In relation to this early and emerging literature on labour, the points of departure for this dissertation's inquiry lie in select currents of analysis within the political economy of communication and within another internally heterogeneous tradition, autonomist Marxism.

Broadly defined as "*the study of control and survival in social life*" (Mosco 2009, 25), critical political economy is also a mode of analysis distinguished by its emphasis on history and social change, on a holistic perspective, on ethical issues, and on praxis (ibid., 26-36). For political economy, "the starting points of social analysis," writes Mosco (ibid., 214), are "the power of capital and the process of commodification." One of the central manifestations of this power is the systemic requirement under capitalism for the

overwhelming majority of the population to sell its capacity to work in order to survive. Marxian political economists have produced a vast and varied literature interrogating "labour control," the multifarious—and contested—process in and through which workers are individually and collectively "disciplined to the purposes of accumulation" (Harvey 1990, 123). In the context of the political economy of communication and culture specifically, two broad ways in which labour has been approached inform this dissertation: the first is that political economists have critically assessed dominant depictions of economic transformations and considered the situation of labour within them; the second is that political economists have investigated instances of labour conflict within the communication and cultural sphere, and have sought to affirm the capacity of working people to challenge labour control.

Stirrings of the sort of economic, technological, and occupational change that Regulation theorists would later associate with the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism were optimistically greeted by a number of commentators. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a dominant celebratory tradition coalesced around what sociologist Daniel Bell (1973) influentially termed "post-industrial society." As one part of this formulation, Bell famously forecasted a decline of class-based struggle, arguing that as advances in productivity shifted capital and labour to an enlarging service sector, so too would the industrial proletariat—and the political role Marxism assigned it—gradually fade. This hypothesis was connected to the proliferation of what Bell (1973, 213) referred to as the "knowledge class," whose expanding ranks was a distinctive trait of the post-industrial society. This general line of thinking was germane to the typically exuberant information-revolution thinking and policy-making that would move into ascendancy in the late 1970s and 1980s (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 22-31), and whose other signature voices ranged from management theorists like Peter Drucker (1967) to popular futurologists like Alvin Toffler (1970, 1980). The knowledge worker who was often a protagonist in this discourse bore little resemblance to his[1] unruly progenitor, the industrial worker: working with his head not his hands, providing services rather than manufacturing products, manipulating information rather than material objects, the post-industrial labour force could anticipate a workplace where jobs would be less onerous, more rewarding, and less susceptible to simplification (see Dyer-Witheford 1999, 25, 28-29; Webster 1995, 35-36).

Hopeful outlooks on the coming world of work were delivered a reality check by Harry Braverman (1998). In his momentous 1974 book, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the 20th Century*, Braverman disputed the view that the new computer technologies entering the workplace, the expanding office workforce, and the developing service-sector occupations would be democratizing and empowering for workers. Braverman reminded that capitalists have time and again utilized technologies and management processes to rationalize a labour process so to dilute workers' counter-

power and extract higher profit. He found evidence of an occupational upgrading of the doctrine of scientific management, with its characteristic outcomes of the deskilling of work, the devaluing of labour, and the dividing of expertise—with a razor thin stratum of empowered managers commanding a teeming mass of labour whose so-called white-collar jobs, Braverman maintained, more closely resembled factory work than boosters at the time cared to admit.

In the 1980s and 1990s political economists of communication took up concerns expressed by Braverman and posed challenges to "the post-industrial fantasy" (Mosco 1983, 239). Critical researchers did not necessarily deny the change occurring in the world of labour, but illustrated that its effects on workers were hardly as rosy as those rendered in the dominant discourse on the knowledge worker and its technological habitat. Assessing the enthusiasm that accompanied the construction of the so-called information superhighway, for example, scholars documented new forms of labour surveillance, the routinization of jobs, and employment uncertainty corresponding to the introduction of new information and communication technologies into a range of sectors, from healthcare to travel (Huws 2003; Menzies 1996). Researchers also examined the transfer of rote information-processing work and electronics assembly to lower-wage regions as characteristic features of the global reorganization of work (Huws 2003; Sussman and Lent 1998).

These lines of inquiry were invigorated as the 20th century drew to a close. Dot.com mania, a virtually inescapable dimension of American capitalist culture at the time, raised the profile not just of wired industries but also of the people working within them. New media occupations in particular were roundly celebrated as not simply enjoyable but flat-out emancipatory. Buzz can boomerang, however, as happened when a number of alternate journalistic accounts surfaced, whose skepticism towards mainstream depictions of labour and life in a network era was openly declared in such book titles as *Netslaves* (Lessard and Baldwin 1999) and *The New Ruthless Economy* (Head 2003). In a similar spirit, political economists critically evaluated the enthusiasm fastened to "digital capitalism" (Schiller 1999) by carrying out empirical investigations into its vaunted workshops, which revealed familiar power imbalances between labour and capital playing out on a novel terrain (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 2006; Ross 2003). Across the Atlantic in the United Kingdom, Tony Blair's New Labour government, on the heels of its 1997 election, was growing visibly keen to the potential of cultural creativity to breathe new life into the British economy (Smith 1998). Cultural studies scholar Angela McRobbie (2002) has consistently tested affirmative perspectives on the cultural economy (e.g., Leadbeater and Oakley 1999) against the workaday realities of making culture for a living; her research on the youthful labour of visual artists and fashion designers, for instance, unearths the flipside of such work, from how indie cultural

producers act as insecure feeders of lean multinational corporations to how social inequalities around age and gender can be subtly reproduced in cultures of cultural work.

Across their diversity, what contributions to the above-noted strand of research minimally share is that they examine the gap between promise and reality, shining a spotlight on human and social consequences that may be marginalized in prevailing narratives surrounding the restructuring of work and economy.

For political economists, however, the point is not simply that work in post-Fordist capitalism is not always what it is cracked up to be. A second dimension of political economic approaches to labour that inspires this dissertation is that focusing on the political agency of working people. While this second current of research is perhaps less developed than the first, its promise was indicated early on by *Communication and Class Struggle*, an expansive two-volume anthology co-edited by Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelaub (1979, 1983). Aiming to "[remove] the question of communication and culture from the order of consumption in which they have been imprisoned," these books featured texts that entered what the editors termed "the interior of the capitalist communications apparatus" (Mattelart 1983, 17). At issue was not only the labour blind spot, however. Mattelart contended that in critical research there was an overemphasis "on the dismantling of the apparatuses of dominant power," and "not nearly enough" attention on "the resistance of groups subjected to it" (ibid., 48). In one of his sprawling introductions to the anthology, Mattelart therefore outlines a suggestive dissonant agenda for "class and group analysis." Research in this vein would be attuned to, among other aspects of the interplay of subaltern politics and communicative practices, "forms of communication and culture [that] produce men and women who struggle against the power apparatus" (ibid., 17); "collective forms of organization" (ibid., 26), including those of "the organised structures of the working class" and of "rank and file movements" (ibid., 19); "social uses of the media" that offer "possibilities of dialogue and reversal" (ibid., 27); and the capacity of communities to independently "[develop] solutions for their survival and liberation" (ibid., 18). Perhaps the overriding question in the mode of analysis that Mattelart advocated is, however, this: "what is the role of creators, receivers and collective organisations in the production of a new democratic alternative?" (ibid., 55) Exploring such a question, especially at the present conjuncture, requires heeding Mattelart's warning—to not react to moments of "restructuring," and indeed of "crisis," by "implicitly thinking of degeneration without ever seeing in it the germs of new possibilities" (ibid., 58).

Rather than treat it as a cast-iron location in a social relationship, Mattelart's perspective on class is resonant, writes Mosco (2009, 193), with a "formational approach" to class. The latter may be contrasted to a critical approach that emphasizes what a subordinate class is deprived of:

> [I]t is important to acknowledge the significance of a lack of control over the means of production, reproduction, and distribution, and a lack of the wealth, income, and the opportunities that go along with them. … However, such a categorical view is limited to the conclusion, however important, that the lower classes are defined by the *absence* of power-generating resources. (ibid., 192, emphasis added).

A formational approach, in contrast, perceives that social class is a locus of agency. Class categories and relationships set limits on, but also create contexts for, the constitution of critical awareness, resistant practices, and collective identities (ibid., 192). Understood formationally, class is not given in advance but a product of struggle. Political economists have taken a formational approach to class by examining labour and their unions in communication, information-technology, and cultural sectors (Bodnar 2006; Brophy 2006; Rodino-Colocino 2007; Mosco and McKercher 2008) and by examining labour's communication practices more broadly (Edge and Hardt 2006; Fones-Wolf 2006; Zhao and Duffy 2007). This research recognizes those who work inside media, communication, and cultural industries as active agents fully capable of organizing collectively to improve their conditions and of engaging in self-organized activity, and it also affirms the capacity of "working people as actual producers of communication and culture" (Mosco 2009, 193). It suggests, moreover, that the tools and strategies of communicative capitalism may be turned to alternate ends—to contest planetary capitalism (Dyer-Witheford 1999) and its convergent corporations (Mosco and McKercher 2008).

A formational approach also animates the second tradition inspiring this dissertation—autonomist Marxism. Coined by Harry Cleaver (2000, 15), the term autonomist Marxism designates, at its broadest, streams of labour inquiry rejecting "an overly one-sided focus on the dynamics of capitalist exploitation" (ibid., 11). Through an autonomist optic, labour is viewed as "the *active* subject of production, the wellspring of the skills, innovation, and cooperation on which capital depends" (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 65). Neither mere production input nor "victimized cog" (Cleaver 2000, 58), labour is conceived by autonomists as the vital energy and antagonistic other of capital. One thread of autonomist thought is that stemming from Italian *operaismo* (workerism) in the 1950s and 1960s, and reappearing, in revised form, in the 1970s in the diffuse social movement of *Autonomia* (see Lotringer and Marazzi 2007; Wright 2002). This current emphasizes the continuing capacity of varied strata of labour to self-organize in decentralized structures that are independent of traditional union structures, political parties, or state institutions.

Since the late 1990s Italian autonomist Marxism has been the subject of increasing attention outside Italy following the publication of Michael Hardt and Antonio

Negri's *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000). The perspective of autonomy adopted by Hardt and Negri begins by positing the priority of labour and resistance to capital and domination, and hence as the forces which capital must attempt to harness and contain. From this perspective, autonomists have argued that capital seeks to leverage "worker's antagonistic will-to-struggle as a motor for its own development" (Tronti cited in Lotringer 2004, 11). Recalling the earlier discussion of Fordism and post-Fordism, examples of this capture might include the strategic mobilization of the wage struggle and organized labour under Fordism, and the selective absorption by post-Fordist management strategists of social demands in the late 1960s and early 1970s for greater participation and less hierarchy in work relations (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). The claim that social conflict can play a constituent role in the course of capitalist development is a central "autonomous hypothesis" (Read 2003, 13).

Italian autonomist Marxism is, however, an exceedingly varied tradition. From its many tributaries, two currents in particular have informed this dissertation: the first is the idea of the ongoing "decomposition" and "recomposition" of sites, forms, and agencies of labour struggle (Midnight Notes 1992); and the second is the concept of "immaterial labour" (Lazzarato 1996) and some of the criticisms advanced against it.

Historically, the Italian autonomist tradition has been oriented toward the creation of new forms of collective organization and non-capitalist sociality, a project grounded in inquiry into the ever-changing "composition" of labour (Berardi 2003; Dyer-Witheford 1999; Wright 2002). Putting the struggle of labour and capital at the forefront, compositional analysis sets out from the assumption that labour may be continually decomposed by capital's attacks, yet it reemerges recomposed in a form that potentially poses new, and escalated, threats to capital's rule. The counter-power of the "craft worker," for example, is decomposed through Taylorization in the Fordist era, which in turn gives rise to the expanded disruptive potential of the "mass worker" in the industrial factory, a figure whom, due to its rising militancy, had to be decomposed by capital; that decomposition in turn helped to prepare the stage for the recomposition of capital and labour along post-Fordist lines (see Negri 1988). The conditions, forms, and prospects of conflict are constituted within the ongoing mutual recomposition of labour and capital. For just as labour processes, employment patterns, and the geography of production alter over time, so too may the sites and agents of resistance. In this regard, autonomists have tended to challenge the traditional socialist left's emphasis on the salaried "industrial proletariat" as the privileged agent of social transformation (Cleaver 2000, 16).

Beginning in the 1990s a number of autonomist theorists began to propose that "immaterial labour" is a key quality of the emerging composition of labour under post-Fordism (Lazzarato 1996; Lazzarato and Negri 1991; Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004). The "classic forms of 'immaterial' production" were said to include "audiovisual production,

advertising, fashion, the production of software, photography, cultural activities, and so forth" (Lazzarato 1996, 137). Immaterial labour has been more broadly defined by Hardt and Negri (2000, 290) as work that creates an "immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication" or an emotional response. Hardt and Negri (ibid., 293) go on to identify various subcategories of immaterial labour, including: forms of industrial work in which the labour process is transformed through the introduction of information and communication technologies; forms of work that revolve around the use of the computer and the competencies that digital networks set in train; forms of affective work involving the creation of an emotional effect, such as satisfaction, confidence, or excitement; and forms of analytical and symbolic work where tasks might range from the highly innovative to the extremely routinized. Such work is not primarily about making a material object, like the work that makes a car roll off an assembly line, or extracts coal from a mine; it involves the less tangible symbolic, affective, and social dimensions of a product and the process that generates it.

Immaterial labour is, in Hardt and Negri's (2004, 109) view, the "*hegemonic*" form of work in contemporary capitalism. This ascendancy, they say, is not quantitative—they recognize that not everyone works with computers or in a creative industry—but "*qualitative*" (ibid., 109). Hardt and Negri assign a strategic position to immaterial labour in part because it is activity that has been vital to a fresh phase of capitalist expansion: for example, the fibre-optic cables and wireless connections of digital networks run by immaterial labour that act as the tendrils of globalizing business; the metropolitan cultural milieus that bolster tourist economies and prepare urban districts for gentrification; the intellectual property lottery that propels some of capital's most futuristic sectors; and, at a wider level, the role of immaterial labour in cognitively and affectively shaping subjectivities throughout and for other parts of the economic system. Hardt and Negri (2004, 109) see immaterial labour as hegemonic in the sense that it is a "tendency," one which they see manifest not only in the apparent diffusion of work oriented toward the production and management of informational and cultural content, but also in the reshaping of multiple forms of work and sites of sociality along lines of immateriality. Immaterial labour theorists have cautioned that they are not proposing a succession of the material by the immaterial. Instead, they note, for example, that few tangible goods enter the marketplace without an "immaterial 'halo'" of visual, emotional, and lifestyle connotations (Read 2003, 127-128)—and it is that "halo" that is often perceived as the value-adding component of a commodity's construction; or that it is information about markets that precedes production in the ideal post-Fordist production scenario (Lazzarato 1996). What makes immaterial labour in these theorist's view a key activity in contemporary capitalism can be grasped by thinking of how central media, marketing, communication, and surveillance are, not just in creating new commodities,

but also in managing the workplaces that produce them and appealing to the consumers that buy them.

The concept of immaterial labour is born of the recognition of the economic significance of language, communication, creativity, emotion, and knowledge. The theorists who devised the term are not, however, in the same camp as, say, Richard Florida's (2003) "creative class," Robert Reich's (1991) "symbolic analysts," or Thomas Friedman's (2007) "global knowledge work," which seek to describe similar phenomena. What sets the immaterial labour concept apart from mainstream theories of post-industrialism is its inherent link to ideas of exploitation, conflict, and autonomy. Immaterial labour has been understood, first and foremost, as a social resource expropriated by capital. Some theorists have likened the subjectivities of immaterial labour to fixed capital, positing that it is the cultivation and exercise of intellect, imagination, and interactivity that is a locus of surplus-value generation in contemporary capitalism (Hardt and Negri 2000; Read 2003). Others see in the performance of immaterial labour a deep self-exploitation dynamic, with post-Fordist work regimes exhorting labouring subjects to be passionate, to communicate, to participate, to be creative (Lazzarato 1996, 134-136). Immaterial labour is, moreover, associated with a continuum of productivity in which the boundaries between work and non-work time blur, creating a space-time of exploitability that extends beyond the walls of the traditional workplace and is increasingly boundless (Fortunati 1995; Hardt and Negri 2000, 356). This line of argument—indebted to feminist-autonomist critiques of reproductive labour as unpaid work (Dalla Costa and James 1972)—suggests that immaterial labour, elements of which are learned and performed off the clock, emanates from everyday activities that feed capital but nonetheless remain unremunerated. A digital network milieu greatly extends the opportunity for this capture, according to autonomist-inspired analyses of the "free labour" (Terranova 2004) lucratively harnessed by social media networks (see Coté and Pybus 2007; Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 2009).

Autonomist perspectives also differ from mainstream theorizations by insisting that the capacities of immaterial workers sporadically conflict with, and spin out of, capital's sphere of control. It is argued that when capital increases its reliance on this type of labour and commodity, it unwittingly inculcates skills and evolves infrastructures that can be turned against it (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 64). More than a descriptive term, then, the concept of immaterial labour comes from a line of thought that would invite a search for moments of conflict, to explore those instances at which an immaterial workforce becomes resistant, unmanageable, and organized, and to find moments of political recomposition. The concept of immaterial labour is thus bound up with a tradition that has historically pursued questions of dissent—and of alternatives to waged-labour—that

are not immediately posed by terms such as creative class. Finally, this concept comes from a tradition whose utopian arrow points toward a future not of more, or even 'better,' work, but, in a distinctive mark of the politics of autonomy, a struggle against the "*reduction of life to work*" (Lotringer 2004, 7; see Weeks 2005).

The concept of immaterial labour is not without its problems. Indeed, some of the term's earliest theorists have acknowledged certain of its limits (Hardt and Negri 2000, 30), and a number of voices internal to the autonomist tradition have raised incisive criticisms (Caffentzis 2005; Dyer-Witheford 2001, 2005; Wright 2005). I want to flag four concerns. First, the idea of immaterial labour groups in a common categorization types of labour that are dramatically dissimilar and, in this way, risks obscuring sharp stratifications and deep differences within and between the groups performing such labour (Dyer-Witheford 2001). Both customer-service and software-engineering, for example, may be defined as immaterial labour: technology jobs, Hardt and Negri say, mobilize cognition and intellect, and service work often involves affect and caring—what feminist theorists have long known as "emotional work" (Hochschild 1983). Service jobs are, however, usually worse paid, less secure, less socially valued, and often more physically demanding—more material—than high-level information-work, and they are differently gendered. Old divides between male production work and female domestic work have, in other words, been reconstituted inside 'new' immaterial labour. The concept does not, moreover, attend to the nature of the employment relationship, which would reveal much about the dimension of stratification within labour.

Second, the formative theoretical discourse in and around immaterial labour has been problematized for its "almost angelic" tone (Hardt and Negri 2000, 30). Others have suggested that immaterial labour has been treated too abstractly. Vassilis Tsianos and Dimitris Papadopoulos (2006) caution against limiting the use of the concept of immaterial labour to a "sociological description" identified with characteristic features of post-Fordist style production. They argue for an activist-oriented approach where understanding of such labour is refocused on its "embodied experience" (ibid.), zeroing in on the tensions among exploitation, excess, and escape, or between the dynamics of neoliberal oppressions and the quotidian realities of living labor. These sorts of concerns are, perhaps, traceable to the disembodied terminology—*im*material labor. On this point, the autonomist theorist Alisa Del Re (2005, 54) issues an important clarification: "production is certainly immaterial, but … this cannot come into reality independently of bodies."

Third, the concept of immaterial labour has been criticized for emphasizing the more privileged high-tech pole of the immaterial workforce at the expense of older—but still alive-and-well—forms of drudgery and exploitation outside the overdeveloped post-Fordist core (Caffentizs 2005; Dunn 2004; Dyer-Witheford 2001, 2005; Federici 2008;

Moore 2001). Oil wars in Iraq, factory-cities in China, and mines in Africa are sufficient reminders that capital does not just run on code, and that some vital resources are not so immaterial. Fourth and finally, the literature focusing on immaterial labour has tended to lack a sustained discussion of the concrete political possibilities of this form of labour, a gap that arguably marks a break with the emphasis on collective action within the autonomist tradition from which the concept of immaterial labour derives. This concern would seem to lurk within a provocative question asked by Tsianos and Papadopoulos (2006): "Who's afraid of immaterial workers today?"

Outline of the Dissertation

I set out in this dissertation to contribute to the growing efforts to work against the labour blind spot tendency. One entry point for counteracting this tendency is, I propose, a contemporary current of analysis and activism confronting the problematic of *precarity*, an English language neologism derived from the Italian *precario* and the French *précair*. If income insecurity, the lack of social protections, the unpredictability of continuing employment, the absence of collective representation, and the blurring of work and non-work time are among its myriad symptoms, precarity is, if nothing else, not new. "The condition described today as that of the unstable worker (*travailleur précaire*)," writes the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, "is perhaps the fundamental reality of the proletariat" (cited in Reid 1989, xxxiii). Separated from ownership of and control over the means of production, the vast majority in the capitalist world is faced with the social necessity to sell its ability to work in a capricious labour market in order to survive—a sale that is never guaranteed, to say nothing of its terms and conditions.

Indeed, the forms and degree of security that in the Fordist period were extended to wage earners in a standard employment relationship is an unprecedented "exception" in the history of labour-capital relations (Mitropoulos 2005; Neilson and Rossiter 2008). The discourse on *precarity* arose from a more specific historical-geographical context, namely, the relative decline of the model of standard work, the rapid growth in nonstandard employment, and the embrace of flexploitation as a labour supply management strategy under conditions of post-Fordism. The language of precarity that inspires this dissertation emerged, moreover, from a particular political context. Building upon intellectual debates and radical activity stretching into the late 1960s and 1970s, autonomous activists in Western Europe, particularly in Italy, France, and Spain, collectively developed and circulated precarity as a mobilizing concept at the start of the 21st century. For the purposes of this inquiry, precarity is broadly defined as existential, income, and social insecurity that is exacerbated by the flexibilization of labour

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associated with post-Fordism, whose paradigmatic employment arrangements range from project-based work to fixed-term contract and solo self-employment.

The dissertation is structured in two main parts. Part one explores instances of the convergence of nonstandard employment and immaterial production. It has a broad threefold purpose. The first is to begin to bring into view the precarious (im)material workforce that underlies what is increasingly known as the *creative economy* or the *creative industries*—perhaps the latest hegemonic labels for post-industrial accumulation strategies, from technological innovation to symbolic production, assembled around immaterial labour. Encompassing the arts, cultural industries, the media, software, and much else besides, the creative industries have been admired for their growing share of total employment in advanced capitalist countries. But with a growing number of writers, I note that the prevalence of precarious employment relationships within these occupational zones tends to be downplayed in the official discourse surrounding them (Gill and Pratt 2008; Lovink and Rossiter 2007; McRobbie 2002). The second purpose is to highlight some of the differential manifestations of precarity, in an effort to stress that precarity is not a uniform condition but multiform—a point that the feminist collective *Precarias a la deriva* (2004a) underline by speaking in terms of "precarization." A third aim is to proceed in a way that responds to some of the concerns that have been raised about the immaterial labour discourse, specifically, that the early theorizations of the concept have tended to be abstracted from the quotidian and distanced from the less privileged labour forces animating post-Fordism. In this light, precarity may be conceived as one path for pursuing the task of "materializing immaterial labour" (Brophy and de Peuter 2007, 180).

The chapters comprising part one selectively draw on theoretical and empirical literature examining contemporary immaterial work to sketch a rough portrait of three personas of precarity. Chapter one introduces the figure of the *autonomous worker*, a nonstandard worker that appears to enjoy a degree of independence from some of the oppressive, alienating, and exploitative dimensions of a standard employment relationship. It discusses classic instantiations of the autonomous worker, such as the figure of the artist and the information-technology contractor, and argues that this persona's space of freedom remains tightly circumscribed, and falls short of the optimistic claims made for the "free agent nation" (Pink 2002). Chapter two offers a profile of the *precog*, a term I borrow from an Italian activist network of the same name. Depictions of an empowered creative class are alien to the precog, a cognitive worker who may labour at a socially glamorous occupation but does so under highly precarious conditions. Characterizations of the creative economy as generating either materially secure creative jobs *or* unstable service jobs (Florida 2007, 186-187), I argue, obscure divisions and difficulties internal to the very employment zones that the creative class

inhabits. By the same token, the precog is capable of rationalizing its exploitation by appealing to narratives of freedom, sacrifice, and meaningful work often linked to academic and artistic traditions (Ross 2000).

Chapter three offers snapshots of the *cybertariat* (Huws 2003): high-tech workers fearful of outsourcing, online digital pieceworkers completing rote tasks for pennies, migrant labourers powering China's sprawling electronics factories, and e-waste disassembly workers found at the end of the IT value chain. Such labour, umbilically linked to a creative economy which puts a premium on innovation and competitiveness, is performed under some of the most precarious employment conditions on the planet. Against Friedman (2007) who anticipates that free trade coupled with information and communication technologies (ICTs) will equalize economic opportunity, the fractured workforce presented in this chapter suggests that ICTs imbricate deeply with precarization, within a familiar but mutating global division of labour whose wage logic is racing to the bottom. The framework of precarious labour personas outlined in part one is, admittedly, generalist. It nonetheless strives to establish that precarity is a defining characteristic of work in sectors tightly associated with the creative economy, and also aims to provide at least an indication of some of the diffuse, uneven, and multiple manifestations of precarization, a process which advances in different ways across different social locations.

In part two, I switch focus to workers' political responses to precarity. The chapters included in this section highlight expressions of oppositional agency and inklings of transformative potential, which are kept out of sight when precarious labour forces are either only addressed as victims or mainly defined by what they lack. The analytical optic of decomposition and recomposition asks us to look at the process of capitalist restructuring, such as that from Fordism to post-Fordism, as a process that may weaken established sources of counter-power—but also generate new conditions and capacities that hold out the possibility of reviving, and potentially amplifying, opportunity for resistance. Arguing that precarization has not entirely exhausted dissent, the second part of the dissertation spotlights instances of the political recomposition of labour in the face of flexploitation. It examines select struggles against precarity arising in the first decade of the 2000s, primarily within West European and North American contexts—regions where it is often presumed that labour-based politics are of a bygone era. Indeed, at the start of the 21st century, some European activists began speaking of a nascent "precariat," a politicized precarious workforce described by some as a distinctly "post-Fordist proletariat" (Negri 2008, 215). Overall, part two tries to show that competencies of immaterial labour and communities of atypical workers in the media and cultural industries—where flexible labour management techniques are well established— have played an active role in experiments in nonstandard resistance, from organizing

protest movements to make the issue of precarity visible, to initiating new collective organizations expressly for precarious immaterial workforces, to floating proposals for reforming social protection systems to lessen precarity.

Chapter four explores a current of activism in Europe in which the code of precarity was proposed in the early 2000s both as a counter-narrative on labour market flexibility and as a political rallying point for a multitude of nonstandard workers. It offers a glimpse of this anti-precarity movement's creative militancy, from massive street parades to alternative media initiatives, through the conceptual lens of "autonomous communication" (Zhao and Duffy 2007, 230). One of the primary communicative innovations of this movement is, I argue, the development and circulation of the concept of precarity itself, which was, within a few years, being steadily integrated, albeit unevenly and not unproblematically, into the political lexicon of the Left. Chapter five begins by noting the strained relationship between the modern labour movement and nonstandard workers, and goes on to consider a handful of workers' organizations that have formed autonomously or in alliance with established unions in response to the concerns and needs of specific precarious immaterial workforces. Its main examples include Washington Alliance of Technology Workers, a Washington State union started by so-called permatemps at Microsoft; Freelancers Union, a fast-growing Brooklyn based membership organization seeking to aggregate the independent workforce as a political constituency; and *Coordination des intermittents et précarias d'Ille de France*, an autonomous organization of part-time media and performance workers in Paris. I argue that if the union movement is in crisis, as labour observers regularly comment, then precarious immaterial workforces are emerging an important catalyst of union renewal. Chapter six briefly turns to policy alternatives to precarity that have been brought up in the context of the European anti-precarity movement. It introduces the proposal for the introduction of a universal basic income, focusing on how this mechanism of economic security might be one component among many to mitigate precarity in an age of flexploitation—and one that holds out the promise of expanding the autonomy of labour within and against the work society as such.

The terrain of this dissertation is therefore the contested convergence of precarity and immaterial labour. Precarity, I contend, is a valuable conceptual tool to engage in a struggle over meaning about contemporary transformations in the world of work. It illuminates an underside that hegemonic discourses surrounding media, information technology, and cultural work—such as the creative economy, the flat world, and the creative class—have been criticized for downplaying if not effacing. While the real limitations of this keyword are discussed in the conclusion to the dissertation, I nonetheless observe that precarity and cognate terms are not only linguistic devices that workers themselves are using to name a qualitative feature of their labour and life

conditions. Precarity also signals a promising laboratory of contemporary labour solidarity, organization, and imagination, constituting one site among many in a wider process of political recomposition against flexploitation and the inequities inherent in it. Precarity is, in short, a site of struggle—within subjectivity, over meaning, and for livelihoods.

Notes

[1] As Ursula Huws (2003, 156-8) has pointed out, the literature of the time spoke of the knowledge worker as almost exclusively male.

Part I

Precarization:
A Profile of Precarious Work in the Creative Economy

In his foreword to Harry Braverman's 1974 book, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the 20th Century*, Paul Sweezy (1998, xxvii) expressed his indignation at the "monstrous system" of mentally stultifying and physically punishing labour to which the "vast majority of my fellow countrymen and women, as well as their counterparts in the most of the rest of the world" are subjected—and this, he noted, for no higher purpose than "the greater glory and great god of Capital." Against "the continuance of an arrangement so obviously destructive of the well-being and happiness of human beings," Sweezy dreamt of a society where "even half" of the energy currently devoted to the banalization of labour is put instead to "making work the joyous and creative activity it can be." Then, Sweezy could only imagine, "what a wonderful world this could be."

About twenty-five years after Sweezy made those remarks, the "great god of Capital" was itself enthusiastically welcoming a creative transformation of work (see Kapur 2007). With his wildly popular notion of the "creative class," the American urban economist Richard Florida (2003, 2007) bears at least some responsibility for a situation where, by the start of the 21st century, "creativity" had become rather "like a rash"—to borrow an analogy from Charles Landry (2005), the British urbanist who in the early 1990s advanced the now-ubiquitous "creative city" idea. The contagion has spread as high as the United Nations (2008, 3), which in 2008 published a three-hundred-plus page report titled *Creative Economy*, the global body's first extensive statement on what its authors describe as a promising "new development paradigm."

At the core of the creative economy, according to the UN report, lie "creative industries" (ibid., 15). After its 1997 election Tony Blair's British New Labour government adopted this term as a vast canopy covering the cultural industries, the media, fashion, publishing, the visual and performing arts, design, advertising, computer software, and much else besides. Adding up the revenues of these sectors yielded an impressive sum, and the Blair regime came to favour "the creative industries" as its preferred policy label for promoting this economic contribution (Ross 2007). Growth in UK creative industries, it was excitedly reported, was outpacing that in traditional industry (see Leadbeater and Oakley 1999; Smith 1998). Rather than the mineshafts, smokestacks, and civil service that symbolically stood for the Fordist era labour unions that Blair's Conservative predecessors stared down, the creative industries referenced the

art galleries, record labels, design studios, cultural events, and videogame developers whose immaterial productions, this emergent state discourse suggested, would drive Britain's national competitiveness, global exports, and economic expansion (Smith 1998).

"The creative industries," according to the generally accepted UK definition, "are those that are based on individual creativity, skill and talent. They also have the potential to create wealth and jobs through developing and exploiting intellectual property" (DCMS 2010). Whitehall's post-industrial formula was not solely of British invention, however. It condenses a variety of post-Fordist tendencies that were already well in play by the late 1990s—which helps to explain the speed with which this discourse has been taken up internationally in the first decade of the 21st century (see Ross 2007). What a growing number of policymakers, urban planners, academics, arts administrators, and wider publics have come to know as the creative class, the creative industries, the creative city, or more comprehensively, the creative economy, are, to be sure, heterogeneous tropes. Critical scholars nonetheless identify this group of terms with a relatively consistent set of emphases, including, but not limited to, the privilege accorded to intellectual property production (Smiers 2007), the value-adding power of symbolic production (Ross 2007), entrepreneurial approaches to city governance (Peck 2007), the information society ideal and promotion of technological innovation generally (Garnham 2005), and micro-enterprise (Raunig 2007).

As capitalism veered to global recession in 2008-09, "the creative economy" was cited as "a glimmer of hope in these economically difficult times" (*Deutschland* 2009, 41). Optimism surrounding the creative economy is based in no small part on its employment dimension. Government publications in this area regularly boast about not only the proportion of the total workforce currently employed in the creative economy (Creative Cities Leadership Team 2006; DCMS 2008; Leadbeater and Oakley 1999; Martin and Florida 2009), but also its "employment creation" potential (United Nations 2008, 16)—an urgent matter for national and urban economies facing deindustrialization, unemployment, or sluggish growth. One early UK report represented employment levels in individual sectors of the creative industries by using pens, pencils, or brushes of varying lengths to denote the relative size of each sector's work force (see Figure 1) (DCMS 2001, 11). Such graphic simplicity will, however, do little to alleviate one of the chief concerns that that have been raised in critical academic, artist, and activist circles about this creative turn—that, in the words of Aphra Kerr (2007, 119), the "focus on creativity seems to remove the focus on actual labour and working conditions…"

Take, for example, *Ontario in the Creative Age*, a 2009 report commissioned by the Province of Ontario and co-authored by Roger L. Martin and Richard Florida (2009) of University of Toronto. A major deliverable from a 2.2 million dollar government-

funded research initiative (Potter 2009), *Creative Age* is replete with statements and statistics conveying the significance of "human creativity," and the jobs "unleashing" it, to prosperity today (Martin and Florida 2009, 5, 12). The contribution of living labour is largely abstracted into a generic "potential" that the economic system must "harness" (ibid., 2). To their credit, Martin and Florida do acknowledge the widening income gap between high-skill professionals and low-skill service-sector workers. Missing, however, is any admission of the material difficulties that might also afflict the workforce within the "creativity-oriented occupations" whose expansion is to be sought (ibid., 22). For as Andrew Ross (2009a) has argued, the cost-cutting flexible labour strategies that capital initiated in low-wage manufacturing and services are steadily climbing the occupational ladder. Martin and Florida convey with crystal clarity their conviction that optimizing "competitiveness" is a highest priority to guide both economic and social policy; less transparent in the report is that competitiveness is the same imperative that drives capital to flexiblize labour globally. No wonder, then, that actual work conditions remain invisible in this publicly funded portrait of the promise of a gilded "creative age."

If the creative economy is beginning to be promoted at a governmental level as a preferred path to post-industrial prosperity (DCMS 2008; Martin and Florida 2009), then it is a task for critical research to make visible the workaday realities within the employment zones that the creative-economy handle broadly encompasses. In the chapters making up part one, I set out to illustrate that a characteristic feature of the creative economy is labour precarity—experiential, income, and social insecurity arising from the flexibilization of employment (see also Neilson and Rossiter 2005; Gill and Pratt 2008). In the context of a critique of creative industries, cultural labour researcher David Hesmondhalgh (2007, 63), while sympathetic with the autonomist discourse around precarity (see chapter four of this dissertation), expresses a concern that "it is hard to find much (in the way of) evidence in the many publications and websites around this topic." He goes on to contend that this literature, often more theoretically oriented, tends to provide "little explanation of what forms these (precarious) subjectivities take in everyday life, through actual instances, or through hearing the voices of a range of 'immaterial workers'" (ibid.).

Heeding this, the three chapters that follow in part one seek out and plug into interdisciplinary literatures that do speak on more empirical terms to the convergence of immaterial production and precarious employment (e.g., Gill 2007; McRobbie 2002, 2003; Ross 2009). Selectively drawing on existing academic research, and periodically supplementing it with additional examples, these chapters recast this material through sketches of three personas of precarity that animate the vaunted creative economy. Chapter one introduces the *autonomous worker* (see Lazzarato 1996), the nonstandard immaterial worker that strives for independence from some of the oppressive, alienating,

and exploitative relations associated with at least an image of standard employment. Chapter two examines the *precog*, a term borrowed from an Italian activist network of the same name. Optimistic accounts of a highly valued "creative class" (Florida 2003, 2007) ring hollow to the precog, a cognitive worker who may labour at a traditionally socially prestigious occupation but does so under classic precarious employment conditions. Chapter three turns to the *cybertariat* (Huws 2003). Dispersed throughout the high-tech value chain, among this fractured work force are recipients of offshored immaterial labour, itinerant material workers of vast electronics factories, home-based digital pieceworkers, and others, whose labour not only undergirds the creative economy, but also is performed under some of the most precarious circumstances encountered in the contemporary global division of labour.

Exploring the convergence of precarity and immaterial labour is one way to ground the latter vis-à-vis the intangibility associated with its products. Approaching immaterial labour from the vantage point of precarity might, moreover, moderate some of the more hyperbolic claims—it bears "the potential for a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 294)—that have been made for such labour. At a broader level, I want to suggest that, rather than search for its poster-child, precarity is more productively approached as multiform. In this respect, the autonomous worker, the precog, and the cybertariat are just three possible entry points among many for constructing an inevitably partial profile of not so much a generic labour condition of precariousness, but of a heterogeneous process of "precarisation" (*Precarias a la deriva* 2004a), a process through which labour insecurity is differentially imposed, experienced, and negotiated among working subjects of a contemporary creative economy that has failed to make Paul Sweezy's dream a reality. These chapters therefore implicitly trouble dominant depictions of the creative economy to the extent that they fail to adequately attend to working conditions, and, in particular, to the precarity that is widespread in employment zones that make up the creative economy or imbricate with it in some way. The wider significance of such a line of inquiry is suggested by Hesmondhalgh (2007, 59): "policies that argue for a radical expansion of these industries under present conditions, without attention to the conditions of creative labour"—or, it should be added, any other type of labour bound up with them—"risk fuelling labour markets marked by irregular, insecure and unprotected work." Indeed, the discourse on the creative industries, he adds, "all too often come(s) close to endorsing inequality and exploitation associated with contemporary neoliberalisms" (ibid., 66).

Figure 1
Estimated employment in UK creative industries

EMPLOYMENT
Estimated Total 1,322,000 (1)

SOFTWARE & COMPUTER SERVICES 555,000

PUBLISHING 141,000

MUSIC 122,000

TELEVISION & RADIO 102,000

ADVERTISING 93,000

DESIGN 76,000

PERFORMING ARTS 74,000

FILM & VIDEO 45,000

ART & ANTIQUES MARKET 37,000

CRAFTS 24,000

ARCHITECTURE 21,000

INTERACTIVE LEISURE SOFTWARE 21,000

DESIGNER FASHION 12,000

(1) Figures may not appear to sum due to rounding.

Chapter 1

The Autonomous Worker

> [I]ndependent work also represents liberation, and has the
> potential to be self-determined … it is possible to produce
> better ways of life than waged labour.
> (Bologna 2007)

Political Economy from Below

A significant share of the creative industries workforce is described as having the employment status of "independents"—"freelancers, the temporarily employed, sole traders and micro-businesses" operating in a labour economy where jobs are frequently "intermittent, irregular and informal" (Strange and Shorthose 2004, 48, 47). To cite only a handful of figures from across this vast industrial field: A UK employment census of audiovisual industries carried out by Skillset (2006a, 4-5) found that more than one quarter of those working on census day was freelancing—yet the "actual available labour pool" of freelancers was estimated to be nearly twice that size.[1] The European Federation of Journalists (Nies and Pedersini 2003, 7, 9) reports that over twenty percent of journalists in the European Union are freelancers, with the number hovering around fifty percent in Germany, Hungary, and Italy. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008-09) counts more than sixty percent of "artists and related workers," and more than thirty percent of writers and editors, as freelancers. Over the last twenty-five years or so, these figures have generally risen, sharply in many cases. In news work, for instance, it is estimated that between the 1980s and the 1990s the percentage of stringers doubled (Tunstall cited in Baines 1999, 19). And the number of freelancers in the UK television sector ballooned more than twenty percent between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s (Ursell 2000, 807). Predictions that "[f]lexible and less formal working patterns are likely to increase across the sector" are not at all uncommon in labour market commentaries around the creative economy (National Guidance Research Forum n.d.).

These rates of employment de-standardization suggest that the creative industries have not been immune to the political, economic, and technological processes that have contributed to the reorganization of workforces in other sectors along 'casual' lines. As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, these processes include: corporate restructuring and privatization which have sought to reduce direct labour costs via

downsizing, outsourcing, and temporary hiring (Ursell 2000); the parallel trend toward industrial fragmentation or decentralization, where larger firms transfer higher risk and lower margin activities to an expanding archipelago of micro-, small- and medium-sized businesses (Mosco 2009, 56); and technological innovation, especially that leading to lower cost production tools which, combined with the evolution of telecommunication networks, have presented new opportunities for the spatial disaggregation of production (see Harvey 1990, 155-159; Leadbeater and Oakley 1999).

Atypical employment is not necessarily new to many of the domains identified with creative industries. For example, Pierre-Michel Menger (2001, 250), a sociologist of artistic labour markets, suggests that the arts have been "forerunners" of labour flexibilization. Other researchers have noted that "the rapid increase in self-employed creators of culture can be seen as an indicator that the emergence of precarious working conditions in this sector dates back further historically than it does in the economy as a whole" (Ellemeier 2003, 11). In an analysis of the reorganization of film labour in Hollywood, Michael Storper (1989, 281-282) notes that, beginning in the 1950s, major studios quickly became committed to a "putting-out system," thereby eroding the model of the "'term contract,' under which writers, actors, and skilled production technicians worked exclusively for one studio full-time for a guaranteed period." Increasingly, a disparate group of contract workers were assembled on a "project" basis for the completion of a single movie (ibid., 282). Project-based employment—where a project might range from a cultural event to a software application—is recognized as a common feature of work organization within creative industries—bringing to mind Paolo Virno's (2004, 58) hypothesis that Hollywood "fine-tuned" ways of working that would grow "pervasive" under the "paradigm of post-Fordist production on the whole" (see Raunig 2007).

Employment statistics and macro-level processes do not complete the story, however. Andreas Wittel (2004, 27, 25) argues that a more comprehensive picture of the play of power in the cultural economy requires broadening the analytical horizon so to bring into view what Wittel, drawing on Antonio Negri, refers to as "political economy from below," in particular, the "micro-politics" of labour and the dynamics of "desire" therein. In terms of this dimension of subjectivity, I note that some Marxian theorists appear at first blush to have an optimistic perspective on the de-standardization of employment, in particular, of the self-employed, a figure whom some writers in the autonomist tradition know as "the autonomous worker" (see Wright 1995/1996).

One branch of the genealogy of this persona reaches back to those social-movement dissidents who in the 1960s, in the words of Isabell Lorey (2006), "persistently aimed to distinguish themselves from normal working conditions and the associated constraints, disciplinary measures, and controls." Lorey continues: "Keywords

here are: deciding for oneself what one does for work and with whom; consciously choosing precarious forms of work and life, because more freedom and autonomy seem possible precisely because of the ability to organize one's own time, and what is most important: self-determination." Similar attractions have been linked to those Italian workers who in the 1980s are said to have fled the power of the boss and rote work in the large-scale factories and instead organized themselves in the small-scale production matrices that would inspire early theorists of flexible specialization (Bologna 2004; Holmes 2002/2003, 119; Scelsi 1998).

Among these workers Negri perceived the emergence of an "entrepreneurial spirit from below," a "new character of labor power, autonomous in its attitude, often self-employed and increasingly immaterial" (cited in Hermann 2006, 66). Similarly, in a far-reaching discussion of transformations affecting labour in the late 20th century, Maurizio Lazzarato (1996, 140) speaks of "polymorphous self-employed autonomous work" as one component of a "'silent revolution' taking place within the anthropological realities of work and within the reconfiguration of its meanings. Waged labor and direct subjugation (to organization)," Lazzarato writes, "no longer constitute the principal form of the contractual relationship between capitalist and worker." None of the above-cited writers is blind to the dark side of flexploitation; nonetheless, these quotes indicate a refusal to discount the desires that animate those who seek an escape route from, or unwittingly find themselves outside, a full-time permanent job along the lines of the standard employment relationship.

How does an optimistic perspective on the autonomous worker hold up against accounts of the everyday experience of self-employment among immaterial labourers? Can one—as labour researcher Sergio Bologna (2007) believes—"produce better ways of life than waged labour" through self-employment or short-term contract work?

"Micro Spaces of Autonomy"

Employment situations that promise flexible schedules, a diversity of work, and the chance to be creative often come with trade-offs that include, among others, a lack of entitlements, uncertainty with regard to continuing paid work, and poor remuneration.

One of the more comprehensive recent surveys of an "independent workforce" was that conducted in 2005 by Freelancers Union (Horowitz et al. 2005).[2] Freelancers Union, an organization which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five of this dissertation, is based in New York City—a bona fide capital of creative industry where, according to municipal statistics, "people working for themselves" account for a striking two-thirds of the jobs created in this metropolis between 1981 and 2006, "making self-employment the biggest source of job creation in the city" (Vanderkam 2009).[3] Based on

a questionnaire completed by more than 2,800 members—concentrated densely in publishing and journalism, new media and information technology, and the arts and advertising—the Freelancers Union published a report stating the finding that "[t]he greatest percentage of freelancers in New York work independently because they want to" (Horowitz et al. 2005, 3). Indeed, according to the authors of the report, many freelancers are "consciously rejecting" (ibid., 4) traditional employment, with the majority of respondents identifying "some form of freedom (from office politics, difficult bosses, cubicles and commutes) as a main benefit" to working independently (ibid., n.p.). In terms of other benefits, 86 percent identified a "flexible schedule," with approximately 70 percent viewing freelancing "as a way to maintain a more balanced life," including, for instance, allowing greater time to devote to children or "artistic pursuits" (ibid., 4). Regarding the work itself, 71 percent reported "diversity of projects" as a merit of independent work, and 47 percent believed they "enjoy more creative control than they would as traditional employees" (ibid.).[4]

These findings put some empirical weight to the view that, as Brian Holmes (2004) puts it, there exists a possibility to "gain further autonomy by escaping into the flexible work situations developing on the urban territory." For at least one respondent to the Freelancers Union survey, "while freelancing is not a political solution, I think it does allow for a psychological autonomy that bleeds into one's political perspective" (cited in Horowitz et al. 2005, 4).

More than any other figure, however, it is probably the artist that is an archetype of the autonomous worker. After all, "artistic labour is seldom recognized as 'real' work," as Alison Bain (2005, 25) says wryly in a study based on interviews with eighty Toronto-based visual artists. This perception is not unconnected, Bain submits, to a popular view of "creativity" as a "human faculty" whose exercise "appears to exceed the automatic routines of thought and behaviour that dominate everyday lives" (ibid., 30). Moreover, since the late 18th century, notes Bain, "separateness" from the social mainstream has been considered "an essential quality of any true artist" (ibid., 28). Unconventionality, individuation, and higher purpose—that is, the quintessential labour of love—are among the classic connotations of the person whose days are devoted to artistic work. As for the labour process of the artist, Menger (1999, 555) lists among its "highly attractive" traits "the variety of the work, a high level of personal autonomy in using one's own initiative, the opportunity to use a wide range of abilities and to feel self-actualized at work, an idiosyncratic way of life, a strong sense of community, a low level of routine…" "Evidently," Bain (2005, 39) adds to this, "a significant degree of work autonomy is a fundamental component of artistic practice; each artist not only has the freedom and flexibility to decide when and for how long she or he will work, but she or he also controls the pace, intensity and quality of the creative output."

In light of descriptions such as these, it is understandable that some cultural theorists find in the labouring life of the artist an inspiring counter-example to the disenchanting norms of the standard employment relationship. In a discussion of the subversive potential of the creative economy as against capitalist heteronomy, Gerard Strange and Jim Shorthose (2004, 44-45) invoke "artistic work as an example of expanded work autonomy." The "more rigid and fixed structure of traditional forms of corporate employment" (ibid., 48) and the concomitant "separation of work and life" (ibid., 49) are contrasted by Shorthose and Strange to the "working patterns of artists" in which they observe an "alternative work-life nexus" (ibid., 48): the "de-alienated labour" and quality of life that can be achieved through the fusing of "artistic life, work life, social life, and friendship" (ibid., 49); the de-centering of conventional waged work rhythms and the "contractually-flexible" employment arrangements that can better accommodate creative activity (ibid., 48); the intricate networks of mutual aid among artists; and the "non-capitalist values" (ibid.) that can compel artistic production—these are among the varied grounds on which Strange and Shorthose discern at the meeting point of the flexible restructuring of labour and the creative transformation of the economy a latent radical potential, namely, the opening up and expansion of "micro spaces of autonomy" (ibid., 50) at work that "offer some independence from capital" (ibid., 54).

Of more contemporary origin than the artist, another immaterial worker who has been symbolically articulated with occupational autonomy is the information-technology specialist, specifically, to borrow a phrase from Franco Berardi (2002), "the multitude of self-employed cognitive workers." This post-industrial workforce is the protagonist of the four-year ethnography of US-based "technical contractors" carried out by Stephen R. Barley and Gideon Kunda (2004, 8). The more than seventy web developers, software programmers, and technical writers interviewed by Barley and Kunda in the late 1990s are the avant-garde of what the authors describe initially as an "employment revolt" (1). And their presence is reportedly diffuse: according to one study they cite, forty-five percent of American companies had hired an information-technology worker on a short-term, contractual basis (ibid., 37).

Often tied to a single employer for no more than a handful of months, the "itinerant professionals" (ibid., 285) of Barley and Kunda's study report to have chosen an employment regimen where "placelessness" (ibid., 175) can be a permanent sensation and "liminality [a] "continual condition, indeed a way of life" (ibid., 176). Contractors' narratives about their exodus from standard employment sometimes revealed a critical, sober understanding that the job security implicit in the post-war employment compact was steadily eroding: technical contractors that Barley and Kunda spoke to perceived employers' continuing expectations of employee "loyalty without offering security [as]

fundamentally unfair" (ibid., 58). The broader idea here that the high-skill worker who drops out of a standard job and opts in to independent work is calling the employers' bluff on "the false promise of security" is one of the founding principles of what US business writer Daniel H. Pink (2002) called "the free agent nation" amid the new-economy heyday. The latter is narrated as "a kind of libertarian, anticorporate rebellion" (Barley and Kunda 2004, 21) against atrophied organizations, repetitive jobs, and paternalistic employers. "The free agent," as Pink (1997) wrote, "can achieve a beautiful synchronicity between who you are and what you do."

The experience of autonomy has multiple manifestations for the "hired guns" described in Barley and Kunda's study. They portray a workforce of contractors whose sense of identity is not necessarily formed around a corporate employer but rather the profession with which the person self-identifies. Believing they were inadequately compensated in their permanent jobs, technical contractors also claimed to obtain a higher wage for their expertise as independent rather than standard workers, and thus squeezed more from capital for their time. Eager to escape managerial fiat, these workers rejected a long-term submissive employment relationship, and instead contracted themselves out to help resolve particular technical problems or challenges; this work arrangement not only partially shielded them from office politics, but also freed them to more fully engage the skills whose exercise is closely tied to the contractors' experience of self-actualization. "[C]ontrol over their time" was another important dimension of their autonomy (Barley and Kunda 2004, 290). Frustrated by the "temporal tyranny" (ibid., 225) for which the demanding high-tech workplace is famous, some contractors reported that they had more power to determine the hours, and sometimes even the site, of work—particularly in situations where a highly dependent employer feared the contractor might otherwise flee. Finally, an inherent feature of contracting is the break between gigs, a regime of intermittence that allows for greater "work-life balance" (ibid., 225) where "downtime" can be seized as an opportunity "for pleasure and relaxation" (ibid., 227). The "obligatory optimism" (Berardi 2002) surrounding the digital work force coinciding with Barley and Kunda's research period cannot completely diminish the inklings of independence that this self-employed cognitariat tastes.

There is, then, a body of empirical and theoretical research asserting that immaterial workers can be drawn into non-standard employment by a desire for autonomy; that gains in terms of an individual worker's control over the labour process can be won in flexible employment arrangements; and that atypical workers themselves have understood the choice to work independently as a matter of "revolting against the tyranny of the job," as one freelancer proclaimed of herself and kindred spirit (Bush 2005). It would be grossly inaccurate, however, to characterize the writers whom I have drawn on in this section as subscribing to an uncritical view of the autonomous worker.

Barley and Kunda (2004, 221), for example, must conclude that, "more often than not, the distance between having flexibility and enjoying it was vast." Likewise, Strange and Shorthose (2004, 50) acknowledge soberly that the "sphere of autonomy" inhabited by artistic workers "is at best partial and fragile." "For many artists," adds Bain (2005, 39), "flexibility and control translates neither into a light work routine nor permits an easy distinction between the time spent in work activities and that spent in non-work." And Freelancers Union is a staunch defender of the occupational freedom enjoyed by workers "consciously rejecting traditional employment" (Horowitz et al. 2005, 4)—but its *raison d'être* as an advocacy organization is to expose, and seek to mitigate, how independent workers are at a material security disadvantage relative to standard workers in comparable positions.

Between Autonomy and Precarity

In a critique of the autonomous-worker hypothesis, Steve Wright (1995/6) calls it "a touch implausible" to believe that the self-employed really "have loosed the bonds of the capital relation." When the livelihood of many independent workers is largely dependent on a "single client," and potentially a "large firm" at that (Wright 1995/6), it is deceptive to assert that "[o]nce, bosses sacked the employees; now, it's the other way round" (Bush 2005)—as if an historic, systemic power reversal is taking place among the ranks of mobile independent labour. For Wright (1995/6), the contemporary situation of the self-employed rather "evoke those of earlier workers who, whilst retaining control of their tools, were nonetheless formally subordinate to capital." In terms of the issues raised in this section, "autonomy" is best viewed as accessible on a "spectrum," as Janet Fraser and Michael Gold (2001, 695) put it in their study of freelance translators.

In this light, this chapter's earlier characterization of the artist as an autonomous worker sits uncomfortably next to the portrait of artistic working lives that emerges from Angela McRobbie's research:

> Endless self-disciplining, the burden of self-assessment, and the handling
> of self-promotion as well as the privatisation of disappointment and the
> internalization of grievances suggest power to be embedded in the
> sometimes surely tortuous practices based on the normative requirement to
> be motivated, to keep in touch, to make the effort, to take responsibility
> for personal success and the many other daily routines of self-
> maintenance. (McRobbie 2003)

Given these rigors, it is understandable that educators have recognized a need for better "Preparing Graduates in Art and Design to Meet the Challenges of Working in the

Creative Industries." In a text under that title, Linda Ball (2002, 12) reports that the "career paths" of arts graduates often skip across and combine "short-term contracts, employment, further studies, part-time and freelance work rather than [adhere to] a linear career progression." Ball gives us a preliminary indication of the comportment of the flexible personality, however, when she says that surviving such an idiomatic work pattern that escapes "formal structures of employment" requires "independence, autonomy, the ability for self-direction" and "self-confidence" (ibid., 12-13); that educational institutions in this field have the responsibility and "the potential to develop capable, flexible, adaptable, lateral-thinking and creative individuals" (ibid., 17); and that "being persistent, taking risks and handling uncertainty" have been revealed as some of the "hidden skills" of the art and design student (ibid., 15).

It is not surprising, then, that the figure of the artist has featured in the critical discourse around precarity. Several theorists have suggested that those who are inclined to perceive the artist's irregular work habits and poorly paid but passionately enjoyed labour as unconventional, perhaps even dissident, it might be awkward to acknowledge the parallels between artistic working lives and flexible labour norms (see Lorey 2006; Ross 2000; von Osten 2007). The mythical separation of the activities of the artist from the imperatives of the market is challenged by Bain (2005, 29) when she acknowledges the pressure on the contemporary artist to be continually "innovative" and to strategically cultivate "a distinctive and marketable individuality." It has also been suggested that the artist operates rather like a "small firm" (Menger 1999, 546) or a manager par excellence, juggling projects, spreading risk across a portfolio, and nurturing a personal brand (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 312). Indeed, "[t]he new spirit of capitalism," says Gregory Sholette (2008), "calls on all of us to think like an artist: outside the box."

The empirical research that I have consulted, as will become clear in the next chapter, presents a sharply polarized portrait of self-employment in the creative economy: on one side, a relatively privileged population with stable work, higher earnings, choice over what work to accept, and sovereignty over their time; on the other is, as Gillian Ursell (2000, 817) says in a study of UK television workers, "the rest"—a more populous mass of de-salaried workers who chase an income in a highly competitive labour economy. Who falls in which camp is adjudicated in part by market demand for particular skills, a fickle insurance plan as many 'hired guns' doubtless learned when the dot.com ship tanked. In short, it seems that the promise of autonomy through flexible, independent work is fulfilled for only "a well-placed minority" (ibid., 817). The "autonomous worker," as Tiziana Terranova (2006, 33) remarks in related context, "can always turn into the precarious worker." Next I turn to this mutation, where it appears that "the bonds of the capital relation" are not loosened but, on the contrary, deepened.

Notes

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[1] The percentage of nonstandard workers varied by sector, however, from as low as ten percent in video game development to as high as seventy percent in television commercials production (Skillset 2006a, 10, 13).

[2] Freelancers Union treats "independent worker" and "freelancer" as synonyms designating "any worker who works in a non-traditional way, including these categories: consultant, independent contractor, self-employed, entrepreneur, sole proprietor, part-time and temporary agency employee" (Horowitz et al. 2005, 10).

[3] New York City officials who track nonstandard employment in the city claim that although self-employment has tended to be viewed as "counter cyclical"—that is, workers who are laid off in an economic downturn tend to turn to self-employment as a last resort—the rate of growth in recent years suggests that people are increasingly choosing independent work relatively independently of the overall state of the economy (cited in Vanderkam 2009).

[4] Other empirical studies corroborate Freelancers Union's claim that self-employment "provides these workers with autonomy" (Horowitz et al. 2005, 4). For example, Janet Fraser and Michael Gold (2001, 690) examine the labour conditions of freelance translators, concluding "the picture is one of considerable autonomy"; they found that, in comparison to traditionally employed translators, the "portfolio working" translators had considerable control over pay rates, a high level of choice over what work to take on, a diverse roster of clients, and flexible scheduling. Even including those downsized into freelancing, few desired a return to standard employment. Another study by Michael Clinton, Peter Totterdell, and Stephen Wood (2006) investigated the working lives of twenty-six "portfolio workers," most of them in media occupations. It found "[n]ot one of the interviewees contemplating returning to organizational employment as they perceived that they way that they worked helped produce a higher quality of life" (ibid., 191). Indeed, Clinton et al. identify "autonomy" as one of the three main "psychological processes" characterizing this way of working, with "positive outcomes" ranging from greater control over work hours, to "increased opportunity for spontaneity" (ibid.), to more power to shape "task ordering" (ibid., 194), a larger supply of "free time and energy" (ibid., 191), and an enlarged capacity to shape "career direction" (ibid., 194).

Chapter 2

The Precog

> Creativity is such an empty term. All you can say is that it
> is positively connotated (similar to 'democracy'). In
> mainstream discourses it is used to sell a concept that is a
> special form of exploitation.
> (Mokre cited in Lovink 2007, 248).

Creative Class Division

"The creative economy," says its most prominent American chronicler Richard Florida (2007, 186-187), "produces two kinds of jobs: high-paying creative occupations and lower-paying, less secure service jobs." On the more desirable side of the divide is the labour aristocracy that Florida (2003) terms "the creative class," its core cadre dispersed across sectors spanning from the arts to the media, entertainment, design, software development, academia, and engineering. Among the ranks of the creative class, Florida (2007, 89) discovers that "more and more people are living this new dream—engaging in work that pays well, is challenging, and that they love." On Florida's estimate, about thirty percent of the US workforce falls into the creative class category, leaving a generous portion of the remaining seventy percent stuck in "lower-paying, less secure service jobs," such as janitorial or food services.

Understandably disturbed by this unequal distribution of occupational reward, Florida is convinced that multiplying the "membership" of the creative class is "[t]he real challenge of our time" (ibid., 35), and adds that the creative economy "holds out the promise to relieve the mental drudgery that now consumes a vast chunk of so many people's work and lives" (ibid., 37). More than his critics typically concede, Florida has, then, come to highlight the social polarities that he acknowledges are inherent to the creative economy in its current form. What must still be challenged, however, is the depiction of the creative economy as generating basically "two kinds of jobs." This simplifying binary portrait is, at one level, perfectly accurate—at another level, however, it obscures a division within the creative class itself, particularly its contingent of nonstandard workers whose occupational habitat and livelihoods are fraught by labour precarity.

Indeed, according to cultural studies scholar Angela McRobbie (2003), a "pleasure-pain axis" is a "shaping characteristic" of the experience of work in the creative economy. This axis is familiar to the precog, a term I pirate from an Italian anti-precarity activist network of the same name that was initiated in the early 2000s (see Foti 2006). The figure of the precog is used in this chapter to designate a cognitive worker[1] that might have a socially prestigious occupation—artist, editor, or new media developer, for example—but nonetheless labours under trademark precarious employment conditions. Bringing together critical empirical and theoretical research which resonates with the problematic of the convergence of labour precarity and immaterial work, this chapter provides an inevitably partial profile of the precog—as a variously low paid, unpaid, anxious, gendered, and always-on subject of flexible immaterial labour.

The point of the pleasure-pain axis is not simply that the autonomous worker discussed in chapter one has a downside. This axis implies intersection, and, as McRobbie (2002a) has consistently shown in her research on cultural work, pleasure and pain can interweave in complex patterns. In this respect, taking a cue from an argument advanced by Andrew Ross (2000), I suggest that the precog is also capable of justifying its precarity, by appealing to norms and narratives of sacrifice, risk-taking, freedom, and self-actualization that, Ross suggests, have deep roots in artistic and academic traditions. More than a blemish on the creative class portrait, the precog, I argue in the conclusion to this chapter, can adopt dispositions that make it not only a victim of neoliberal, post-Fordist capitalism, but also something of a model subject of it.

Low Paid

Income is of course a principle gauge of precarity. Traditionally prestigious sectors of immaterial production, such as the arts and academia, and reputedly cool industries, such as new media, are not immune to low wages. A 2008 table by Statistics Canada (2009) ranks average weekly earnings in twenty industries covering the gamut of the national economy: "arts, entertainment, and recreation" occupy second-to-last place, while "retail trade" takes the bottom slot. Research by Hill Strategies (2009, 3) reports that in 2006 Canadian artists brought in an average annual income that trailed the overall national average by thirty-six percent. Pierre-Michel Menger (1999, 556), a sociologist of artistic labour markets, notes that "[p]overty rates among US artists are higher than those for all other professional and technical workers."

One route into the complex question of why certain types of creative work seem prone to low pay is via what Ross (2000) terms "the mental labour problem." With this phrase Ross is concerned with the "special conditions that apply to pricing wages" for select groups of cognitive workers, including those in the arts (ibid., 29). He refers to the

logic of "the cultural discount," the idea that "artists and other arts workers accept non-monetary rewards—the gratification of producing art—as compensation for their work, thereby discounting the cash price of their labor" (ibid., 6). In a similar vein, sociologists of artistic labour have invoked the notion of a "psychic income," in which occupational pleasure offsets something of the pain of low financial reward (Withers cited in Baines 1999, 24). To the extent that "love of their craft" does form part of the justification for accepting low earnings, it is neither patrons nor states, contends Ross (2000, 6), but rather "workers themselves" who have historically provided "the largest subsidy to the arts." Despite the prospect of low wages, Menger (1999, 567) identifies a "self-congesting spiral of oversupply" as a frequent feature of artistic labour markets. Alluding to the psychic-income element, Menger (2001, 251) explains that "the attractiveness of artistic occupations may be exploited to secure a pool of underemployed personnel forming a 'reserve army' and to allocate work on a numerically flexible basis."

A second group of workers among whom Ross discerns a version of the cultural discount is scholars. "Like artists and performers, academics," he argues, "are inclined by their training to sacrifice earnings for the opportunity to exercise their craft" (Ross 2000, 22). The brunt of this sacrificial accounting is shouldered by the graduate-student teacher, the postdoctoral fellow, or the itinerant contract educator whose professed "'love for their subject'" is surely one part of the rationale for accommodation to low wages and job insecurity (ibid., 22). If the contemporary university has not found itself lacking a willing supply of casual faculty (see Bousquet 2008), Ross poses uncomfortable questions about the availability of a "volunteer low-wage army" (Ross 2000, 22). Neither implying a happy victim of cognitive labour exploitation nor ignoring the growing efforts to unionize precarious academic workers, Ross invokes the image of a "volunteer low-wage army" as a way "to describe the natural outcome of a training in the habit of embracing nonmonetary rewards—mental or creative gratification—as compensation for work" (ibid., 22). The swift pace at which the casualization of the university workforce has proceeded in the neoliberal phase has been, Ross concludes, "hastened along by conditions amenable to discounting mental labour" (ibid., 22).

Naming an occupational mindset in which existential pursuit is put on an ethical plane above matters of material security, the concept of the mental labour problem intersects with Isabell Lorey's (2006) critique of "self-chosen precarization," which specifically references the sphere of cultural employment. "Perhaps those who work creatively, these precarious cultural producers by design," Lorey hypothesizes, "are subjects that can be exploited so easily because they seem to bear their living and working conditions eternally due to the belief in their own freedom and autonomy, due to self-realization fantasies." Such a propensity is not restricted, however, to the relatively rarified domains of the arts or academia.

This much is suggested by the research of Gillian Ursell (2000) on television production labour in the United Kingdom. In the wake of privatization and escalating competition in the 1990s, the quality of the employment relationship between state broadcasters and television workers was manifestly deteriorating, its erosion reflected in a rapid increase in casual work across the sector. Ursell argued that the declining wages for freelance television workers that ensued are not completely explained by structural factors alone (e.g., that an increase in the labour supply would depress wages). Putting questions of subjectivity in the picture, what struck Ursell in her interviews with television workers was an apparent "willingness to work for next to nothing," in spite of the diminishing returns—a sentiment encapsulated by the editor and camera operator who could flatly claim, "I don't do this for the money" (ibid., 821). A classic display of the cultural discount, Ursell's findings suggest that the sting of low pay is at least partly relieved by a "type of work which allows for the exploration, expression, and actualization of the sensual dimension of subjectivity" (ibid.). From this point of view, a critical account of the low-wage relation in this freelance media labour economy requires attention to the interaction of existential gratification and (self)exploitation, a combined emphasis on economics and erotics, for, as Ursell captures it: "This vampire is seductive" (ibid.).

Informed by her research on the working lives of fashion designers and by reports on the labour conditions of other groups of cultural workers, McRobbie (2002a, 109), too, finds it impossible to ignore "the pleasure with which individuals enter into this kind of work, notwithstanding low pay…" McRobbie spots an emergent labour control regime, discursively organized around the "creativity/talent" couplet, which operates through the mechanism of existential allure, specifically, through the fastening together of work, identity, and passion. Within this arrangement, writes McRobbie (ibid., 109): "Where the individual is most free to be chasing his or her dreams of self-expression, so also is postmodern power at its most effective" (ibid., 109). This power is efficacious not only to the degree that it affordably arouses the imagination, intelligence, and innovation that post-Fordist capital requires of immaterial labour—but also to the degree that an individual worker's pursuit of existential reward, and capital's pursuit of surplus value, grow immanent to each other, reducing the need for more overt forms of managerial intervention (see Lazzarato 1996, 134-137).

Motivating Ross's analysis of the mental labour problem was, in part, a concern that the logic of the cultural discount seemed to be over-spilling its traditional strongholds and moving into fields at the fore of post-Fordist capitalist development. Ross's essay, published near the feverish height of the dot.com boom, could point to emergent work cultures and amorphous occupations taking shape in and around 'new media.' Under this sign, artists, technology hobbyists, neo-managers, and venture capitalists converged in

web design studios and other avant-garde workplaces in which Ross (2003) observed "the industrialization of bohemia." Super-committed digital artisans would not only put in legendary extended hours—and, in this way, diminish the value of their wage, a.k.a. deepen their exploitation—but indeed were found to participate in an "insider brand of sick humor … [that] it is actually cool to be so badly exploited" (Ross 2004b, 157). Even after the New Economy hype dissipated, interview-based research on new media work continues to reveal a high level of "passion" for the job, coinciding, in some instances, with expressions of an "active disinterest in money" (Gill 2007, 13).

In the media sector, one bastion of precarity pay is the lean publishing business, at least according to the freelance book editor who shares stories of subcontractors willingly accepting poorly compensated proofreading tasks—with at least one candidate volunteering to do it for free, "because she loved books" (Zaba 2005). The readiness of a passionate labour reserve army, according to the scholarship considered in this section, is one among a myriad of subjective variables parlayed by creative industries. Whatever specific example is taken, one of the wider political questions that is begged by the notion of the mental labour problem is whether the inclination to view one's paid labour through the perceptual lens of a love, a calling, or a passion occludes an understanding of one's work activity as an object of capitalist exploitation. If the precog is, in this way, a participant in its own low pay, it does not necessarily follow that it is hoodwinked. Instead, the cognitive worker with a desire for paid activity that is personally meaningful, but without much bargaining power, seems to be cornered by the cruel logic of the labour market into accepting a precarious "shadow price" (Menger 1999, 555).

In addition to the internally rewarding qualities of its work, researchers have flagged two external variables that may factor into the precog's habituation to low earnings. The first is the "normalization of risk" (Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin 2005, 307). The lure of celebrity, the myth of sacrifice, or the fantasy of eventually cashing out on a piece of intellectual property are valences of a normalization of risk-taking in sectors of a creative-economy identified with a "'winner-take-all inequity' in both income and status" (ibid., 307). The second is the social cachet of "'cool' jobs in 'hot' industries" (ibid.). A telling instance of this comes by way of a videogame tester. "I don't make a lot of money," he admits. Then, as if to justify, he invokes the psychic income informally earned through the glamorous public image of his entertainment-industry employer: "You try not to promote it, but when you meet someone at the bar, and they ask where you work... it's a bonus of the job" (Anonymous 2002). The fiscal predicament of the precog is not necessarily limited, however, to being merely low paid.

Unpaid

A corollary of the mental labour problem is the zero-cost worker supplied by the quasi-employment arrangement typically advertised as the unpaid internship. Not all interns donate their time, but "the gifting of free labour" (Ursell 2000, 806) is a practice widespread in creative economy workspaces. Art galleries, magazine and book publishers, record labels, and television production companies are among the branches of the wider "culture industry" that, according to Naomi Klein (2000, 245), has "led the way in the blossoming of unpaid work…" Recently, however, interns have earned if not money at least attention in some European countries, thanks to the advocacy initiatives of past and present interns organizing themselves in groups such as *Génération Précaire* in France, Fairwork in Germany, and Internocracy in Britain (Boucherak 2008).

In the UK in 2009, an ad hoc committee called The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009) published a major government-supported independent report entitled *Unleashing Aspirations*, one chapter of which is devoted to the topic of internships. While not entirely uncritical, the authors of *Unleashing Aspirations* frame the internship as an institutional feature of the "flexible economy" that is "useful both for interns and for employers" (ibid., 99). According to this win-win interpretation, the employer sacrifices valuable time so to provide neophytes with a practical taste of a possible occupational future, and also screens potential recruits for full-time openings, whereas the intern obtains the entry-level "experience," demonstrates the "commitment," and accumulates the "contacts" that might improve her or his chance at securing permanent employment in what are often exceptionally competitive fields (ibid., 100).

Interning is not, however, a symmetrical relationship of professional labour reproduction. Underwhelming internships are familiar, but the cliché of the intern who shuttles coffee to higher-ups and lists it under work experience on the C.V. is challenged by *Unleashing Aspirations* when it unsurprisingly reports that "some companies use interns as a low-cost way to cover positions that would otherwise be filled by a permanent full-time member of staff" (ibid., 103). The authors cite, as one example, a survey by the UK National Union of Journalists, which found that nearly eighty percent of journalism interns who generated published content while on a work experience program were not paid for it (ibid.).

Unleashing Aspirations also challenges the view that an internship is an exceptional opportunity, observing that it is an increasingly obligatory "rung on the ladder to success" (ibid., 99). Employers probed by the panel claimed to consistently hire former interns. And practical work experience, frequently obtained via internships, is described as a de facto requirement to gain entrance to most professions (ibid., 101). According to *The Guardian*, however, student interns in particular can reside in a "grey

area legally," with respect to minimum wage regulations, for example (Curtis, Friend, and Jones 2009). There have also been concerns that the 2008-09 recession was raising the demand for free intern labour, with reports of a spike in the number of internships advertised in the UK coinciding with a glut of jobless university graduates (Curtis 2009). Under these conditions, it is perhaps predictable that, according to a poll by the UK National Council for Experience, two-thirds of students and graduates looking for jobs "felt obliged to work for free" (Curtis, Friend, and Jones 2009). In a separate survey by Internocracy, one-third of respondents claimed to be "willing to do a year's free work to get the experience they need to start a career" (ibid.). Such are the disciplinary effects of economic crisis.

According to the general secretary of the UK Trade Union Congress, the "worst abusers" of the unpaid internship system, and hence its principle beneficiaries, tend to be "employers in the most 'glamorous' careers" (Curtis 2009). Accepting an unpaid "voluntary" position is arguably another face of the self-precarization tendency that Lorey (2006) identifies with segments of the cultural labour force—an instance of what she piercingly terms "anticipatory obedience." Seen from this point of view, the precog is as it were precognizant that forgoing income is a foregone conclusion if one hopes to break into select occupational spheres of immaterial production. This attitude certainly manifests in the labour practices of the UK television industry, according to the research of Ursell. The imperative to generate a portfolio or establish contacts to penetrate a cutthroat sector partly explains the willingness to "self-exploit" that Ursell (2000, 821) observes. The zeal with which at least some "media-wannabees" (ibid., 814) volunteer their immaterial labour to a conglomerate or a smaller production company that feeds the latter content is also entangled with the "seductive" existential qualities of work in this area (ibid., 821), an enticement that, as discussed earlier, extends to the distinction that the art and entertainment apparatus attaches to itself and confers on its workforce (see Neff et al. 2005, 315).

The normalization of the performance of labour for little or no pay or benefits is one issue. Another, however, is that an intern must be able to "afford to work for free" (Curtis, Friend, and Jones, 2009). Youthfulness, as McRobbie (2002a, 110) has argued, is a virtual "requirement for participation" in many of the work cultures of the creative economy—and interns are, almost by definition, drawn from a young demographic. Insofar as it embeds the assumption that it is more justifiable for a young person to work without a wage (or for a substandard one), the unpaid internship is an ageist institution. Creative industries' preference for pre-professional subjects who are compliant with a no-wage norm, unencumbered by financial obligations, and devoted to the quest for a meaningful career at personal expense, represents, in certain respects, an updating of the status of "youth" in the Fordist era—"an industrial ideal"—the exemplary "'efficient

worker'" valued for its "endurance and reflexes" on the demanding factory assembly line (Ewen 1976, 142). In the post-Fordist immaterial labour market, the prevailing meaning of "youth," in the words of Marc Bousquet (2002, 99), "now delimits a term of availability for super-exploitation." Assent to this exploitation operates on, but also is reproduced through, the ageist logic implanted in a commonplace like 'pay your dues,' the necessity of which an elder job-secure immaterial worker and a younger precog intern may well concur.

If the internship exploits on the axis of age, it excludes on the basis of class. One means of funding a period of free working is a second shift at a part-time job. In the case of a full-time internship in one of the costly global cities where many attractive gigs are concentrated (The Panel on Fair Access 2009, 102-103), a not unlikely scenario is that financing is provided by the "bank of mum and dad," meaning that self-sponsored professional work experience is comparatively inaccessible to graduates from less privileged (or less collateralized) families (Streeting cited in Curtis 2009). Class reproduction is also in play where internships are advertised informally, a practice favouring the candidate already advantageously positioned within socio-occupational networks due, probably, to family-linked connections (The Panel on Fair Access 2009, 103). Insofar as an unpaid internship is a passport to a career in the media, for instance, class-based exclusions have potentially "very real implications for the future of cultural production: today's interns," as Klein (2000, 246) writes, "are tomorrow's managers, producers, and editors." According to a 2002 study cited in the *Unleashing Aspirations* report, ten percent of "new entrants" to journalism identified themselves as of "working-class backgrounds," and a slender three percent came "from homes headed by semi-skilled or unskilled workers" (The Panel on Fair Access 2009, 101).

In response to the constraints on "social mobility" in the professions, the authors of *Unleashing Aspirations* offer some recommendations that are encouraging, such as that for greater transparency in the promotion of internships (ibid., 105). Others are less encouraging—such as the recommendation that an existing government student loan program, as well as "micro-loans," could be extended to help those in need to "meet the costs of an internship" (ibid., 109). While the report presents "internship loans" (ibid., 110) as a progressive measure to lower the access barrier, they would appear, on the contrary, to deepen the participation of the state in the mental labour problem and to uphold the neoliberal protocol that the individual bears the cost of being flexible labour.

Anxious

"The media glamour world everyone's so impressed by is non-existent," says one freelance television producer about her occupation: "The companies are making a fortune, but it's individuals who are taking the hit" (Pullman cited in Zaba 2005). Having dedicated many years to inquiry into the experience of self-employment, Italian autonomist researcher Sergio Bologna (2001) acknowledges the difficulty of rendering visible the hidden injuries of this way of working. "How," asks Bologna, "can one record the traces of exploitation in the face of a freelancer with the same power as the 'black muzzle' of a miner?" Labour scholars, union organizations, and journalists have begun to document the peculiar challenges facing independent workers. These efforts suggest one trait that would almost certainly stamp the physiognomy of the freelancer, that of anxiety.

Of the multiple possible manifestations of anxiousness among the nonstandard immaterial workforce, I call attention to a handful: an insecurity about meeting one's basic financial obligations, particularly in sectors where the labour supply is legion, and, thus, the competition fierce, which in turn may make independent workers reluctant to request improved rates (see Baines 1999; Fraser and Gold 2001; Morini 2007; Zaba 2005); a nagging sense of vulnerability deriving from nonstandard workers' limited social safety net and lack of employer-supported benefits, namely with respect to vital matters like health coverage, unemployment insurance, retirement savings, paid vacations, and maternity-leave (Gill 2007, 17; Horowitz et al. 2005; Vanderkam 2009); a possible hesitancy to assert oneself on matters of social equity in employment situations where there is neither a contractual guarantee of continuing employment nor the protection of collective representation; a worry about keeping one's knowledge and skills current—a distress about employability that is acute in occupational contexts strongly affected by perpetual technological innovation, which obliges independent workers to initiate a self-funded process of reskilling that can be experienced as an "endless process" (Kotamraju 2002, 18; see also Christopherson and van Jaarsveld 2005, 83); a self-consciousness about age, particularly in industries like fashion, in which youthfulness is a veritable prerequisite for participation (McRobbie 2002), and youth a tight timeline in which one might attain recognition; and a fear of "failure" in fields where the individual's "talent" is fetishized and therefore where the lack of success is liable to be understood as a reflection of personal shortcomings (see McRobbie 2002a, 2003; Storey et al. 2005, 1036).

In a study based upon interviews with thirty media industry independent workers, John Storey, Graeme Salaman, and Kerry Platman (2005, 1043) found that "a major focus of anxiety" was "reputation"—that intangible but nonetheless hard currency of the social network. The precog is fixated on reputation where, in informal labour markets, personal contacts are frequently the passport to the next paying gig (Wittel 2001). With a

livelihood potentially hanging in the balance, a nonstandard immaterial worker is understandably motivated to "protect or advance" her or his status (Storey et al. 1040). Anxiety about reputation seems, however, to function as a self-disciplinary mechanism of labour control. At the most basic level, satisfying the expectations of the buyer of labour power is the degree-zero of safeguarding one's reputation; while standard workers obviously share this concern, it is arguably amplified among independent workers lacking guaranteed continuing employment. Sustaining reputation is, as Storey et al. write, essential "not only for possible repeat work but for recommendations within the informal network" (ibid., 1048). Several scholars suggest that anxiety about reputation is elevated in cultural industries, where, according to Gina Neff, Elizabeth Wissinger, and Sharon Zukin (2005, 330), workers are "constantly … judged not by their track record, but by their most recent work." In a study of film labour, Helen Blair (2001) captures the cruelty of this logic in the saying, "'you're only as good as your last job.'" While the work ethic likely to follow from this system of evaluation is not difficult to imagine, neither is it surprising to hear reports of festering worry in the freelance trenches that one is "always in danger of being forgotten" (Storey et al. 2005, 1043). Protecting reputation is, however, often a much more mundane behaviour, such as making a deliberate effort "to be liked and outgoing" (Ekinsmyth 1999, 361). Innocuous though this may sound, McRobbie (2002b, 523) worries that "emphasis on presentation of self" in informal cultural labour economies "is incompatible with a contestatory demeanour." As she puts its, "It's not 'cool' to be difficult."

The anxiety of the precog is spurred, at the most basic level, by the necessity for the independent worker to largely self-manage uncertainties arising from its position in an external labour market. It is, in particular, the responsibility of the individual, rather than an employer, to maintain a regular stream of paid work. In an interview-based study of the labouring lives of so-called "portfolio workers" in media, arts, and business services, Michael Clinton, Peter Totterdell, and Stephen Wood (2006, 188) suggest that those working on, and probably juggling, short-term contracts can be persistently tormented by worry about where, even in the near-term, "work would be coming from." In a Freelancers Union survey of 2,800 nonstandard workers in New York City, respondents identified the "unstable income" pattern inherent in their way of working as a frequent source of consternation—a fear that can easily mutate into an edginess about the need to be "always looking for work" (Horowitz et al. 2005, 5). It is in this sense that Clinton et al. (2006, 189) argue that employment "autonomy" is, for portfolio workers, sharply double-edged: "You've got no way of telling what's going to happen, it is literally from day-to-day, from month-to-month," said one freelance photographer (cited in ibid., 188). In a series of interviews with new media developers in Amsterdam, media sociologist Rosalind Gill (2007, 40) encountered a similar apprehensiveness around the

phenomenon of time, indeed, observing a quite deeply felt sense of unpredictability, culminating in what Gill describes as an "inability to think about the future."

Gendered

"Huge profits are being made by global media corporations thanks to highly educated people, typically women, sitting alone at the kitchen table at night working for a pittance" (Zaba 2005). Providing this vignette is a one-time freelance publishing production manager, whose work process entailed subcontracting editorial tasks such as proofreading to fellow female freelancers. Now a union advocate, Christina Zaba admits: "It was complete and utter exploitation…" (ibid.). According to a 2003 survey, women accounted for the vast majority of contingent workers in the UK publishing sector who "earned less than £10,000" that year—even though they were potentially putting in full-time hours (ibid.). In addition to illustrating that the precarious can exploit the more precarious, this example opens onto the next feature of the precog I want to note—it is deeply gendered.

The discourse on precarity has been criticized for portraying labour precarity as "gender neutral" (Federici 2008; see also Fantone 2007). Against this tendency, Italian labour researcher Cristina Morini (2007, 43), within an analysis of the feminization of cognitive labour through the case of freelance publishing workers, argues that "the figure of social precariousness today is woman." Indeed, the historical model of standard employment is, as discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, a "masculinist construction" (Ekinsmyth 1999, 359). One of the ideological and social implications is that women are presumed more 'natural' candidates for nonstandard jobs. Labour market research on precarious employment confirms that women are disproportionately represented in vulnerable work situations as compared to men (see Cranford et al. 2003; Vosko 2006). In terms of the gendering of nonstandard employment in the creative economy specifically, feminist labour researchers, notably Gill (2002, 2007) and McRobbie (2002a, 2002b), have argued that, despite its experimental and egalitarian image, this immaterial workforce is not immune to traditional gender divides.

In the earlier-mentioned Freelancers Union survey, more than eighty-five percent of respondents agreed that a "flexible schedule" is a benefit of working independently (Horowitz et al. 2005, n.p.). In this apparent advantage, however, can lurk some rather more rigid itineraries, which reflect in turn a deep-rooted social division of labour. Empirical studies of nonstandard employment addressing fields such as publishing, translation, and new media indicate that women with young children tend more often than men to go freelance in order to mix paid work with household responsibilities, in particular, to take care of children (Ekinsmyth 1999, 358; Fraser and Gold 2001, 686; Henninger and Gottschall 2007, 63). Atypical employment arrangements are thus not

incompatible with the exceedingly typical heteronormative gender contract, in which women are understood *a priori* as "the primary care-giver in family relationships" (Gregg 2008, 287).

As Gill (2002, 83-84) suggests in the context of a landmark European study of project-based new media work, even if "flexibility" initially pulls people into nontraditional forms of employment, this quality can ultimately be experienced as a source of oppression. Gesturing to this is a female German new media freelancer who remarks that, in her relationship, her comparatively fluid schedule translated as "I always had to be the more flexible one," as far as the performance of domestic responsibilities were concerned (cited in Henninger and Gottschall 2007, 64). This is the sort of everyday example of the ingrained gendered division of labour that brought feminist critics to view so-called "telework" as a mode of home-based paid labour that tends to redouble rather than reconcile the work load of many women (see Baines 1999, 19-21; Huws 2003, 95-96). It must also be noted that although some men might be inclined to perceive the chance to work from home as an enticing offer of relief from the daily grind, this is perhaps less likely to be the automatic reaction among "women for whom—historically—the home has not been a straightforward site of leisure and relaxation" (Gill 2002, 84).

Habitually long hours, deadline-driven crunch time, and attending events outside standard working hours are among the recognized attributes of "'cool' jobs in 'hot' industries" (Neff et al. 2005). "[T]he traditional conditions of youthfulness," says McRobbie (2002a, 110), "are normatively expected of this workforce independent of family life." In a study of magazine publishing, Carol Ekinsmyth (1999) points to one of the potential impacts of pressurized schedules on the gender composition of this media workforce. Interviewees reported that women in the magazine sector are "most likely to be young and childless and that older, more senior females have typically sacrificed the possibility of a family in order to progress up the career ladder" (ibid., 360). The well-known rigors of the field's work rhythm, Ekinsmyth writes, "sends messages to many female workers that they need to negotiate their own (risky) path through a career in magazines"—to go freelance, in other words, if they wish to have and be home with children.

However, as Gill (2002, 84) comments with reference to her research on the working conditions of women in new media and the challenges of managing a 'successful' nonstandard work life in that area: "it would be extremely difficult for a woman to combine child-rearing with the bulimic patterns of the portfolio new media career—without an excellent support network of childcarers willing to mimic the intense stop-go patterns and long hours, or a radical restructuring of heterosexual gender relations." Without universalizing the desire for children or disregarding the politics of the refusal to have them, in the light of a work regimen along these lines (on top of,

perhaps, low pay and inadequate maternity leave coverage), it is understandable that precariously employed women in 'hot' industries have expressed trepidation about the prospect of having children (see Gill 2007, 32-33; Henninger and Gottschall 2007, 58). Indeed, it is in reference to this issue that Morini (2007, 52) observes a powerful instance of how precarious "work ends up hugely contaminating other planes of existence…"

The gendered nature of the precog may also be viewed from another angle. Fordism's historical reliance on the reproductive labour of women to subsidize the factory-based valorization process (Dalla Costa and James 1972) is a logic that is not surpassed under post-Fordism. As Susan Baines (1999, 21) points out in a study of home-based media workers, the notion of self-employment is something of a misnomer: when a family's home doubles as a business base, the aggregate domestic workload can enlarge, as household responsibilities and small-business management segue into each other, and the enterprise of the independent worker may come to be "sustained through hidden contributions from spouses in the form of unpaid practical assistance and income earning in 'ordinary' jobs." Baines finds evidence in the existing research that, in solo self-employment situations generally, it is women more often than men who make these "hidden contributions."

From a somewhat different perspective, the social theorist Lisa Adkins (1999, 130-131) suggests that employment models that are customarily associated with independence (e.g., entrepreneurship) and economic processes that are perceived as "cutting edge" (e.g., culturalization) can coexist with a "retraditionalization" of gender relations, where, for example, a man's capacity to take on flexible employment, a time-demanding work style, or a reflexive job is supported by the "gendered productivity" of "family relations" as such. Here it is tempting to cite a comment by none other than Richard Florida about his "better half": "She is the master multitasker who organizes everything in my life" (cited in "The List" 2010, 67).

So although a patriarchal division of labour does not disappear in the domain of independent work, other research, such as that of Annette Henninger and Karin Gottschall (2007, 66, 67) on the gender arrangements in the households of freelance media workers in Germany, suggests a greater fluidity in the assignment of roles. Perhaps in an environment of generalized employment insecurity and frequent job changes, no one single gender-based allocation of wage-earning roles and domestic work is necessarily permanent in a household.

Gender-based exclusions in creative economy milieus can also arise from the peculiarities of informally organized external labour markets. In cultural labour economies where "the club is the hub"—where accessing paid work opportunities goes hand in hand with, for instance, a sustained presence at after-hours social events so to make or maintain a network of contacts—people with caring responsibilities at home,

such as a single mother, are liable to be ostracized (McRobbie 2002b, 526). Based on interviews with new media workers in Amsterdam, Gill (2007, 25) underlines the significance of "'who you know'" to obtaining paid employment in this area. While mindful of the dearth of empirical research on the topic, Gill writes: "In general, informal practices tend to reinforce, rather than challenge, existing inequalities, and do not serve equal opportunities practices well" (ibid., 25). Of the more than one hundred new media freelancers surveyed in Gill's (2002, 82) earlier study, women received "significantly fewer of the work contracts," and thereby earned lower incomes than their male counterparts. This saw some women "pushed into other occupations to earn a living" (ibid.). For others, it reinforced home-based working, with the inability to rent an office in, say, a technology cluster or cultural district, potentially further marginalizing female contractors from the place-based social networks through which they might learn about paying gigs—and experience work community. Even so, Gill (2002, 84) observed a tendency for "meritocratic discourses" (ibid., 85) to trump systemic explanations—what she terms "the post-feminism problem," a manifestation of which is "the reluctance of new media workers—men, but also most women—to understand their experiences as having anything to do with gender" (ibid., 84). This reluctance may, however, be a symptom of another source of precarity: the absence in informal labour markets of equity standards governing hiring decisions (Gill 2007, 25-26)—and, it could be added, where there is no collective representation nor grievance process in place, the informally organized contractual labour economy presents the precog with few institutional outlets to, with relative safety, voice concerns.

Returning to where this section began, however, one of the primary reasons that Morini (2007, 48) views the labour of women as paradigmatic of precariousness is the "*incessant work*" independent work can involve—which opens onto the trait of the precog considered next.

Always On

"Extensification" is a term proposed by Helen Jarvis and Andy Pratt (2006, 331) to designate the "exporting of work across different spaces/scales and times." The "overspilling" of work into everyday domestic life is, they suggest, a "rapidly developing" tendency in cultural industries and new media (ibid., 332). Based upon interviews with twenty partner households in San Francisco, where at least one person is a new media worker, Jarvis and Pratt observe not so much a fine balance struck between work and non-work time, but, on the contrary, an often-fraught negotiation of the "overflowing" of work into life (ibid., 331). This process of extensification is particularly pronounced for the precog. If an individual is initially drawn to independent employment

on its promise of improved work-life balance, she or he might be ultimately disappointed to find her or himself thoroughly over-extended (see Sennett 1998). The precog is, in short, "always on" (Jarvis and Pratt 2006, 337).

"Independent work," according to Bologna (2007), involves "a massive extension of the social working day." This stems in part from the lack of a guaranteed continuous stream of paid work, which is generally inherent to contractual or freelance employment. Positioned such that it is the responsibility of the individual to secure a regular run of work, the precog must "always think one step ahead, setting up their next work contract at the same time they are completing work in the present," as Susan Christopherson and Danielle van Jaarsveld (2005, 84) observe with respect to independent new media workers in the United States. Even when already engaged, the project worker, write Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (2005, 462), must be continually "available to integrate … into the next project." Stimulating a potentially perpetual state of job search is the understandable fear of a future lull in the flow of income. This prospect can be embodied as a sharp contradiction, which is captured by a writer/consultant interviewed by Clinton et al. (2006):

> Really, when I've got nothing on I should be going, "oh great, I can do some of those other things that I wanted to do," which is the whole point of working in this way, but unfortunately you get sucked into panic mode of thinking "well actually I should be madly looking for more work." (Clinton et al. 2006, 191)

Precarization, as this admission suggests, can be an experience in which the conventionally strict temporal boundary between employment and unemployment grows fuzzy if not indistinct (see Corsani 2007b).

Income insecurity among independent workers can give rise to "a pressure to 'never say no to a job'" (Gill 2007, 6; see also Clinton et al. 2006, 189). This partly explains why, according to a Freelancers Union survey, virtually half of those canvassed reported working "more hours than a full-time job" (Horowitz et al. 2005, 4). "Hard work seemed universally recognized as a penalty of freelancing," says Ekinsmyth (1999, 361), based on interviews with magazine writers. Generally, the precog's work rhythm has been described as one of "feast or famine" (cited in Clinton et al. 2006, 188), lurching between periods of crunch time and of "unwanted idleness" (Henninger and Gottschall 2007, 59). In their study, Clinton et al. (2006, 189) found that one of the outcomes of the concern to avoid a pause in revenue is that it compelled at least some workers to accept a job even if the job on offer was felt to be "inappropriate" or not "required." Here again is an example of how the "autonomy" promised by free agency (i.e., an increase in control over work) is diluted by the reality of monetary "uncertainty" (ibid.). In this sense, the

predicament of the precog is, paradoxically, that of having simultaneously too much and not enough work.

The precog is 'always on' in other respects as well. Two are highlighted. The first concerns the site of work. "There is," Bologna (2007) claims, "no longer a specific place devoted specially to carrying out work." Managerial innovations in work organization combined with technical developments in networked communication have endowed employers with expanded opportunity for extracting value across a more diffuse space from activities of cognitive labour that do not demand "the continual presence of the worker in what was the traditional workplace" (Federici 2008). Doing paid immaterial labour at home is the obvious instance of the dispersion of work into places that—vis-à-vis the normative standard employment relationship—are respites from work obligations. In a critique of home-based working as a form of "flextime" opening up to some professionals in the 1990s, Richard Sennett (1998, 59) argued that, where escape from the physical walls of the office is viewed as the elusion of the control of the boss, "the appearance of a new freedom is deceptive." "Work is physically decentralized," said Sennett—but, in that very process, he contended, the "power over the worker is more direct" (ibid.). Deployment of new surveillance techniques—the back and forth dispatching of status reports over email could serve as just one example—attempt "to regulate the actual work process of those who are absent from the office" (ibid.). In terms of the dispersion of the site of labour, the space outside of the home is also the workshop of the precog, a classic example being that of the contract-based graphic designer, freelance writer, or sessional academic whose remote office is the wireless café and whose rent is paid in coffee purchases. While the social isolation that can result from the de-localization of work is familiar, what is less visible perhaps is that operating expenses typically covered by employers, like office space or access to communications, are transferred to the roaming independent worker.

A second way in which the precog is 'always on' concerns the seeping of thought about work into non-work time. The need to secure a steady flow of contractual income, as Clinton et al. (2006, 191) heard from the portfolio-workers they interviewed, can, not surprisingly, translate into trouble "switching off" mentally. This is not limited to a generic worry about accessing work, however. Jarvis and Pratt (2006, 337) point to a key temporal dimension of cognitive labour when, in reference to the media workers in their study, they note: "When the need to generate ideas means they are 'always on' it is impossible to define when they are at work or at rest." Think, for instance, of the precog imagining an idea for a story, a piece of copy, a string of code, a design for a logo, or an outline for a course while, say, wandering a city, socializing with friends, or putting a child to sleep. In its diffuse work site and unbounded work time, the precog exemplifies the absence of "a clean, well-defined threshold separating labor time from non-labor

time," which, according to Paolo Virno (2004, 103), is characteristic of post-Fordist production to the extent that innovation is decisive to the capitalist valorization process. For Virno, this phenomenon ultimately throws up, again, the issue of "*hidden labor*," or "non-remunerated life, that is to say, the part of human activity which, alike in every respect to the activity of labor, is not, however, calculated as productive force" (ibid.).

The imperative to be always on extends to the wider social sphere for hyper-mobile independent workers. Empirical studies on sectors ranging from media production (Baumann 2002, 34) to the performing arts (Frade and Darmon 2005, 114) to new media development (Christopherson and van Jaarsveld 2005, 84-85; Gill 2002, 78) have observed that traditional recruitment channels are more or less superfluous where contract- or project-based employment is concerned. As Gill (2007, 25) writes with respect to the "informal connections" binding together workers and jobs in Amsterdam's new media sector, "the entire economy of work opportunities operates through contacts— people you meet at conferences, parties, drinks evenings, friends of friends, ex-colleagues, etc." This is one dimension of what is, according to Bologna (2007), the distinctive mark of "the new self-employed," namely, the volume of "relational work" that must be performed—making and maintaining contacts, sustaining amiable interpersonal relations, and so on (see Ronneberger 2007). The precog is, in short, obliged to network.

The networker and precarious employment are connected in Andreas Wittel's (2001) analysis of "network sociality." Informed in part by participant-observation within media work communities in London, Wittel proposes that "freelancers" are "paradigmatic" of "chronic network construction and maintenance" (ibid., 65). He emphasizes the preponderance of face-to-face networking practices, including institutionalized forms like regular meetings coordinated by associations, but also more informal manifestations like dinner parties. Wittel argues that it is through these and other "ephemeral but intense encounters" (ibid., 51) that the "intrinsically insecure" elaborate a "network sociality" that offers them "support," diminishes their "risk," and enhances their "security" (ibid., 57; see also Christopherson and van Jaarsveld 2005, 84-85). It is in and through practices of network sociality that information about gigs is circulated—and, crucially, access to the intermediary contacts that control them is obtained—in the absence of more formal paths into employment.

Seeking security via network sociality is, however, an ambivalent undertaking (Wittel 2001, 56). It is so, first, because network sociality is not merely a means for independent workers to learn about or land a job. It contributes to the self-organization of labour pools which in turn are parasitized by those who recruit on the behalf of the beneficiaries of flexploitation (see Ursell 2001): "informal networks" of skilled workers furnish capital with a "ready-made and cost-effective route to access the freelance labour

supply" (Storey et al. 2005, 1040). In addition to this issue of unremunerated labour sourcing, a second ambivalent quality of network sociality is brought up by Klaus Ronneberger (2007) when he writes: "In order to secure one's own reproduction, one must constantly stay in touch with others to find out about contracts and jobs and be recommended to other employers. That is why freelances always also view acquaintances and friends from the point of view of networking…" So although the performance of relational labour may be seen as the enrichment of social capacity, embedded in it is the tendency for networking to grow into a generic "strategic" disposition intruding on even intimate relations (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 456). In this sense, as Wittel (2001, 56) observed in his research, network sociality in informal labour economies is stamped by a tension between conviviality and instrumentality: "On the one hand the commodification of social relationships (doing a pitch, getting funds, finding work) is highly obvious, on the other, it is important to hide this commodification by creating a frame (music, alcohol, etc.) that makes people comfortable, that suggests a somehow 'authentic' interest in meeting people."

This dovetails with a third ambivalent quality of network sociality, that of the blurring of the boundary between work and non-work time (see Virno 2004, 102-104), with the interpersonal and the commercial merging in the strategic networking conducted in socio-cultural spaces of leisure. For example, in a discussion about her research on the musicians, artists, and fashion designers propelling New York City's creative economy, the urbanist Elizabeth Currid (2007) offers, "nightlife is an incredibly important economic institution for these people and it needs to be thought of as such." Clubs and bars, Currid adds, are not just businesses in themselves—"it's really where a lot of business gets done" among independent cultural workers. While Currid's remarks might suggest that work indeed is play for the precog, what Melissa Gregg terms "compulsory sociality" suggests another interpretation is possible (cited in Gill 2007, 26). Intimating the affective exhaustion that regular, obligatory social interaction can invite is the new media entrepreneur whom advises, "If you look at it like work, you'll burn out" (cited in Neff et al. 2005, 322). Precarity, as Gerald Raunig (2007) puts it, "flows from work into life," where, in the impetus to be always on, the whole of life becomes a terrain of exploitation and opportunism.

Role-Model Worker?

Official political coverage of the creative industries has been faulted for "nary a shed of attention" on the difficulties that face those performing labour within them (Ross 2007, 37). For his part, Florida (2003, 106-108) is not unaware of the folly of more romantic free-agent perspectives. Yet, he, too, misgauges the scope of precariousness when, as

noted at the start of this chapter, he claims that "[t]he creative economy produces two kinds of jobs: high-paying creative occupations and lower-paying, less secure service jobs" (Florida 2007, 186-187). This chapter set out to challenge this binary labour-market portrait by introducing the figure of the precog in which creative-class type jobs and labour precarity intersect. The empirical research and theoretical accounts consulted for this chapter would seem to, at minimum, complicate any hard and fast identification of the creative class with professional nirvana.

If dominant depictions of the creative economy have been criticized for neglecting the quality of employment relationships, several artists and theorists have drawn attention to inverse tendencies: for "precarious cultural producers" to be represented as "role models" in policy documents in some West European countries (Lorey 2006); for workers with high-tech, image-making, and informational jobs in highly flexible employment arrangements to assume not only a prominent media profile but also a social "norm-making" function (Neff et al. 2005, 308; see also Gregg 2008); and for the figure of the artist to be held up as an example that wider groups of immaterial workers might come to mimic in post-Fordism (see Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Ross 2000, 2007; von Osten 2007). Despite the apparent fit between classic artistic propensities and post-Fordist priorities (see chapter one), Maurizio Lazzarato (2007) maintains that it is not so much the artist that supplies the "model of subjectivation" for flexible capitalism, but "the entrepreneur."

This persona makes more than a cameo appearance in the genealogy of creative industries discourse in Britain—widely regarded as its formative national site. While rhetoric of enterprise is hardly a historical novelty, the revival of "enterprise culture" as an ideological ingredient of the neoliberal project in the 1980s is closely associated with Margaret Thatcher; the British Prime Minister infamously appealed to the sacrosanct individual to liberate itself from the alleged paternalism of the bureaucratic state and collectivism of the trade union through the mental embrace of a free-market orientation (Cohen 1997, 275-325). The enterprise culture that evolved often invited its youthful prospective participants to parlay their love, hobby, or leisure "into a means of livelihood" (ibid., 296). The children of Lady Thatcher would receive an approving review in *The Independents: Britain's New Cultural Entrepreneurs*, a report published in the formative days of creative-industries thinking under Tony Blair's New Labour government. Notably, authors Charles Leadbeater and Kate Oakley (1999, 15) described the "new cultural entrepreneurs" as "anti-establishment, anti-traditionalist and in respects highly individualistic: they prize freedom, autonomy and choice. These values," Leadbeater and Oakley deduced, "predispose them to pursue self-employment and entrepreneurship in a spirit of self-exploration and self-fulfillment." That profile conveys perfectly the now widely current argument that the dissident demands and desires of

social movements of the late 1960s and 1970s anticipated, and helped to mobilize consent for, the reorganization of work and society along the lines of a post-Fordist regime of exploitation (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005).

Other cultural analysts, too, observe an ideological shift toward entrepreneurialism. Neff et al. (2005, 309) contend that the "true *social* innovation" of the "new economy" moment, with its legendary seductive stories of bootstrapped teenaged dot.com millionaires, was "the production of a new labor force that is more 'entrepreneurial' than previous generations of workers." If one of the objectives in that context was to excite the potentially lucrative invention power of digital labour under the combined rule of IP and IPOs, a terminological drift to the entrepreneurial has been pointed out in the arts as well. Andrea Ellmeier (2003, 9) notes that there has been a drift away from the "*cultural worker*"—"an emancipatory term from the post-1968 movement"—and toward the "cultural micro-entrepreneur"—a semiotic shift corresponding with the deteriorating hegemony of the standard employment relationship, the restructuring of arts funding models, and the further subsumption of the cultural by the economic.

Enterprise culture is animated in the flesh by what Foucaultian theorist Nikolas Rose (1998, 154) calls the "enterprising self." McRobbie (2002a, 98, 109) speaks to this subjectivity in a discussion of "permanently transitional" employment among young cultural workers. Entrepreneurial audacity, and the social networks on which it is exercised, are significant resources, but, says McRobbie, these "are not simply there, on tap. They have to be worked at." Precarization is not endured, then, by a docile labouring body. Negotiating precarity entails the management of "life from its interior" by active subjects (Tarì and Vanni 2005), a certain mode of "care of the self," or an ensemble of techniques and practices through which one relates to or sets to work on oneself and regulates its conduct with others (Foucault 1988). Enterprise, says Rose (1998, 154), is a mode of self-conduct marked by the exertion of "energy, initiative, ambition, calculation, and personal responsibility." The individual is "[encouraged] to conduct themselves with boldness and vigor, to calculate for their own advantage, to drive themselves hard, and to accept risks in the pursuit of goals" (ibid.). What I want to suggest in conclusion is that if the precog regularly confronts a situation in which its livelihood is uncertain and is responsible for managing its own immaterial labour to optimal economic effect, then the precog can always slip into the enterprising self, as part of an attempt to cope with, or ward off, exposure to precarity.

Following Foucault, Rose theorizes the enterprising self as a practice of self-government operating via the freedom of the subject. From this perspective, power does not so much lord over the subject from outside as activate it from within. Enterprise seeks to mobilize the "psychological striving of individuals for autonomy and creativity"—and

to direct that striving to particular ends (ibid., 161). Enterprise ideology invites its subject to identify with work to the point that human fulfillment itself is understood as attainable "not *in spite of* but *by means of* work" (ibid., 158).[2] While this logic is intrinsic to the idea of the creative class, as this chapter has shown, researchers have revealed a rather more strained workaday existence for independent immaterial work forces in sectors associated with the creative economy. Pressure mounts on these nonstandard workers as a result of their structural location at what McRobbie describes as the "midway between labour and capital," where they are caught "doing the job of both at the same time" (cited in Ellmeier 2003, 11). This double duty is vividly captured by Storey et al. (2005, 1036): the independent worker, they write, "must be enterprising about making herself enterprising: becoming in effect a microcosmic business; developing a strategy, marketing herself, developing 'products,' establishing herself as a brand, understanding the market (for herself) and so on." The enterprising self is thus not only about the insertion of generic subjective capacities—for language, relationality, affectivity—into capitalist production (see Virno 2004). It is also, and more comprehensively, about the performance of life as a business (see Lazzarato 2007).

Addressing the political implications of precarious worlds of cultural work, McRobbie (2002a, 99) worries that "[a]s self-reliance becomes a way of being, a means of conducting the self, ideas of the social become emptied of meaning." It is here that the full ambivalence of the precog begins to be brought into view. For it is a victim of post-Fordist, neoliberal exploitation, while, at the same, potentially its ideal subject. It is not only in a generic immaterial labour that post-Fordism finds value, but additionally, and more specifically, its embodiment in the sort of traits that come together in the precog: its passionate commitment to work, its flexibility on pay, its willingness to work for free, its perpetual (and personally financed) updating of skills, its habituation to financial insecurity, its always being on, its view of networks as primarily a site of economic opportunism, its self-sufficient enterprising behaviour…

Ultimately, perhaps, what is at risk is that the precog mutates into what Brian Holmes (2002/3, 132) terms "the flexible personality"—an agent of immaterial labour whose attitudes, capacities, and social interactions comply perfectly with the imperatives of a distinctly flexible accumulation regime (ibid., 109); it names an ideal-type subjectivity distinguished by its uncritical tolerance or enthusiastic embrace of a gamut of activities that are in near-perfect accord with the requirements of deregulated market activity. Self-advancing networking, obsessing over reputation, and projecting enterprising affects of boldness and confidence, and risk-taking are behaviours in which the flexible personality excels. To the extent that the precog adopts such dispositions, it might be understood as a pragmatic adjustment to a systemic labour market position providing few if any guarantees. Reading the precog in this way suggests that the

externalization of labour paradoxically accomplishes an intensified internalization of, or accommodation to, the requirements of flexploitation. As Massimo De Carolis (1996, 42) writes in an analysis of precarious work and opportunism: "Fear compels the imitation of power, which in turn, behind the patina of its arrogance, conceals the anguish of a rabbit caught in a trap."

Notes

[1] Resonant with the category of immaterial labour, "cognitive work," writes Cristina Morini (2007, 50), refers to "everything which today evokes the extraction of value from cognitive activities and relationships of human beings—in other words, from knowledge, training, the symbolic apparatus and experiences of each individual person, their creativity and the way they act in a natural spirit of cooperation. If Fordism represents the era of the tangible production of goods and, to that end, uses the strength of the body, cognitive capitalism embodies the era of the production of knowledge through making proper use of the cognitive faculties to form relationships and communicate effectively."

[2] The deep genealogy of the notion of meaningful work is addressed in Lars Svendson (2008).

Chapter 3

The Cybertariat

The options for employers are multiplying all the time.
(Huws 2009a)

The Nexus of Creativity, Technology, and Precarity

In an analysis of the semiotic switch from "cultural industries" to "creative industries" in the UK policy context, Nicholas Garnham (2005, 20) argued that the New Labour government's preference for the word "creativity" reflected its allegiance to extant post-industrial positions as crystallized in the phrase, "the information society." This included, for instance, a Schumpeterian emphasis on "innovation," specifically technological innovation, as key to competitiveness and growth (ibid., 21). From a different angle, the idea of the 'creative city' might bring to mind a vibrant, urban artist-run culture—but it is in the science parks and technology hubs where the sought-after residents cluster. Moreover, to attract creative-class cadre, it is said that cities require a sophisticated technological infrastructure (Florida 2003). Reports on the "creative economy" advise government extend "support and incentives" for technology research (Martin and Florida 2009, 8). The most lucrative sector generally grouped under the "creative industries" umbrella is, by a strong margin, the amorphous "software and computer services" category (DCMS 2001, 10). And the products of creative workers are promoted and exchanged on digital networks and devices. In short, the creative economy composite is coextensive with information and communication technologies, or ICTs.

Broadly encompassing telecommunications, network technologies, and computer-mediated communication, ICTs are widely recognized as having played an enabling role in the neoliberal revitalization of capitalism since the 1980s (Schiller 1999). This chapter looks specifically at the nexus of ICTs and labour precarity. Arguably constituted at this nexus is the persona that labour researcher Ursula Huws names the "cybertariat." Huws (2003, 152-176) introduces this figure in the context of a wide-ranging analysis of the reorganization of work in and through ICTs. Emphasizing embodiment, routinization, and place, Huws adopts a materialist perspective on the cybertariat that is antithetical to the New Economy narratives that, taking hold of common sense in the 1990s, seemed to assume the intangibility of production, the upward spiral of worker skill, or the smoothness of global space. Huws' cybertariat is, in contrast, a computer-age proletariat associated with, among other working practices, the expansion of rote jobs revolving

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around the processing of information—think data entry; the digitization and "relocation of non-manual work across national boundaries"—or knowledge transfer (ibid., 160); the phenomenon of telework—the performance of paid work at home via phone or network connection; and the obstinately material labour—from manufacturing to mining—that coexists with knowledge work and immaterial commodities.

Taking its cue from Huws, this chapter provides a fragmentary look at the contemporary cybertariat, by which I understand a multifarious, stratified subject of labour constituted at the nexus of ICTs and precarity. I set out to identify just four of the 'multiplying options' available to employers for accessing (im)material labour, options that are remote from the Fordist standard employment norm: first, the offshore outsourcing of high level immaterial work and the self-discipline that persistent fear of job loss might elicit; second, the growth of digital piecework, that is, hyper-rationalized, bite-sized jobs carried out by a diffuse web-based workforce for micro-payments; third, the "free labour" (Terranova 2004) of Internet users whose unpaid content-producing activity is a wellspring of financial value generation in online economies; and, fourth, the "variegated citizenship" (Ong 1999, 2006) of populations to whom differential social rights are assigned depending upon their location in the occupational hierarchy of high-tech production. While ICTs appear in these examples as tools and sites of precarization, the externalization of labour represented in these examples is immanent to a global reorganization of work and global division of labour—what Manuel Castells (1996, 147) describes as a "relentlessly variable geometry." I will return to this question of the composition of the international division of labour in the conclusion to this chapter where Thomas Freidman's (2007) forecast of a flat world appears wildly off the mark.

Offshore Outsourcing and Fear

Outsourcing is another mechanism of precarization shaping the cybertariat (see Huws 2003, 56-60). The practice of transferring in-house jobs to an external provider or to a foreign subsidiary can be viewed as a continuation of the "neo-liberal agenda" (Mosco 2005, 41). The wider context of offshore outsourcing in particular is the hyper-mobility of capital, facilitated by an increasingly liberalized global political economic framework, inclusive—critically—of the market-led development of the world's telecommunications infrastructure (see Barney 2004; Schiller 1999). Mosco (2005, 41) connects outsourcing to the undoing of the postwar social compact between labour and capital, and the displacement of that accord by "a business-first agenda that, in the name of productivity, has made jobs, wages, and certainly benefits, far from a guarantee in today's developed societies." Where it has been motivated by a desire to reduce capital's direct and indirect labour costs, outsourcing is an unequivocal departure from the tacit contract in the

standard employment relationship whereby the employee offers loyalty while the employer promises security (see Barley and Kunda 2004, 9). Outsourcing is also a weapon wielded against organized labour, when, as is frequently the case, a unionized standard job in one part of the world is replaced with a "non-union" job elsewhere (Ross 2006, 32). In terms of precarity, a specific feature of the exceedingly complex outsourcing phenomenon that I wish to flag is that of fear. Informed or imagined, worry of losing a job to offshore outsourcing is a globally constituted emotional characteristic of the cybertariat, an ambient feeling of vulnerability that may in turn function as a lever of elevated labour discipline (see Huws 2009a).

While the exporting of low-wage manufacturing jobs has been a familiar feature of the new international division of labour since the 1960s, over the past three decades outsourcing has made incremental and, more recently, rapid incursions into the sphere of immaterial work. Huws (2009a) identifies a number of interrelated processes that seem to make certain jobs "footloose." The "digitization" of information, the "standardization of tasks," the dissemination of a cluster of generic computing and software proficiencies, and the installation of an increasingly affordable communications infrastructure: these are among the dimensions making information-processing jobs particularly susceptible to 'delocalization' (Huws 2003, 148). Indeed, by the early 2000s, investor interests had made it virtually "imperative" for large listed firms to migrate a range of 'business process' work to a lower-cost site overseas (Ross 2006, 30). Bearing the brunt of this pursuit of class power through the application of competitive pressure are so-called "at-risk workers" (cited in Bednarzik 2005, 19)—data-entry staff, call centre operators, and other workers in highly routinized "knowledge industry jobs" (Mosco 2005, 47). Yet workers located further up the chain of value-adding labour, such as software programmers, are increasingly seen as vulnerable, too. The ease of offshore outsourcing—and hence the degree of mobility capital enjoys—should not be overstated (Armour 2007). Neither should it be assumed that outsourcing, even of higher end work, always travels a straightforward route from North to South (Mosco 2005); the geography of outsourcing is, recalling Castells' phrase, a "relentlessly variable geometry" (1996, 147). And the statistics on its incidence are disputed (Bednarzik 2005). Few deny, however, that outsourcing is a tendency stepping up.

Outsourcing, writes Mosco (2006, 771), "signals a fundamental transformation in the international division of labour that is accelerating especially in the knowledge and media sectors." Examples of this metamorphosis include MindWorks Global Media, a media outsourcing company located on the outskirts of New Delhi—with a second office in New York. MindWorks claims its ad-design, pagination, and copyediting services provide a costs savings of up to forty percent for its clients—which have included newspapers based in the United States as well as in the Middle East (Lakshman 2008;

Moozakis 2009). Thomson Reuters, known for its wire service, has at least ten percent of its staff located offshore in Bangalore (Mosco 2005, 44)—and it announced in 2009 that additional work would go to the Philippines (BusinessWorld 2009). The Nielsen Company, the media measurement and market research firm, is currently in a decade-long contract worth more than one billion dollars with Indian outsourcing giant Tata Consultancy Services (2007). And Electronic Arts, the US-headquartered powerhouse videogame publisher, has steadily increased the outsourced proportion of its game development work—about twenty percent of which is currently done in comparatively "low-cost regions" (Richtel 2008). An Electronic Arts executive summarizes well the emotional working conditions for a gamut of people labouring amid the prospect of outsourcing: the company's seven thousand standard employees in mind, the executive confesses, "You can never really take the full fear out of it" (cited in Overby 2003). It might be tempting to hear sympathy in this statement, but if, as Papadopoulos et al. (2008, 222) argue, "precarity" is a "regime of labour control," then keeping an element of fear in play in the employment relation is precisely the point.

This fear factor is prominent in Andrew Ross' (2006) book-length account of high-tech outsourcing to China—the country which, along with India, is virtually affixed to the word 'outsourcing' in the mind of the global North. But if a white-collar American job is lost to an emergent technopole in a far-flung locale, what of the fate of the offshore worker assuming that job? This question prompted Ross to follow the flow of capital into the Chinese high-skill outsourcing business. Interviews with managers, engineers, and programmers at firms in Shanghai, the Yangtze Delta, and elsewhere, revealed that the work-related insecurities that afflict the onshore workers who lose their jobs—or worry of losing them—are recapitulated among the typically young workers who "'took'" the jobs offshore (ibid., 12). Among the skilled workers he talked with, Ross reports a keen consciousness of the abundant local labour reserve—and, as a result, a sense of being always potentially disposable (ibid., 93-94, 111, 117). While one axis of fear was national, another was more global in scope. With regularity, says Ross, workers spoke of the "pressure" put on them by managers who would invoke either India or another region within China as promising a ready labour supply with comparable skills willing to work at a lower wage (ibid., 111, 134-135, 211): "Time after time, I listened to employees relate how the managers used this threat, even in mainland China, to extract longer hours or surplus enthusiasm on the job" (ibid., 19-20). One of the upshots of the threat of relocation was encapsulated by a Chinese software engineer: "Every so often, my manager reminds me that the company pays me more than it pays a programmer in Mumbai … I am sure he thinks it will make me work harder. And, to be honest, it probably does" (cited in ibid., 135). It was not unusual, Ross learnt in further travels, for

workers in India to sustain the same threat—but with China cast as the fearsome competing destination.

Pitting workers in one part of the world against counterparts elsewhere is a classic feature of flexploitation (Bourdieu 1998, 85). It is not necessary for job transfer to materialize, however, to accentuate labour control (Huws 2009a). This is so for at least three reasons. First, offshore outsourcing is an efficacious mechanism for disciplining labour to the extent that fearing the vulnerability of one's employment is sufficient to arouse a self-exhortation to improve one's productivity. Second, outsourcing publicity may have a magnifying effect, further normalizing low expectations for job security, and, in that way, imperceptibly feed the incremental deterioration of the quality of employment relationships. Third, the fear that global outsourcing inspires can provoke social reactions that potentially deepen political divisions within labour. Commonalities at the level of employment conditions and labour processes would seem to create favourable conditions for the formation of "common class consciousness" among a globalizing cybertariat (Huws 2003, 175). Against that potentiality are poised, says Huws, "powerful counterforces," in particular, "racism" (ibid.). Several critical voices in the US have troubled the nationalistic and xenophobic overtones of the response that outsourcing has elicited from right-wing pundits and elements of organized labour alike (see Chakravartty 2006; Rodino-Colocino 2007, 218; Ross 2006, 11-12). If it is not uncommon for blame for job loss to be ascribed to an anonymous racialized 'other,' this explanation plays neatly into the hands of capital—both by displacing accountability from imperatives of capital to differences of identity, and by undermining the solidarity that is required if labour is to even begin a coordinated transnational response to mobile capital (see Ross 2006, 21).

Digital Piecework

"The new phenomenon is not the precarious character of the job market," writes Franco Berardi (2005), "but the technical and cultural conditions in which info-labour is made precarious." If the technical conditions include the Internet, mobile communications, and reticular workflow software which provide a material infrastructure for the flexible reorganization of work, then the cultural conditions encompass increasingly diffuse generic competencies in, say, basic computer use, web navigation, participatory media, and cellular interface. These techno-cultural conditions have made possible a dramatic multiplication of the options available to capital to access immaterial labour power— options that make a standard employment relationship appear a quaint anachronism. Indeed, according to Berardi, where "info-labour" is concerned, "[c]apital no longer recruits people, but buys packets of time, separated from their interchangeable and

occasional bearers." Hiring a temp is a short-term nonstandard work arrangement that pales in comparison to early 21st century experiments in using networked communication platforms to extract quantum doses of immaterial labour—or digital piecework—from a dispersed workforce.

Berardi's claim that via networks "cells of productive time can be mobilized in punctual, casual and fragmentary forms" is not science fiction but emergent best practice in "everything from grunt work to lab work," according to some mainstream technology commentators (Howe 2006a). Take, for example, Amazon Mechanical Turk, a subsidiary of Amazon.com. Its premise is that there are certain rote informational chores that companies need done, but computers cannot (for the moment) capably complete automatically—like, for example, transcribe a podcast, accurately label an image, or research a highly specific detail on the web. Mechanical Turk mobilizes the "Artificial Artificial Intelligence"—a.k.a. humans—necessary to complete these and other tedious digital duties (Amazon Web Services 2010). Launched in 2005, mturk.com is presented by Amazon as a web service connecting online workers to remote employers. In this virtual hiring hall, employers, called Requesters, post a simple description of a "human intelligence task," or HIT, along with the time allotted for its completion and the rate paid. Workers apply, perform the HIT over a web-based platform, and submit the work to the Requester. Technically, Mechanical Turk is a programmable interface allowing a Requester to directly integrate the results of the work into their own software applications.

Amazon pitches the web service to its prospective labour recruits as a resolution of "the problem of finding work you can do wherever and whenever you want" (Amazon Web Services 2010). In 2009 it was reported that Mechanical Turk had 200,000 registered workers (Holmes 2009)—earning, generally speaking, a few pennies, maybe a few dollars, per HIT. Anecdotes of "four hours' work for a grand total of $2.14" are not uncommon (Bingham and Dunn 2009). One Requester gloats his software company "pays tens of dollars … for work that would typically cost thousands" (cited in Mieszkowski 2006). A company called CastingWords uses Mechanical Turk to organize a labour market in the transcription of online audio files (Markoff 2006). And an American robotics company is experimenting with using the platform to draft workers to interface with robots: its idea is to pay people to draw a basic shape around an image obstructing the path of a robot so that the obstacle can be rendered intelligible to its AI and averted (Giles 2009), opening the door to a truly sci-fi scenario of far flung war machines remote-controlled by the working poor with a computer, a mouse, and a broadband connection. While Requesters are wooed with the prospect of access to "cheap, flexible labour available 24 hours a day" (Bingham and Dunn 2009), Amazon.com cashes in twice: first when it charges Requesters ten percent of the pay rate

on every HIT, and again when a Mechanical Turk worker chooses to be paid in Amazon store credit.

Mechanical Turk is not alone. Indeed, something of its logic is moving further up the immaterial labour hierarchy. Associated Content invites news stories, travel journalism, how-to videos and a host of other contributions to its web site from content producers whose level of compensation is tied to the number of page views the content receives (Holmes 2009). LivePerson is a web site selling the micro-services of high-skill workers: technical writers, Java programmers, mental-health counselors and other professionals are paid by the minute for online chats or by flat-fee email replies (ibid.). CrowdSpring (2010) is a 'spec design' web service boasting access to more than 50,000 graphic designers ready to compete on small design jobs; potentially dozens of creative workers will submit a design in response to a job post (e.g., design a logo), while the client chooses among the submissions, paying only for the one they like best (Howe 2009a). Owned by Getty Images, iStockphoto taps a growing legion of amateur digital photographers. Clients purchase discount high-quality photographs from a massive online archive of images "created by a global, fluid workforce of fifty thousand part-time photographers and artists, fewer than 10 percent of whom make enough from iStock to live on" (Howe 2009b, 183). And InnoCentive (2009) describes itself as a "global innovation marketplace." From major biochemical corporations to consumer electronics giants, clients of InnoCentive post complex scientific "challenges" to a reservoir of 140,000 registered "solvers" dotting "more than 170 countries" (Howe 2009b, 42). For resolving a research problem, the hobbyists and experts that make up InnoCentive's "ad hoc labor force" can earn a 'reward' running into the tens of thousands (ibid., 43). A client's "average earnings from a successful solution are twenty times the fee paid to a solver" (ibid., 44-45). If these and other web-work experiments prove viable, "the virtual worker of tomorrow" may, as Greg Downey (2003, 245) writes, bear a strange resemblance to "the piecewage homeworker of yesterday."

A latest frontier of fractal labour performance is the mobile phone. "[T]he ringtone," says Berardi (2005), "calls the workers to reconnect their abstract time to the reticular flux." Calling a substitute teacher to a shift via a fully automated phone service is just one example of the design of communications systems for just-in-time employment. Or we might imagine one of Japan's so-called "net café refugees" (Otake 2008)—un- and under-employed workers living in 24-hour cyber-cafés—awaiting a call to day labour in the construction industry. More than a means to summon an individual to a workplace, however, the mobile phone has *become* a workplace. The manager tethered to a smartphone at dinner is a now classic example. The cybertarian possibilities are more powerfully evoked, however, by a recent entrepreneurial initiative: txteagle, a Boston-based enterprise, is working to dispatch "simple tasks" via "text messages" to the

"untapped work force in developing countries" where the cellular user base is broadening (Marwaha 2009).

In its pilot project in Kenya, txteagle enlisted English language speakers to use their mobile phones to, among other tasks, receive and translate single words or phrases to local dialect (Bennett 2010). Translations are aggregated and sold to multinational telecommunication firms developing localized phone menu interfaces. This mobile labour process is a concrete example of what Berardi abstractly describes as the compression of work time "to minimal and reassemblable fragments," and the insertion of the fractal cognitive result into the "recombinative productive circuit." In a recursive loop, the Kenyan txt-workers may receive their micro-payments in the form of airtime (Singel 2009). With projects in Rwanda and Dominican Republic in the pipes (ibid.), txteagle calculates "the total amount of idle time that literate, English-speaking mobile phone subscribers have within the developing world … to be more than 250 million hours every day" (Marwaha 2009). In this way, cellular piecework is envisaged as a method of capitalist expansion, drawing the unproductive "idle time" of the global periphery into the core of capital's productive circuitry.

The temporality of the post-Fordist digital pieceworker is contrasted to that of the Fordist industrial standard worker when Berardi writes: "if capital wanted to dispose of the necessary time for its valorization, it was indispensable to hire a human being, to buy all of its time, and therefore to face up to the material needs and trade union and political demands of which the human was a bearer." However, "[w]hen we move on to the sphere of info-labour," Berardi writes, "there is no longer a need to have bought over a person for eight hours a day indefinitely." One of the central problems to arise from the shedding of this need is, Berardi argues, that "depersonalized time has no rights." There are, for example, no regulations governing overtime in the virtual workspace of the digital pieceworker. In the US context, when the digital pieceworker is legally classified as an independent contractor, he or she must pay income taxes on what are likely meager earnings—but, so long as the money paid out to a single contractor does not exceed six hundred dollars in one year, the employer is not required to pay employment taxes. And it is the client of Mechanical Turk who retains the power to decide, after work is submitted, if the labour deserves compensation; grievances about unfair rejection of work are not infrequent. Ultimately, Berardi's claim that info-labour is bereft of rights suggests that the cybertariat is of interest to capital as a mind split from its body. Put differently, digital piecework is an attempt by flexible capital to access labour but absolve itself of employees—a project that is taken still further in the case of free labour, to which I turn next.

Free Labour

If one tendency is for the cybertariat's remunerated time to be progressively fractalized, a contrary tendency is for its productive time to be increasingly unbounded. This section looks at instances of the latter tendency through the lens of what autonomist media theorist Tiziana Terranova (2004) terms "free labour," which, she argues, is a vital source of financial value generation in contemporary online economies.

First, however, I want to acknowledge a mass media antecedent to this line of argument—the assertion by political economist Dallas Smythe (2001, 256) that media audiences perform a species of labour he theorized as "audience power." Smythe argued that commercial media outlets are primarily in the business of selling "the audience commodity"; that is, they aggregate demographically desirable units of audience attention and sell them to advertisers. The implication is that surplus is the product not only of the labour-power of workers inside the media company, but also of the labour of the audience outside. Moreover, Smythe wrote: "The work which audience members perform for the advertiser to whom they have been sold is learning to buy goods and to spend their income accordingly" (ibid., 266). Audience power thus "pays off," he suggested, when a dutifully trained consumer purchases an advertiser's product (ibid., 254).

For Smythe, then, "the productivity of audience power" (ibid., 262) was far from a marginal phenomenon. Indeed, he submitted that "audiences are engaged in production which is as essential to the capitalist system as was the production at the job front in the early nineteenth century" (ibid., 275). The formation of consumerized consciousness was, after all, indissolubly linked to the management of effective demand in the wider system of monopoly capital with which Smythe was concerned. The broader suggestion of this analysis is that the commercial media apparatus produces the audience as a subjective node critical to capitalist reproduction more broadly. Smythe pursued his argument to the conclusion that "putting audience power to work" is tantamount to "unpaid work time" (ibid., 262, 261), implicitly questioning the activity that is and is not recognized as productive according to capital's measure of value contribution.

Smythe developed these ideas in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The arrival of the Internet, and in particular the Web, radically expanded the opportunities available to capital for harnessing "audience productivity." As early as 2000, Tiziana Terranova (2004), writing about the role of AOL chat room hosts, open-source software programmers, and digital fan sites, identified the prevalence of "free labour" in those circuits of the emergent digital economy that rely on fan-excitement, hobbyist expertise, and user-generated content. Fast-forwarding to 2005 when the term "Web 2.0" was penetrating network culture parlance (O'Reilly 2005), the best known brands of the

web—Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia, MySpace, Flickr—were sites whose content was built almost exclusively by users' contributions.

Distinguished from a populist term like "prosumer" (Toffler 1980), Terranova's concept of free labour zeroes in on capitalist expropriation of Internet users' activity as a diffuse, cut-rate source of immaterial labour. Devotees of participatory media platforms contribute to financial value-generation when mobilized as, for example, a trial workforce for a Web 2.0 venture capitalist, a bargain-price content pipeline for a media conglomerate, or an audience whose attention is target-sold to an advertiser (see Banks and Deuze 2009; Coté and Pybus 2007; *Mute* 2005; Zwick et al. 2008). The concept of free labour doesn't deny the willingness with which users contribute content online. Indeed, the pleasure of it is integral to Terranova's (2004, 74) conception of free labour as that class of ambivalent online activity that is "simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited."

Free labour is an instance of the phenomenon *Wired*'s Jeff Howe (2009b) labels "crowdsourcing," bluntly defined as the leveraging of "the Internet to exploit the spare processing power of millions of human brains" (Howe 2006b). Unlike "outsourcing," where, he says, "location" is a thornier issue, the crowdsourcing of work requires simply that the immaterial labourer be "on the network" (ibid.). While examples of crowdsourcing include the sort of digital piecework mentioned earlier, it also comes in more cloaked form. An example Howe gives is the influential "collaborative filters" developed by Amazon. When a customer purchases a book, additional recommendations are provided based on the purchasing pattern of other customers who have bought the same title: "Merely highlighting the relationship between the two, [Amazon] has found, drives sales" (Howe 2009b, 238-239).

Beyond an increasingly standard data mining technique such as this, a more recent twist on free network labour is suggested by BC Dash. Owned by BigChampagne Media Measurement, BC Dash is a proprietary software platform enabling its corporate buyers to monitor, in real time, users' download activity on filesharing networks. For the music industry clients of BC Dash, "[t]he data they find there … help[s] them in any number of ways, from choosing which leaked song to use as the single, to where a band should tour based on the IP addresses of its fans, to figuring out which artists should perform on the same bill" (Van Buskirk 2009). Dispersed online cultural consumption is thus scanned and translated into a value-adding informational commodity, with the potentially illegal activity of digital music downloading making a circuitous contribution to capitalist valorization processes. "The crowd," to put it in Howe's (2009b, 281) terms, "possesses a great deal of creative energy."

The sphere of online social networks is frequently described as a democratic advance over the one-to-many broadcast media model (see Dean 2009)—and, for some,

the illicit nodes on this network may be understood as counter-capitalistic (Barbrook 1999). The emergence of parasitical surveillance techniques such as those deployed by BigChampagne show how, in line with Terranova's analysis, Internet users are actively or passively, knowingly or unknowingly, engaged in the "continuous production of value" for capital (Terranova 2004, 74). Free labour arguably represents an extension, through digital networks, of the longstanding post-Fordist practice of drawing on external labour markets. Moreover, free labour exemplifies what the theorists of immaterial labour say is one of the main characteristics of intellectual, affective, and cultural creation, that is, a blurring of the boundaries between work and leisure, creating a continuum of productivity, and, hence, of exploitability (Hardt and Negri 2000, 356). For these theorists, the basin of value often lies outside the enterprise in social activity—tapping into it via networks and converting it into informational form is, examples such as BC Dash suggest, one facet of the reorganization of work and the production of value under post-Fordism.

Some of the most elaborate examples of free labour come, however, from the video game industry. For many years now, game developers have been lucratively harnessing the immaterial labour of its audience of players in a myriad of ways, but especially through the development of games with tools allowing player-made content (see Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 3-33). Here the most sophisticated site is the video game genre of MMOs, or massively multiplayer online games, of which the best-known current example is Blizzard Entertainment's *World of Warcraft* with twelve million people registered players worldwide. Blizzard's profits are not just a question of players paying for software purchase and subscriptions. As players play, they also in a sense work for the game owner, providing, through their ingenious interactions and collective construction, the content of the virtual world that sustains interest and attracts new players. Julian Kücklich (2005) refers to this do-it-yourself game activity "playbour"—a neologism that perfectly captures the hybrid of work and enjoyment it involves. In MMOs, game capital benefits from the "immaterial, affective, collective production" of their in-game populations (Humphreys 2004, 4). Among the first successful commercial ventures in the crowdsourcing, MMOs show that tapping into the collaborative creativity of millions of players can be highly profitable.

In some of the most successful MMOs, however, free labour slips and segues into a mutant form of paid digital piecework. Neofeudal-themed MMOs tend to be dominated by market exchange. Virtual currencies—gold in *World of Warcraft*—are at the core of game activity, vital for acquiring goods, such as weapons, armor, or spells. In MMOs, virtual currency—as well as arsenal, property, and characters—can be traded for real-world dollars. Virtual-to-real trading—or RMT (Real Money Trading)—seems to have begun with individual ad hoc transactions on eBay and other online auctions. Soon,

however, gamers playing for profit—known as 'farmers'—were systematically harvesting games for real cash resale. Farmers often occupy strategic sites in virtual worlds where they can, for example, kill the same re-spawning monster over and over again, repeatedly looting whatever treasures it drops. More sophisticated farming enterprises use automated programs—farmbots—to scour game worlds, gathering gold or saleable items without human monitoring, turning virtual communities into resource extraction sites for acquisitive roving game golems.

In 2002 it was reported that a US company, Black Snow Interactive, had hired and trained shifts of Mexican day labourers in Tijuana to farm games (see Dibbell 2006, 10-32). Other transnationally organized, commercial so-called game farming enterprises followed. Their services include the purchase of currency, or of specific game items, or 'power leveling' by which a player pays a proxy to rapidly advance his or her avatar through the grind of gaining game experience. Gold farming operations, like many black market businesses, have their own deeply exploitative labour control practices: behind the rogue virtual character looting gold in the game, there is a real living player who is themselves expropriated by cyber-sweatshop operators. Though gold farms are located all over the world, many, perhaps most, operate out of China (Dibbell 2006; Lee 2005).

David Barboza (2005) estimated that in 2005 there were about 100,000 people in China whose everyday work was farming MMOs. Recent reports (Barboza 2005; Jin 2006; Paul 2005; Yee 2006) give a glimpse of an industry with its own precarious labour problems. China's gold farms are clustered between Shanghai and Guangzhou. Enterprises range in size from small shops to factory-like enterprises with hundreds of computers and employees. Companies purchase MMO accounts and, operating 24/7, rapidly advance avatars to their maximum levels so they can access the high-level, lucrative areas of the game. Employees work twelve hours shifts, then hand off both the computer and the avatar they are playing to the next worker (Paul 2005). Some gold farms provide meals and dorms, or perhaps just a sleeping pad beside the keyboard. Workers' wages seem to vary widely, with reports ranging from forty to 200 dollars (300-1500 yuan) per month, though there are instances where farmers work only for accommodation (He 2005; Jin 2006).

Some observers emphasize the long hours, lack of security, and repetitive nature of the work: "You try going back and forth clicking the same thing for 12 hours a day, six or seven days a week, then you will see if it's a game or not," says one gold farmer (cited in He 2005). Others say that workers take pride in game skill and prefer a game 'sweatshop' to other available employment options. The gold farming workforce seems to involve two main groups—college students and graduates, and rural immigrants to cities. College students led the way in making money from MMOs: some now own or manage gold farms, which are increasingly employing a new workforce of rural migrants

to cities. These workers can be trained on site in minimal farming skills, and employed at very low wages. One owner says: "We prefer to hire young migrant workers rather than college students. The pay is not good for students, but it is quite attractive to the young migrants from the countryside" (ibid.). He is "thinking of moving his company to Gansu or Shanxi provinces, where he could easily find scores of rural migrants to become 'farmers' at lower costs" (ibid.).

The migrant workers who are now recruited by gold farms are part of the mass migration from China's countryside to its cities. By 2020, between three and five hundred million people will have shifted from countryside to city to provide the labour for Chinese capitalism (Xinhua News Agency 2003). If migrants are drawn to China's cities by the promise of factory wages, they are also driven by the destruction of the social guarantees that protected rural living standards. Many are victims of the compelled sale of farmlands to party-capitalist developers for middle-class housing, rural villas, and greenfield industrial sites. Gold farming's internal migrants are also, simultaneously, a transnational migrant labour force in networked flexploitation. Nick Yee (2006), a MMO demographer, suggests that farmers in *World of Warcraft* occupy a position similar to that of the Chinese labourers in nineteenth-century America who provided menial services in laundries and barber shops. By accumulating currency which can be purchased by wealthy players in the US or Europe to speed progress through the game, or by leveling up avatars, gold farmers in China take on the grinding virtual work of time-consuming video games. But, as immigrant labourers so often are, they are often repaid with hostility. When farmers are recognized in an MMO—not only by patterns of play, but also often by 'the English test' of conversational skills—they are often subject to harassment from other players. Asked how to evaluate how the "foreign players" he interacts with regard his activities, one farmer says, "loathing." Noting that gold farming is driven by North American's desire to buy shortcuts to game success, Yee suggests this distaste for farmers repeated a familiar pattern of Sinophobia, and, more broadly, of Western racism against mobile, precarious foreign labour.

Variegated Citizenship

The familiarity of the term electronic sweatshop is testimony to the efforts of labour advocates to illuminate "the dark side of the chip" (Siegel and Markoff 1985; see also Smith et al. 2006). Their accounts of technological toil help "to make visible the material components of this virtual world," the general thrust of Huws' (2003, 127) approach to the cybertariat. If this concept urges that "human beings, in all their rounded, messy, vulnerable materiality" (ibid., 151) be a focal point in critical accounts of immaterial production, then it is important to emphasize that the embodied cybertariat is not only a

subject of capital, but also of state, not only a worker, but also a citizen. Rather than a bearer of universal rights, however, the cybertarian is a stratified figure inhabiting a system of rule which anthropologist Aihwa Ong theorizes as "graduated sovereignty" (Ong 1999, 217; Ong 2006, 75-96). Ong (2006, 78) introduces this concept in response to the custom design by the neoliberal state of geographical "zones" that accommodate to the requirements of the world market and its corporate actors. Basic to graduated sovereignty is the state's preoccupation with "producing and managing populations that are attractive to global capital" (Ong 1999, 216). One of the main results and features of graduated sovereignty is the generation of what Ong calls "variegated citizenship," a system "in which populations subjected to different regimes of value enjoy different kinds of rights, discipline, caring, and security" (ibid., 217). Below I touch on two illustrative examples of differential citizenship at dramatically dissimilar locations within the global division of labour.

Despite the growing economic significance of information, services, knowledge and other intangible commodities under post-Fordism, Huws (2003, 131) maintains that the prevailing tendency of capitalism remains the forward march of commodification through the production of material goods. No better proof is the sprawling electronics manufacturing plants in the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) dotting the global South and newly industrializing economies. It is within these spaces of graduated sovereignty, such as the Mexican *maquiladoras*, where a product conceived by one stratum of the cybertariat is assembled by another (see Lüthje 2006). Since the 1980s, high-tech manufacturing has of course been steadily concentrating in China—to the point that, as Yuezhi Zhao and Rob Duffy (2007, 229) put it, "the global information economy is built in part on the backs of tens of millions of Chinese industrial workers" (see Hong 2008). In one of the premiere SEZs in coastal China, the city of Shenzhen, this material labour force moils at foreign-invested enterprises like Foxconn Technology Group, a behemoth subcontractor which mobilizes a 200,000 strong workforce at just one of its various production complexes, churning out laptops, smartphones and countless other of the requisite digital devices of free agency (Einhorn and Burrows 2007).

So vital is Chinese labour power to global capital that *The Economist* (2008) was tempted to propose that the value of this commodity, not, say, oil, is perhaps "the single most important price in the world." Against a cynical neoliberal calculus that reduces human labour to a production input, activist-scholars have documented the punishing conditions of work that are frequently confronted in electronics manufacturing plants in the SEZs (Leong and Pandita 2006). Said one worker about the labour process: "All the factory jobs here are the same" (Zhou cited in French 2006a). Light manufacturing, which would include many electronics enterprises, is also a deeply gendered sector, with many companies reported to take on "only young women in their 20s, as they are thought

to be less troublesome and more willing to work long hours" (*The Economist* 2008). In a study of women working in the factories of Shenzhen, Pun Ngai (2004), a Hong Kong based labour organizer and anthropologist, switches attention to the "precarious employment system" in and through which this labour power is embedded and unlocked.

The vast majority of Shenzhen's three-million-plus labour force is a temporarily employed internal migrant worker from rural China, known as *mingong* (ibid., 29, 32). Ngai argues that the precarious employment of women workers in China is a product of an admixture of global (e.g., the presence and pressure of mobile capital) and local (e.g., the patriarchal culture that pushes—and pulls—women from the countryside to the city) forces (ibid., 29, 35). A major pivot of precarity in China is also the national system of residence registration (ibid., 32). In the 1950s Mao introduced a residency protocol— *hukou*—categorizing the population of the PRC as either urban or rural resident (ibid.). Entitlements were linked to *hukou* status: "when the program was implemented, urban residents received social welfare benefits such as pensions, health care, and subsidized housing, while rural residents received land" (Jiang 2007). In the 1980s, however, at the start of China's neoliberal reform period, this binary system was modified to include another category, that of the "temporary household registration" (Ngai 2004, 32). Introduced on a wide basis in Shenzhen, the flexibilization of status would allow this and other SEZs to draw in the rural workforce whose labour would propel the country's export-oriented economic development.

Ngai, like others, depicts Shenzhen as a bipolar metropolis. Engendering the urban social divide is the *hukou* system. Less than one third of Shenzhen's population is a permanent urban resident. Members of this group include "state officials, entrepreneurs, technicians, and skilled workers" (ibid., 29). With urban status, these residents have, as noted above, access to a range of entitlements in the city. This slice of Shenzhen's population has been broadly portrayed as an aspirant middleclass, as keen about civic engagement (French 2006b), and as inhabitant of a metropolitan environment enticing enough to warrant Shenzhen's inclusion in a *New York Times*' list of the top cities to visit in 2010 (Beehner 2010).

Next to the middle-class residents is an exceedingly vaster population of *mingong* earning "$100-a-month sweatshop salaries" (French 2006a). The precarity of the temporary migrant workers arises in no small part from their delimited entitlements as compared to permanent urban residents. Migrants' claim to the city is, as Ngai explains, tenuous: they must renew their residency status annually; they are blocked from registering a marriage or childbirth locally; they cannot be joined by relatives "unless they too can find a job"; and they must maintain employment to maintain residency privileges—suggesting that a citizen's right to the city is subordinated to global market conditions (Ngai 2004, 32). In general, migrant workers are excluded from (or are

charged to access) a variety of welfare provisions—on vital needs ranging from housing to education to healthcare—that are available to urban residents (*The Economist* 2008; Jiang 2007; Ngai 2004). In short, the *hukou* system produces a "deformed citizenship" (Ngai 2004, 32). While the costs the local government saves by differential access to public services are clear, from the point of view of labour control, *hukou* helps to ensure a steady turnover in the migrant labour pool, which Ngai identifies as one of the formidable barriers to the sustained development of urban organizations that would fight for the defense of workers' rights (ibid., 35). The precarization of labour through a differential citizenship device is not limited, however, to so-called unskilled material labour.

The concept of variegated citizenship emphasizes the differential rights—such as those pertaining to mobility and entitlements—that are extended to different category of worker based upon the economic value attributed to the skill she or he possess and its significance to global capital at a given point in time. Worlds away from the Chinese rural migrant woman working an over-time shift on a semiconductor manufacturing line and then returning to an employer-controlled dormitory afterwards is the high-skill Indian technical specialist, graduated perhaps from one of the country's renowned Indian Institutes of Technology. While some of these youthful immaterial workers may find themselves in a rather different SEZ, such as a gleaming IT Park in Hyderabad, others may be attracted to the prospect of parlaying their sought-after skills into a cosmopolitan "flexible citizenship" (Ong 1999), by participating in a kind of transnational immaterial labour arbitrage, traveling from the Subcontinent to the United States on a work visa permit called the H-1B. While these workers would appear to be harbingers of an unfettered globetrotting knowledge worker, their mobility is, as we shall see, far from unrestricted.

The US H-1B visa program is a guest-worker permit designed specifically for high-skill immaterial workers. Officially, the scheme is presented as a means for American employers to recruit across a veritable world labour market for the "best and brightest," from academics to engineers (Turnball 2009). Historically, information-technology specialists, like systems analysts and software programmers, have accounted for the lion's share of H-1B visa holders (Aneesh 2006, 38). The number of H-1B permits that have been available has varied over the years, with migrant labour intake flexibly calibrated to market conditions and needs. In the past decade, the most active window for the H-1B program was that around the dot.com boom. Thanks to the corporate lobbying efforts of IT giants like Microsoft, US Congress raised the total number of available visas to 195,000 in the early 2000s (Rodino-Colocino 2007, 214). In subsequent years, this number was more than halved, a drop that is partly a reflection of mounting political pressure to protect American jobs amid global economic downtimes. An H-1B permit is typically granted for a period of three years, and can be renewed to a total of six years.

Visa-holders might choose to apply for a more stable residency status during their stay (i.e., green card), but their success is not a sure thing—which is just one indication of the precarity that this relatively privileged temporary resident might endure.

Most of the high-tech workers on H-1Bs arrive from India (Aneesh 2006, 39). In his study of Indian software programmers in the US on H-1B visas, sociologist A. Aneesh both interrogates employers' motivations for sponsoring these guest workers and illuminates the precarity that can arise from their status. Aneesh frames the H-1B program as a quintessential "flexible regime of just-in-time labor" (ibid., 44). Even if an H-1B contractor is paid decently because her or his skills are scarce, Aneesh says the employing firm ultimately saves money by 'flying in' an H-1B worker, because doing so reduces the indirect labour costs associated with the long-term maintenance of a standard employee (ibid., 43). However, as Michelle Rodino-Colocino (2007, 214) notes, several studies have concluded that H-1B workers are paid less than their standard counterparts within their industry and, potentially, within the same employing organization. It is on these and other grounds that some American unions representing high-tech workers have denounced the H-1B visa as a tool that an employer may use to enlarge its labour supply and, in so doing, "[drive] down labor costs" (ibid.).

Although the fates of resident and H-1B workers are linked through the wage, the precarity of the H-1B visa permit holder is particular, if heterogeneous. The sale of the labour-power of H-1B workers in the US is often mediated by so-called 'body shopping' recruitment agencies headquartered in India. These firms subcontract the workers in their employ to outside clients on an on-demand project basis, with the Indian agency skimming potentially more than half of a worker's US wage (Aneesh 2006, 39, 44). Other H-1Bs are recruited directly by an employer for a longer tenure. Others still might be hired by an Indian firm located in the US, only to return to India to work in outsourcing operation there. Whatever the precise nature of H-1B visa workers' employment arrangements, in his interview-based research Aneesh found that this flexible labour system generates any number of "unsettling effects" in the everyday working lives of its alien inhabitants (ibid., 56): they may receive potentially substandard wages—while nonetheless facing a similar cost of living as their citizen counterparts; immigration regulations may bar a partner from obtaining formal employment—which can lead to social exclusions around the gender and age of H1-B permit holders; and it is generally difficult to put down roots in a residency situation that makes for an "uncertain future"— which connects to a "troubled existential space" where the transnationally traded may find themselves "forever nostalgic for the other home" (ibid., 61).

The thrust of the H-1B visa as an instrument of precarious labour control is conveyed by Rodino-Colocino (2007, 214), however, when she writes: "H-1B visa workers understand that being fired is tantamount to deportation." Status is conditional

upon maintaining a job that is consistent with visa program criteria, with a worker given four weeks to find a replacement job with an employer willing to act as a sponsor (ibid.). This precarious residency arrangement has been further connected to an alleged inclination among these migrant immaterial workers to commit unpaid overtime (ibid.). Moreover, these 'best-and-brightest' are, like so many other nonstandard workers, "[i]neligible for any kind of jobless benefit" (Turnbull 2009). These are among the reasons why some IT workers have characterized of the H-1B program as "high-tech indentured servitude" (cited in Mir et al. 2000, 24).

Hiring non-resident immaterial labour has, then, been controversial in the US—and no less so in the wake of the recession that closed the first decade of the 21st century. One of the most prominent corporate advocates of the H-1B program is Microsoft. It had about one thousand workers employed on the visa in 2008 (Turnbull 2009). Due to "lower than expected profits" in a single fiscal quarter of 2009, Microsoft announced 5,000 jobs would be slashed—while its commitment to the H-1B program would be sustained (Eaton 2009). Incensed, one Republican senator, Chuck Grassley, stoked media interest when he contacted the CEO of Washington-state based Microsoft, insisting that the guest workers go 'first.' Against this familiar invocation of the shadowy foreigner, at least one empathetic story appeared in the Washington press. It set out to investigate what might happen to "an untold number of foreign professionals nationwide who are also 'out of status' as soon as they are out of work" (Turnbull 2009). In *The Seattle Times* article, an immigration lawyer comments that, despite having an established life, and despite having made tax contributions over the years, these visa worker confront the prospect of the loss of "the right to live here," unless they are able to find, quickly, an employer willing to sponsor them (Brown cited in Turnbull 2009). This portends "the flight of the creative class," albeit not in the direction Richard Florida (2007) has in mind with this phrase. Paula Chakravartty (2005) describes the H-1B workers as "weak winners of globalization."

This section discussed China's *mingong* in the electronics factories and Indian H-1B workers to point to the importance of citizenship as an axis of precarization. Within this, (im)migration protocols are seen to operate as a lever of flexible labour supply management, while the ordering of citizens and residents around various politically instituted categories of population was shown to be tied closely to differential exclusion from social entitlements and unequal degrees of job security. While it would be erroneous to equate the precarity of the *mingong* to that of the H-1B, both subjects underscore that, whether at the top or the bottom of the social hierarchy of skill, the migrant worker is hit hardest by precarity. Capital finds in immigration protocols (a short-term visa, a temporary residence permit) a lever to optimize labour control, to raise labour supply, to block dissent, and to minimize its social-security pay-out. "Contrary to expectations that

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global markets produce globalized conditions for labor solidarity," says Ong (2006, 125), "the deployments of latitudinal citizenship fragment and particularize labor pools."

This is not at all to suggest that these migrant (im)material workers are passive victims of the social forces that put them into motion. The concept of "the autonomy of migration" (Papadopolous and Tsianos 2008) invites consideration of migration as a constituent force; from this point of view, it is not the structural determinations of capital that completely account for the paths and possibilities of social subjects in transit. Attention is put to the "imperceptible" desires that can animate migration as a political act. Here I note that based on interviews with the young rural women workers who are the preferred source of labour in electronics assembly plants and light manufacturing, Ngai (2004, 31) emphasizes that the decision to go to Shenzhen was not one made by dupes, but by women who "knew almost everything" about the exploitation that awaited; the decision to migrate in spite of this, suggests Ngai, can be viewed in relation to, among other push factors, "women's struggle against the patriarchal culture" of a rural social order, a desire to escape, however temporarily, hegemonic gender norms. At a wholly different scale, Aneesh (2006) speaks of some H-1B workers who arrive in the US via a body-shopping recruitment firm, but eventually flee the consultancy that facilitated their trip by finding work independently; he speaks, too, of a more general tension to live within and against the frame of the nation—even, of course, as it restricted their movement on a world still patrolled by borders.

Flat World or World Fair?

In developments in the world of labour ranging from offshore outsourcing to Web 2.0 platforms, the neoliberal booster Thomas Friedman (2007, 7) optimistically perceives the progressive 'flattening' of the world through the union of free markets, global telecommunications, and information technologies. This combination, Friedman is convinced, is leading to a leveling of the planetary "playing field" of competitive opportunity, wealth distribution, and cultural participation. Friedman is a perfect example of what postcolonial theorist Ramaswami Harindranath (2006, 8) is getting at when he writes: "prominent conceptualizations of globalization have tended to ignore or neglect the material realities of communities outside the dominant ones…" There is, Harindranath goes on to say, a "persistent neglect of the 'underside' of globalization" (ibid., 13).

This chapter's brief look at offshore outsourcing, digital piecework, free labour, and variegated citizenship provides a glimpse of the global reorganization of work underway. While the older notion of the international division of labour referred to the colonial power relation whereby the North controlled the natural resources of the South,

exporting them to fuel its Fordist boom, the "new international division of labour" (Fröbel et al. 1980) identified the movement of Taylorist manufacturing to the South in the 1960s. By the mid-1990s, the idea of the "global division of labour" was being proposed (see Mittelman 1995). The global division of labour refers, at minimum, to the upsetting of straightforward hemispheric divides. There are, it is increasingly argued, multiple cores, multiple peripheries.

Electronic sweatshops in California, often "ethnic enclaves" (Ong 2006, 121) of undocumented women workers, can be in direct competition with the so-called China price. Imagine an unemployed autoworker in Detroit performing rote virtual tasks on Mechanical Turk to top up a welfare wage. Young Chinese university graduates are entering the middle class as owners of gold farming operations in which internal Chinese migrants sell virtual objects to Wall Street game players. If these are the strange occupational shifts opening up in the post-Fordist age, the creative economy cannot escape its immanent relation to the underside of globalization.

Consider, for example, the mining of coltan, or columbine tantalite—a mineral vital for the electrical capacitors used in mobile phones, laptops, video game consoles, and any number of other requisite resources of free agency or products of the labour of the 'supercore' of the creative class. Eighty percent of the world's coltan deposits are in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in a catastrophe zone of globalization, wracked by poverty, HIV/AIDS, and chronic wars (see Montague 2002; Vick 2001; Wakabi 2005). Child labour has been common, the proceeds have funded regional resource wars, and the ecological devastation is at risk of endangering local wildlife. Coltan extraction is dirty, hard, pick and shovel manual work—and the information society relies on it. Nor can the innovation-centred creative economy escape its connections to the e-waste disassembly workers in Africa, China, and India where one can find women in their kitchens burning circuit boards on Bunsen burners to extract tiny pieces of metal tradeable in local informal markets (PBS 2009).

With this brief profile, it is useful to turn to Paolo Virno who presents an image not of a flat world but of a world's fair:

> In contrast to Taylorism and Fordism, today's productive reorganization is selective; it develops spottily, unevenly, flanking traditional productive patterns. The impact of technology, even at its most powerful point, is not universal. Rather than determine a universal and compulsory mode of production, technology keeps alive myriad distinct modes of production, and even resuscitates those that are obsolete and anachronistic. Here is the paradox: This particularly vigorous innovation involves only certain segments of the workforce constituting a sort of 'umbrella' under which is replicated the entire history of labour: islands of mass workers, enclaves of

the swollen numbers of the self-employed, and new forms of workplace discipline and individual control. The modes of production that over time emerged one after the other are now represented synchronically, almost as if at a world's fair. (Virno 1996, 18-19).

The playbourer, the txt-worker, the Mechanical Turk worker, the spec graphic designer, the H-1B visa holder, and the mingong—despite the dizzying dissimilarity between the diverse types of worker that were introduced in this chapter, there are at least two conclusions that apply to virtually all among this multiplicitous cybertariat. The first is that expanding access to means of digital production has not brought about the emancipation of labour, as the rhetoric surrounding "communicative capitalism" would suggest (Dean 2009), but rather, its continuing exploitation.

The second is that, as Ross (2009b, 137) writes in the context of a discussion of "the political economy of amateurism," many of the "creative industries" may be evolving into "an optimum field for realizing a longstanding capitalist dream of stripping labour costs to the bone." In this light, free labour and digital piecework are but three more symptoms of the neoliberal labour syndrome: "workers are doing more for less" (Rodino-Colocino 2007, 210). Moreover, long-time professional photographers have reported rising competition and eroding rates as their occupation is reshaped by crowdsourcing (Howe 2006b). Similar grievances are anticipated by growing controversies around the impact of "spec" graphic design sites (Howe 2009a). Offshore outsourcing, whether in journalism or high-tech, promises similar wage pressure.

To this extent, the diverse practices of labour's fractalization via digital networks, despite the novelty of their form, are continuous with historical tendencies in capitalism noted by Harry Braverman (1998), namely, the degradation of work, the deskilling of professionals, and the depression of wages through a labour reserve which, as the crowdsourcing commentators say, is now potentially as large as a scalable network allows. Even so, some have depicted developments like digital piecework as perhaps "a useful way to find additional work" (Ali 2009). Rather than promote this docile response to the diminishing value of real wages, we are put on a firmer critical foundation when we remember that what Berardi (2005) calls "fractalization" is not merely a technical process but a class process as well: it "makes it possible for capital to constantly find the conditions of minimal salary." Indeed, the same writer who struggles to see an upside in Mechanical Turk must admit upon conducting a trial that "the worst fast-food service jobs will pay out better" (Ali 2009).

This takes us to the tensions internal to the cybertariat. Huws (2009b) identifies a contradiction of "creative" labour when she remarks that much of the kind of "creativity" that capital rewards is that which is dedicated to the rationalization of the jobs of other people. Returning to the creative economy discourse, surely it must be asked: Would not

the entrepreneurs who initiated, say, txteagle or crowdSpring, looking for the next 'killer app' for precarizing labour, count as model members of the creative class?

Part II

Recomposition:
A Survey of Nonstandard Resistance

The model of a standard employment relationship was a boon to market expansion and social control during the so-called golden age of post-war Fordism in the global North. Already by the late 1960s however, declining corporate profitability made it apparent to accountants that this employment relationship was becoming a costly barrier that capital would be forced to overcome. In response to the counter-power that well-organized labour built up over the course of the 20th century, employers, in concert with the neoliberal states that supported them, have increasingly pursued the de-standardization of employment, and the flexibilization of labour more generally, since the 1980s (Harvey 1990, 147-155; Harvey 2005, 168-170).

Near the end of the 1990s, the spread of precarious employment was leaving many progressives pessimistic about the prospects for the labour movement. In a 1997 talk entitled "Job Insecurity is Everywhere Now," the French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1998, 82) told an activist audience that casualization has potentially devastating consequences on worker militancy, not least because it fosters an experiential condition "making the whole future uncertain," thereby undermining "the basic belief and hope in the future that one needs in order to rebel, especially collectively, against present conditions, even the most intolerable." In an analysis of the individualization of employment in the creative industries, cultural studies scholar Angela McRobbie (2002, 112) arrived at a similarly foreboding conclusion: "Being freelance or self-employed appears to negate the idea of the politics of work."

Such gloomy political forecasts, as the previous chapters of this dissertation attest, are hardly unwarranted. I show in Part II, however, that precarization has *not* entirely exhausted dissent. On the contrary, I note that by the first decade of the 21st century, "flexploitation" was unwittingly tilling a fresh field of labour conflict (Bourdieu 1998, 85). According to some European activists and theorists, one of the collective actors in this variegated contest could be named "precariat" (see Raunig 2007): "a post-Fordist proletariat" fighting within and against precarious material conditions of labour and life, and seeking potential pathways beyond precarity (Negri 2008, 215).

The announcement that "a strange precariat is advancing" is most strongly associated with currents of Italian autonomous activism (Scelsi in Negri 2008, 211). The suggestion that a new collective subject is emerging may be understood from the perspective of "political recomposition" (see Midnight Notes 1992, 112). The autonomist

concept of "class composition" subdivides into "technical" and "political" components (Wright 2002, 3). Technical composition designates the "material structure" of the labouring population according to protocols of capital, such as occupational categories, production methods, or employment arrangements (ibid.). Political composition encompasses the "autonomous" behaviour of the working class (ibid.). Political composition refers to "the capacity of living labour" to organize and express itself in ways that subvert or exceed capitalist heteronomy (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 66). It also includes independent socio-cultural practices, the sort of desires and demands that are being articulated, and the nature of the relationship between emergent working class organizations and those of the established labour movement (ibid.). When the relationship between technical and political composition grows tenuous at a system-wide level, capital, according to this line of argument, will attempt to *decompose* a prevailing political composition by embarking on a process of restructuring (ibid.).

Such a reaction is intended to return the initiative to capital and to disarm the threat of labour. However, the process of capitalist restructuring gives rise to novel forms and configurations of labour. This, writes Nick Dyer-Witheford (1999, 66), opens "the possibility of working-class recomposition involving different strata of workers with fresh capacities of resistance and counterinitiative." Viewed through this analytical optic, the de-standardization of employment, the de-unionization of labour, and the de-industrialization of production frequently associated with post-Fordist transformation may be seen as definitively decompositional. At the same time, the re-assembly of technical composition around precarious employment and immaterial labour establishes conditions of possibility for revived opportunities—and throws up new challenges—for a process of political recomposition. It is within such a destructively reconstructive dynamic that we may situate the hypothesis that "a strange precariat is advancing."

The purpose of Part II is to provide some glimpses of the oppositional agency and transformative potentiality that is obscured when subjects of precarity are viewed only as victims who are principally defined by what they lack (e.g., social protections, representative organizations). Drawing on a mix of scholarly accounts, news reports, and activist literature in the public domain, I set out to emphasize the *contested* character of the convergence of precarious employment and immaterial labour. In what follows I describe resistant practices and reform proposals associated with select struggles against precarity that arose in the first decade of the 2000s, primarily in European and North American contexts—where it is perhaps too quickly assumed that labour politics are atrophied.

Without any pretence of comprehensiveness, Part II's survey of nonstandard resistance is presented in three chapters. The first introduces *autonomous communication* practices that have sought to raise the visibility of precarious labour and to mobilize

protest against the precarization of existence; the main examples here are drawn from currents of European dissent which launched a counter-narrative on labour flexibility through the meme of '*precarity*.' The second chapter looks at *worker organizations* that are responding to concerns and needs of specific groups of precarious workers performing immaterial labour; here the examples include two US-based unions, Washington Alliance of Technology Workers and Freelancers Union, as well as the *Coordination des intermittents et précarias d'Ile de France*. The third and final chapter in this section turns to *policy alternatives* to precarity that have been floated in the context of the European anti-precarity movement, namely, the proposal for the introduction of a basic income. In the conclusion I suggest that if the category of 'precariat' is to be retained, it should not be as a label for a new unified vanguard subject with the star role in a teleological narrative. Rather, the precariat is better understood as a concept that, like the framework of compositional analysis, recognizes the historical malleability of agents of worker resistance, and, moreover, that names a laboratory of contemporary labour politics constituting one site among many in a wider process of political recomposition against flexible capitalism and the inequities inherent to it.

Chapter 4

Anti-Precarity Activism and Autonomous Communication

This is what precarity is–it's both a condition of
exploitation and an opportunity.
(Foti 2004a)

El Precariat Social Rebel

In 2003 the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA) hosted an event under the title of El Precariat Social Rebel. It featured the participation of Chainworkers, an Italian activist network that at the time was gaining attention in radical political circles for its media savvy approach to organizing two groups of workers rarely associated in the public imagination with militancy: "chainworkers," as these activists called them, are those employed on a mostly part-time basis handling the cash, serving the customers, and stocking the shelves for the biggest brand-name companies, while "brainworkers" are hired on short-term contracts compiling the code, writing the content, and designing the interface for the knowledge economy (Foti 2004a). Lacking union representation, facing an unpredictable work schedule, jumping from gig to gig, confronting chronic uncertainty about how long one's current job will last, or not having access to the same benefits as the standard worker across the hall—the labour and lives of these workers are marked differently, but unmistakably, by precariousness.

These nonstandard workers are among the "precariat" boldly announced in the MACBA event. The precariat, to use the words of Chainworkers activist Alex Foti (2004a), is "peripheral in terms of rights, but central in terms of the financial web of the creative value produced." Narrowing the gap between workers' contribution and their compensation is one of the main causes to which trade unions have been historically devoted, but the stronghold of the modern labour movement has tended to be among standard workers in the industrial and public sectors. Operating outside established union structures, Chainworkers set out with syndicalist bravado to mobilize 'chain' and 'brain' workers through a mix of militant direct action and slick media activism.

It was not unusual for the MACBA to host an event with a guest of this political pedigree. Still, El Precariat Social Rebel proved to be audacious programming. In the lead up to the event, a couple of young women working at the MACBA explained to Chainworkers that the institution hosting them was no stranger to precarious employment practices. These staff members were under contract to MACBA from a temporary

employment agency, placing them in an employment relationship in which voicing workplace concerns, not to mention joining a union, is notoriously difficult. Doubtless to their employers' surprise, at the El Precariat Social Rebel event, the art temps, with the support of Chainworkers, "spoke out against the museum's dubious employment practices" and subsequently "gave up their jobs in circumstances that remain largely unclear" (Davies 2007).

And so the event lived up to its rebel billing, but even more so afterwards. In response to this episode, the MACBA temps launched an activist-research collective called ctrl-i. Interested in examining working conditions at cultural institutions in Barcelona, ctrl-i would also be highly conscious of the politics of gentrification. After all, the gleaming white and glass box that was once their workplace is an architectural icon of culture-led urban regeneration. In a familiar script, the MACBA is located in an area of central Barcelona where real-estate speculation has been pricing out long-time local residents, a multitude of them migrants, and many employed in circumstances that would likely make temping in an art gallery attractive, to say the least. Despite the schism between these groups, both of them, recalling Foti's point, are central to wider patterns of capitalist accumulation today: just as the working poor living in the area make it attractive to property investors who can buy in on a bargain and extract super-profits on the sale, so too does Barcelona's lucrative tourist economy rest upon the cultural know-how and customer service delivery of workers like the art temps.

Jumping ahead a few years to 2006, the ctrl-i collective was, in a terrific irony, invited to give a talk at the MACBA at an event on art and politics. The collective refused to participate. Posted to the web, their letter of decline, as Anthony Davies (2007) describes it, charged the gallery "of complicity with the very neoliberal imperatives it purported to critique." "Talking about precariousness at the Macba," the seething communiqué cracked, "is like taking a nutrition seminar at MacDonald's" (ctrl-i 2006). And, as far as politics go, the MACBA, the collective wrote, partakes of "nothing really political, meaning active and transformational" (ibid.).

This episode arose from and contributed to a wider current of activism in which *precarity* had emerged as a keyword in the first decade of the 21st century. Issues surrounding around precarious labour and life were fast becoming a prominent site of social conflict in parts of Western Europe, particularly in Italy, France, and Spain. Street protests, public forums, and flying pickets were among the symbols of a renewed effort to politicize labour insecurity that not only defied familiar narratives about a labour movement in retreat but also anticipated a more multitudinous protagonist. The collective actor was not limited to a Fordist-type standard worker but extended to include a more heterogeneous nonstandard labour force. In this opposition to flexploitation, labour radicalism combined with other elements of the movement of movements, and media

workers and other agents of immaterial labour would have an important role to play. In this chapter I set out to explore select moments of anti-precarity activism, putting an emphasis on what I argue is one of its most dynamic elements, its practices of autonomous communication.

Autonomous Communication

Noting the ascent of the idea of precarity among European activists, a group of activists from Buenos Aires, Argentina, organized a *encuentro* around the subject in 2006. That they did so reflected not only the apparent global applicability of the concept, but also the geographic reach of the counter-networks on which information about the European struggles circulated. It is fitting, then, that the invitation to the Buenos Aires event would put the theme of communication at the forefront. Organizers Martin Bergel and Julia Risler (2006) contended that "communication" is "a decisive area," yet one that too often is "not sufficiently recognized as such by social movements." Under the title of "Precarity, Social Movements, and Political Communication," the encounter was presented as an opportunity for protagonists of a variety of local struggles and international projects to explore how "experiences that resist precarization" negotiate the ambivalence of a "hyper-communicative world." "In what way," they would ask, "can media be used creatively to promote practices of struggle?" "What uses do new technologies have in the process?" "What concrete communication strategies contribute to the empowerment and auto-affirmation of those collectives that are fleeing from precarity?" "What uses do experimental … languages have?"

This chapter takes its cue from these questions and explores them through a conceptual frame of "autonomous communication," a sphere of resistant practice that is immanent to a process of political recomposition (Zhao and Duffy 2007, 230). Continuous with the class-struggle perspective on communication outlined by Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelaub (1983), the notion of autonomous communication can be situated in relation to literatures cross-pollinating autonomist Marxism and communication studies. With the label autonomous communication I want to signal to three interconnecting and reciprocally interacting premises or practices. First is the argument that as post-Fordist capital has grown increasingly reliant for its reproduction on a network infrastructure and on immaterial labour so too has it supplied tools and inculcated capacities that can be turned to alternate ends, potentially widening and deepening the terrain of struggle; this argument posits the autonomy of immaterial labour in the sense that its potential exceeds and regularly escapes the horizon in which capital would prefer to confine it (Dyer-Witheford 1999; Negri 1989).

Second is "autonomous media" (Langlois and Dubois 2005), referring to the multifarious field of do-it-yourself media which supports social movements by variously giving voice to groups and perspectives marginalized in corporate-controlled outlets, making information accessible in non-commodified form, sharing information relevant to struggles, and providing technical platforms that nurture the horizontal participation of disparate groups in "network struggles" (Hardt and Negri 2004). Third is the refusal of hegemonic ideological codes and subject positions, the basic prerequisite for the construction of "alternative system[s] of meaning" (Mattoni 2008, 105) from below, counter-interpellations that subvert prevailing explanatory frameworks and propose alternate identifications. The point is not to reduce political dissent to autonomous communication, but rather to underline the latter's constituent role in the production of resistant communities and political subjectivities.

This chapter explores some of the autonomous communication activities that formed a vital part of the wider currents of anti-precarity activism that arose in the early years of the first decade of the 2000s.[1] Drawing on a mix of academic accounts, news reports, and literature generated by activist organizations, the chapter is organized around four examples of resistance that have been oriented to making precarious labour more visible and to mobilizing collective action around it: the dissident media culture that has developed around Italy's Chainworkers; the research inquiries of *Precarias a la Deriva* from Spain; the alternative MayDay protest that has grown into an increasingly transnational event; and the circulation of the 'precariat' discourse to Japan, where it intersects with nationally specific symbolic and political conflicts around a group of nonstandard workers known as the *freeters*. While all of these resistant practices arise from particular conjunctures that are only touched upon in the pages that follow, my broader aim is to establish the social creativity of the autonomous communication activities with which they are co-constituted. I argue in conclusion that one of the main contributions of these currents is to have put into circulation the linguistic code of precarity itself, a term whose political life is suggestive of the constituent role of language in a process of recomposition.

Chainworkers: 'Advertising a New Brand of Labour Activism'

The critical discourse on precarity and the collective dissent against it that arose in parts of Europe over the past decade cannot be neatly traced to a single origin.[2] In the Italian context, a pivotal role was played by the autonomous collective Chainworkers, which was launched in Milan in 1999 (Fernández 2006, 35). It is not a coincidence that anti-precarity activism sprung up in Italy. Discussions of precarious labour have taken place in radical Italian circles since the late 1970s (Wright 2008, 123-124), but it was in the

early 2000s that the category of precarity entered the vocabulary of a wider European left. To begin with, Chainworkers was embedded in a *centri sociali* in Milan, a regional node on a national network of self-managed spaces for radical political, cultural, and technological activities that remain a living link to the Italian *Autonomia* movement of the 1970s (see Mudu 2004). In those restive years, youthful militants defiantly proclaimed, "precariousness is good," as Franco Berardi (2003) recalls; the refusal of the standard-employment regime so to reclaim the time of one's life from capital's imposition of waged-labour was understood as a "form of autonomy."

A couple of decades later, however, detachment from a permanent full-time job was increasingly linked to an oppressive condition in a national setting in which the structural underpinnings of precarization are advanced; for example, since the 1980s, the country's high self-employment rate has hovered between twenty and twenty-five percent, and more than thirty legal categories of "non-standard" work were formalized in 2002 (Coletto 2009; see Tarì and Vanni 2005). For a gauge of the controversy surrounding labour flexibilization in Italy, it is sufficient to recall that in 2002 the terrorist legacy of the Italian Red Brigades was tragically reasserted in the murder of an academic advisor to the Italian government on labour market reform legislation that "aimed at making it easier for employers to hire and fire" (Willey 2002; see also BBC 2005).

A number of the activists who would assemble around Chainworkers had a union background combined with more recent work experience in the local media industry (Chainworkers 2002). A founder of Chainworkers, union activist Alex Foti (2006), explains some of the inspirations behind this project. On a trip to the US in 1998 with the project's co-founder, he says, "we were struck by the wal-martization of America and how service labor was being pitilessly exploited in offices and malls." He goes on: "We thought this was a trend already present in metropolitan Italy and that America in a way was showing us the bleak future in store for European precarious workers if they didn't fight back." On the same journey, Foti says he learned about the young women who initiated the successful unionization of a McDonald's Restaurant in British Columbia.

If the seed idea for Chainworkers was "to help young temps and part-timers organize and defend themselves from greedy and manipulative employers," the means it would go about this bore the imprint of the growing interest at the time in 'subvertising'—"a technique of diverting and reappropriating the language of advertising to create meanings that are either different or completely opposite" (Frenchi in Fernandez 35). Upon reading Naomi Klein's *No Logo*, which documents how late-20th century capitalism's brand-identity obsession was boomeranging thanks to culturally savvy anti-corporate activists, Foti says he and his co-conspirators "became Kleinian converts immediately" (Foti 2006). This was also a conjuncture when online media activism was fast-becoming a prominent part of a then nascent counter-globalization movement,

exemplified by the Network of Independent Media Centres that promised a horizontal alternative to corporate controlled communications.

For Brian Holmes (2007), Chainworkers can be viewed as an experiment in the "resymbolization" of capitalist power relations that sought to generate effects on "political recomposition." In this sense, a main symbol is the chain-store worker itself. Capital primarily values this (frequently young) subject as a low-wage worker in a service-sector job *and* as a lucrative consumer demographic for branded products in a media-saturated environment. The franchise clerk comprises a work force that is emblematic of precarity when it is paid low wages, employed on-demand, devoid of social protections, subjected to affective degradation on the job, distanced from union representation (organizationally and ideologically), and governed by a "neoliberal logic of control" in the workplace that hides exploitation in a managerial rhetoric of 'teams' and 'associates' (Foti 2004c). The expanding population of chain-store clerks, fast-food staff, and agency temps are potentially important loci of workplace conflict and labour organization, not least because the jobs it performs are often largely un-exportable, its workplaces are typically high-density sites of flexible labour, its employers are frequently iconic behemoths of global corporate power, and its labour-power is consistently a gaping void as far as union coverage is concerned (see Foti 2004c).

Aiming to mobilize this post-industrial labour force, Chainworkers set out to remix media activism and union politics (Foti 2006). It was inaugurated in the 2000 launch of a website (www.chainworkers.org) designed to provide legal information about worker rights, to report on labour conflicts, and to generally build awareness about precarious labour (Holmes 2007, 288). Notably, Chainworkers embraced youth-oriented marketing tactics, from a stylized logo to clothing merchandise to using web-based virtual games to raise the issue of precarious labour. Setting out to "advertise a new brand of labour activism," Chainworkers (2002) reflects how the technical skills and cultural literacies of immaterial labour so vital to reproducing post-Fordism are turned against this late 20th century capitalist complex (Mattoni 2008, 120). Not limited to media activism, however, Chainworkers also mobilized social-centre activists in direct action. For example, with the support of a rank-and-file union, Chainworkers carried out a clandestinely planned intervention at a shopping mall, re-signifying a highly regulated space of consumption as a contested site of labour control (Foti 2004c). Interventions such as this, Foti reports, drew media attention to Chainworkers, and, in turn, attracted precarious workers and other activists to the collective. At its peak, Foti says that the cell of this network was still only about fifty militants, but could mobilize hundreds more for the solidarity activities of Chainworkers which included dispatching flying pickets in support of conflicts involving McDonald's staff and agency temps among others (Foti 2004c, 2006).

But if Chainworkers began with the idea of appropriating "American-style marketing" (Foti 2004c) to raise awareness about precarious work and to activate conflict among nonstandard workers in Italy, the most popular manifestation of its counter-marketing logic was that of San Precario.

The Latin word *precor* means to beg, entreat, pray. Activists from Chainworkers playfully seized this meaning when they announced 'San Precario'—the patron saint to protect precarious workers. San Precario, say Marcello Tarì and Illaria Vanni (2005), was conceived as an elaborate "*detournement*." The subversive deployment of Italy's Catholic tradition begins with San Precario's hagiography: a son of a wealthy family studies "creative finance" at university; visits a financially blessed media magnate (a thinly disguised reference to Italy's Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi); encounters a group of laid-off workers who claim to be unable to find anything but short-term jobs that do not provide a sustainable livelihood; fails in his attempt to prove the sacked workers wrong when he too finds himself in a precarious work situation (confirmed by an inability to secure a loan for a television); and ultimately identifies with the plight of the disposed precarious workers.

San Precario's debut apparition was in February 2004. As Tarì and Vanni recount, a mobile statue of the saint led a parodied procession of clergy and devotees from a Milan social centre through the city streets into a supermarket chain store. Doubtless San Precario commanded attention, his multiple arms conveying a readiness for the contract-juggling and multi-tasking demanded of the ultra-flexible worker: one hand gripped a mobile phone (to accept the call to just-in-time employment), another held the newspaper job ads, while another served an order of fries... The scheduling of the saint's public appearance was timed with public-relations precision: on February 29th—a symbol of "intermittent" temporality, and on a Sunday, a symbol of how the "normalization" of traditional holidays as "working days" has contributed to "the erosion of time for living" (ibid.).

Saint cards (see Figures 2 and 3) were handed out to grocery store customers. On them San Precario is depicted as a young man dawning a fast-food uniform, raising his folded hands in prayer, basking in a neon halo (see Appendix A). Under the saint are a set of icons corresponding to what one Chainworkers activist describes as "the five keys to non-precarity": "access to money, housing, affection and the right to communication and transport" (Frenchi cited in Fernández 2006, 35). San Precario's prayer was also recited at the intervention (see Appendix B). And, to cap off the events, a miracle was declared: an across-the-board store discount, a gesture invoking a radical Italian tradition of "autoreduction" in which the needs and means of people, not market determinations, set the cost of living (see Cherki/Wieviorka 2007).

The issue of precarity found a clever Trojan Horse in San Precario (Tarì and Varri 2005, Mattoni and Doerr 2007; Renzi and Turpin 2007). The saint, to put it into autonomous-communication terms, was an operative counter-interpellation. For if nothing else San Precario is a wholesale dis-identification with a hegemonic market ideology in which labour flexibility is valued exclusively from the point of view of efficiency and competitiveness. More than an irreverent 'oppositional reading' of the restructuring of work along post-Fordist lines, however, San Precario also sought to generate a new collective identification. Brian Holmes (2007) makes this point when he refers to Chainworkers as an experiment in the creative writing of an "iconic language that could reach out simultaneously to kids doing service jobs in chain-stores, temp workers, and freelance intellectual laborers, the so-called cognitariat, who are sometimes better paid but face similarly precarious conditions."

Tarì and Vanni encapsulate the radical creative labour that San Precario performs when, in their analysis of the saint, they write: "The production of imagery, of a system of signification, becomes the constituent elements of political subjectivities and of communities." The efficacy of a counter-interpellation is measured by its capacity to activate counter-publics. An appropriable rather than proprietary image, San Precario appeared at strategic places of precarious labour throughout the country, from the gates of the Venice Film Festival to the temporary employment-agency storefront (Tarì and Varri 2005). San Precario's public appearances in this way gave expression to an increasingly diffuse network of activist initiatives organizing against precarity (ibid.).

The point is not to privilege street-based mobilizations, however. As Alice Mattoni and Nicole Doerr (2007) argue, the visual culture of the anti-precarity movement became a site of contestation reflecting back on the composition of the movement itself, particularly with regard to gender. The male-centrism in the anti-precarity discourse was challenged, for instance, in an image titled *Maternita* which portrayed the saint as a working call-centre mother simultaneously wearing a headset and nursing a newborn (Mute 2005, 94), a direct reference to the gendered experience of precarious employment that has, for example, made women protagonists in the collective organization of Italian call centre labour (Brophy 2009).

Probably the most mature example of San Precario's protean persona is that of Serpica Naro. Putting the activist discourse on precarity into contact with the fashion industry in Milan, anti-precarity organizers and precarious workers inside the local fashion economy came together to fabricate a narrative revolving around an emerging Anglo-Japanese designer, 'Serpica Naro,' an anagram of San Precario (Matonni and Doerr 2007, 133). Concocted in 2005 for Milan Fashion Week, Naro was officially registered by its creators; they launched a slick website under Naro's name; fuelled press interest in anticipation of her debut in the city; and designed clothing bearing her brand.

The cooperative immaterial labour of website developers, fashion designers, and public-relations intelligence that had been invested in Naro was revealed to be a ruse the evening of the show. Just as the architects of the prank would have predicted, the press covered the story, thereby forcing reporters to spotlight the precarious employment within the Milan fashion industry that motivated the hoax (Tarì and Vanni 2005). Naro's show featured comical precarity-protecting attire designed to trouble the distinctly gendered effects of precarious employment relationships (Mattoni and Doerr 2007, 133-134). Serpica Naro was ultimately liberated as an "open source brand" that independent fashion designers are able to use under a Creative Commons license, with precarity-based activism here morphing into an experiment in network-based autonomous production that is anchored in the principle of the free sharing of knowledge (Renzi and Turpin 2007).

San Precario thus began to function as a "counter-franchise," as Foti (2005) put it. Notably, the saint went from icon to institution in a Milan social centre that initiated "Punti San Precario," a resource point that provides legal services for precarious workers in the defence of their employment rights. More broadly, however, the emphasis is put on political self-organization. Rather than aim to represent workers, the ethos of Punti San Precario is, as one organizer puts it, "to help precarious workers organize their own struggles" (Romano 2009). The political experience of the anti-precarity movement here circulates through the sharing of tactical knowledge about workplace organizing and Internet activism. This provision for worker participation has been contrasted to "traditional forms of political aggregation," including those of the major unions: Tarì and Vanni (2005) report that many precarious workers in Italy have chosen to "exit" the latter institutions "to re-organize around oppositional struggles against precarity."

In this way, the San Precario project, like the Chainworkers network that it stemmed from, reflects the conviction on the part of these activists that the institutional form of the union must be rebuilt from the ground up (Romano 2009). Here it is interesting to go back to the transnational genealogy of Chainworkers. This initiative also drew inspiration from Justice for Janitors (ibid.), the celebrated grassroots campaign of the North American Service Employees International Union that has, since the 1980s, broken out of worksite-based organizing, gone directly into the community to mobilize support in the migrant networks that many janitorial staff are a part of, and have taken up the whole city as the territory of visibilization, and, indeed, of contract negotiation.

Chainworkers uniquely identified young 'chain' and 'brain' workers as not only subjects of flexploitation but also as potential agents of resistance. In an attempt to appeal to these workers and to expose the underside of labour flexibility, Chainworkers activists sought to put visual culture, ironic storytelling, and public relations to subversive use. Chainworkers helped to open a space of communication about labour conditions in which image production as much as theoretical texts would have a formative role in anti-

precarity struggle in Italy (Mattoni and Doerr 2007). In the words of Wu Ming, Chainworkers is an exemplary instance of using "tales as weapons" (cited in Tarì and Vanni 2005).

Precarias a la Deriva: Communicative Resonances

Beyond Italy, Spain was another important site in the formation of a critical discourse around precarity in Europe. Like Chainworkers, Madrid's *Precarias a la Deriva* (precarious women workers adrift) is a collective project which emerged from a squat / social centre milieu, in this case, the feminist self-managed space *La Eskalera Karakola*. The *Precarias a la Deriva* project was prompted by a 2002 Spanish general strike that was called by some of the country's largest unions to challenge regressive labour reforms being pushed through by the José María Aznar government.

    The strike was problematic for women in the collective, in part, because of its organizers' failure to confront issues specific to the "fragmented, informal, invisible work," particularly care work, that is disproportionately done by women (*Precarias a la Deriva* 2004a, 157). They asked: "Was there even a minimal interest on the part of the unions for the situation of precarious workers, immigrants, housewives?" And what is the relevance of the form of the general strike itself to those in the independent labour force? "Did the shut-down stop the productive process of domestic workers, translators, designers, programmers, all those autonomous workers for whom stopping this day would do nothing but duplicate their work the next day?" (*Precarias a la Deriva* 2004b)

    Rather than withdraw from the protest, however, *Precarias a la Deriva* engaged the strike as a research platform, carrying out what the collective termed a "picket survey":

> a group of women decided to spend the day of the strike wandering the city together, transforming the classic picket line into a picket survey: talking to women about their work and their days. Are you striking? Why? Under what conditions do you work? What kind of tools do you have to confront situations that seem unjust to you? … (*Precarias a la Deriva* 2004a, 157)

The picket-survey turned out to be a preliminary experiment in what members of the collective described as "an initiative between research and activism," one oriented towards "opening a field of communication and fluid action" from within and against the lived experience of precariousness (*Precarias a la Deriva* 2004a, 157; *Precarias a la Deriva* n.d.).

Precarias a la Deriva is an example of the revival of interest in what in the autonomist tradition is known variously as "worker inquiry," "co-research," or "militant research" (Dyer-Witheford 2008; see Conti et al. 2007). But if the Italian workerists were keen to enter the factory to gauge class composition (Wright 2002), for *Precarias*, the site of work, and hence of inquiry, is unbound. The collective sought methods of investigation that would be appropriate to a diffuse metropolitan workforce that has been rendered evermore spatially and temporally mobile by neoliberal capital. Here the collective saw potential in the *Situationist* tactic of *dérive*, or the drift through urban terrain. Rather than the anarchic stroll of the "*flâneur*, so particular to the bourgeois male subject with nothing pressing to do," however, *Precarias* sought to maintain the "open character" of the drift while adapting it to a feminist epistemology and to the flexible organization of labour (*Precarias a la Deriva* 2004b). The collective would thus speak of a "situated drift" that would follow an intentional yet fluid path through the everyday "itineraries" of precarious women workers (ibid.).

Conceived as "a moving interview" (ibid.), the drifts would be navigated by women working in feminized occupations within the care and communication sectors, e.g., domestic workers, call-centre operators, language instructors, sex workers, and media freelancers (*Precarias a la Deriva* 2004a, 158). Documented with video cameras and audio recorders, these traveling conversations invited the guide to speak "in the first person," started from the "quotidian environments" of embodied labour, moved across the variable sites of paid and unpaid work, blurred the division between researcher and researched, and, notably, had "one eye always set on the possibility of conflict" (ibid., 158, 157). Several weeks of drifts formed the basis for a video production and a collectively authored book—circulated, as one collective member says of the publication, in the hope of generating "communicative resonances, self-identification with the argument, and thus networking…" (cited in Casas and Cobarrubias 2008).

Precarias spoke of the drifts as an exercise in "taking our own communication seriously, not only as a tool of diffusion but as primary material for politics" (*Precarias a la Deriva* 2004a, 158). In this sense, the experience of the drifts, and the reflection on the documentation, were brought to bear on the category of precariousness itself. Engaging in a process of collective theorizing, in one of its collaborative texts *Precarias* lays out a set of "hypotheses" that were informed by the drifts (ibid.). Among them are two points that are foundational to this dissertation—that precariousness is neither "limited to the world of work" nor are its manifestations "uniform" (ibid.). The latter is palpable in the juxtapositions in the video the collective made: in one scene, for example, the video's editors have concealed the identity of a presumably undocumented migrant domestic worker, who, while serving children at a dinner table, insists the camera crew must leave because she faces the risk of being fired if her boss were to return; in another moment,

the camera pans a home office as an immaterial worker explains that, despite its low financial returns, she accepted a job that can be done from home, because it frees up time for other projects (*Precarias a la Deriva* 2004c). The collective is thus careful to emphasize the "tremendously irregular topography" of precarity, whose stratifications are shaped by intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and status, and, bound up with these, of the differential ascription of social value to different types of work (*Precarias a la Deriva* 2004b). It is in a similar vein that *Precarias a la Deriva* set the experience of drifts was set against the theoretical discourse on "immaterial labour, whose homogenization," they write, "we resist…" (ibid.).

Inquiry, as Casas and Cobarrubias write, is "a way of producing knowledge specifically for social movements in order to evaluate steps taken, to understand new contexts, or to open up new issues of struggle." The latter is bound up with the generation of questions. A central question for anti-precarity activism is articulated clearly by Precarias: "How shall we articulate our common need without falling back upon identity, without flattening or homogenizing our situations?" (ibid., 158). Eschewing easy or ethereal answers, *Precarias* affirms the need to pursue singular and common paths of resistance against the force of "neoliberal fragmentation" as a device of control (ibid., 157). In this sense, the collective outlines a set of "clues" that their drifts might provide in terms of intervening politically against precarity. One was the need to form "*points of aggregation*" (ibid., 159). Acting on this, *Precarias* would go on to reconfigure its activities around an initiative it called *Agencia Precaria*, envisaged as a space for legal services and workshops and so on, for both affirming informal expertise about negotiating precariousness and exploring the possibility of new alliances. Another "clue" was the need for "*public utterances and visibility*," writing, "if we want to break social atomization, we have to intervene with strength in the public sphere, circulate other utterances, produce massive events which place precariousness as a conflict upon the table…" (ibid., 160). It was exactly this need that was recognized by the Italian activists who set out to creatively rejuvenate a century-old labour movement tradition, May Day.

MayDay! Network Struggles

Around the turn of the 20th century, counter-globalization activists were reviving the culture of street protest from London to Seattle to Quebec City to Genoa. Riding this wave of antagonistic energy, organizers in Milan initiated an alternative May 1st demonstration in 2001 expressly for precarious workers. Sounding the internationally recognized distress call, their *MayDay* Parade was conceived as a "communicative act" (Frenchi cited in Fernández 2006, 35). Its organizers viewed the city as the territory within which to both achieve visibility for a non-standard workforce whose members are

frequently distanced from established institutions of political representation (i.e., trade unions) and to display solidarity among individual workers who are frequently isolated from each other as a result of the spatial and temporal fragmentation marking post-Fordist labour strategies.

Drawing on a deep national tradition of self-organization, the pilot MayDay event in Milan was the product of a collaboration involving activists from Chainworkers, members of the *centri sociali* Bulk, and a local unit of the rank-and-file trade union *Confederazione Unitaria di Base* (Mattoni 2008, 109-110). At its trial run in 2001, the parade drew some 5,000 people (Foti 2005a). Rather than join the morning labour rally called by the major Italian unions, however, these paraders chose to assemble "autonomously" in the afternoon (Negri 2008, 211). The concept of a precariat protest caught on—and swiftly. Over the next couple of years, participation in the Milan event swelled to 50,000 (Foti 2005a). While French and Spanish collectives were already a presence at the Italian event, the name of the parade was changed in 2004 to 'EuroMayDay,' reflecting the continental extension of the festivities, with organizers reporting that 100,000 people had gathered on the streets of Milan and Barcelona (ibid.). In subsequent editions, parallel demonstrations of varying size dotted more than twenty European cities, from Stockholm to Hamburg to London (Mattoni 2008, 108). In 2007, talk shifted to 'Mondo MayDay,' and, in 2009, Tokyo and Toronto were among the cities added to posters promoting what was an increasingly transnational event (see Figure 4).

In an interview addressing these metropolitan aggregations, Antonio Negri (2008, 215) insists that "May Day is much more than a simultaneous series of parades, it is a process of recomposition…" Below I flag just four entwined dimensions of this process, particularly as it overlaps with practices of autonomous communication.

The first dimension concerns terminology. As the philosopher Gerald Raunig (2007) has remarked, "the conceptual field of precarity - precarization - precariat" had developed into "the most important reference" in the discourse of the EuroMayDay movement. Doubtless the Italian organizers were satisfied. In a study informed by interviews with several of the activists who instigated the parade in Milan, the media scholar Alice Mattoni (2008, 114) reports that one of the aims of the organizers was precisely to use MayDay as a medium for promoting "their alternative system of meaning with regards to labour flexibility"—a counter-narrative in which the flexibilization of the workforce would be re-presented as a "social problem," one that these activists "framed as 'precarity.'" The point would be to expose the insecurity that stemmed from labour flexibility, which was an agenda that was being vigorously pursued in Italy (as elsewhere in the European Union) with the consent of institutional actors from across the party spectrum (ibid., 113-114).

The definition of precarity that these activists put into circulation was more fluid than fixed. The thrust of it is conveyed by Foti (2005a) in a widely circulated 2005 text calling on "euro flex workers … to get a move on!" Foti invokes a condition of life where one is variously "unable to make plans for the future," "excluded from most kinds of public welfare and social security," and without "basic social rights such as maternity or sick leave or the luxury of paid holidays." Emphasizing that migrants, women, and youth are disproportionately affected by precarity, and identifying part-time service workers, media temps, and short-term contract holders, Foti writes: "We are hireable on demand, available on call, exploitable at will, and fireable at whim. We are the precariat." Part of their project was to evolve a language capable of constructing a "collective identity," not only among disparate individual precarious workers, but also among diverse political groups that were already engaged in a fight against labour insecurity (Matttoni 2008, 114).

To the extent that MayDay was promoted under the banner of *precarity*, the rapid uptake of the parade in Milan and its steady diffusion to other points in Western Europe can be attributed, in part, to the isolation of a term that evidently captured something basic about the experience of labour and life shared by a breadth of workers in employment arrangements that deviate from the standard mold. At parades such as that in Barcelona in 2004, where tens of thousands of part-timers, temporary agency workers, undocumented migrants, contract-flitting knowledge workers, and union allies marched together, on-the-ground reports leave the impression that "*precariedad*" was a word in which a diversity of social subjects were able to recognize something of themselves (see Vila and Fernández 2004).[3] This is not, however, to naively downplay the chasms that can separate the disparate social subjects differentially excluded from standard jobs and social protection. By the same token, if the weakness of worker resistance derives in part from division within the ranks of the collective worker, then it would be unwise to brush off those common names that have provided a basis, however temporarily or tenuously, for solidarity. This poses the issue of the constituent role of language in recomposition, a topic to which I will return in the conclusion to this chapter.

MayDay has been a platform not only for the articulation of grievances, but also the expression of counter-values, a second aspect of recomposition. In this sense, the affective atmosphere and cultural character of some of the MayDay events have been described as closer to a rave party, a pride parade, or a Reclaim the Streets intervention than to what tends to be conjured by a conventional labour rally (Lazzarato 2003; Raunig 2007). In the graphical posters, allegorical costumes, sound trucks, comical sculptures, pink-clad dance troupes, graffiti, media centres and other accoutrements that have marked MayDay proceedings, activist-theorists close to the anti-precarity movement have seen the "creativity exercised [on the job] now spread out as an opponent" (Raunig 2004)

across the urban post-Fordist economies to whose functioning the precarious paraders themselves are an integral productive force.[4] In this respect, it is relevant to note that MayDay organizers like Foti argued that precarious workers inhabit the heart of the media, cultural, knowledge, and service sectors so crucial to contemporary capitalist accumulation that "provide the raw material on which the system functions: information" (Foti 2005a). Perhaps it was a deepening conviction of the gap between precarious workers' productivity and their compensation that motivated a shift in MayDay sloganeering, a move from the defensive "stop the *precariat*" at the pilot event in 2001, to, in 2003, the assertive, "the precariat rebels" (cited in Raunig 2007).

Counter-value is not only about the expression of resistance, but also the enunciation of alternatives (see Hardt and Negri 2000, 61). As Emmanuelle Cosse (2008) explains, MayDay has doubled as a platform for the voicing of demands for measures to counteract precarity:

> The EuroMayDay Network is based on a "block" of demands: globalization of social rights at the European level, dissociation between work and income ("with discontinuous work, continuous income"), calling into question European migratory policies (closing the detention centers, freedom of circulation), free public transportation, free access to and knowledge sharing on the internet, and opposition to sexism, homophobia and racism.

What is missing from this list of claims is equally telling: there is neither a demand for 'the right to work' nor a desire to return to the model of a job for life. Nor could some resolution to these concerns come about only through a rehabilitated standard employment relationship. Moreover, the breadth of this block of demands reflects a shift in the precarity discourse itself, a move "from labor precarity to *social* precarity" as the central problematic (Frenchi cited in Fernández 2006, emphasis added). At the same time, the range of demands that have come to be associated with EuroMayDay indicate the disparate collectives and struggles that have converged around the parade. This point dovetails with the next feature of MayDay that I want to mention—its network form of organization.

During the 2004 European Social Forum in London, an autonomous offshoot coordinated under the title of 'Beyond the E.S.F.' provided the occasion for an initial gathering of various activist groups from different parts of Europe engaged in struggles around precarious labour (Mattoni 2008, 108). This marked the creation of the EuroMayDay Network (see "The Middlesex Declaration" 2004), which can be seen as an experiment in what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004, 79-91) label "network struggles." These are associated with a rejection of centralized power, representative

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spokespersons, vertical structures of control, and the subordination of differences to unity (ibid., 86). From the Zapatista National Liberation Army to the World Social Forum, Hardt and Negri, observe in resistance movements of the last two decades a search for an alternative model of organization which some groups have found through the mechanism of the network. For Hardt and Negri, the characteristic features of network struggles include decentralized control, horizontal structures, and distributed agency. An overarching attribute of network struggles is, however, the strong value that is placed on the "maximum autonomy of all the participating elements" (ibid., 89)—while nonetheless striving "to act together based on what they have in common" (ibid., 86). Sustaining this mix of self-organization and commonality, suggest Hardt and Negri, puts a premium on "the construction of new circuits of communication" (ibid., 81).

Building upon existing activist networks, EuroMayDay has come to involve a multiplicity of groups from social centres set up by squatters to media activists, rank-and-file labour unions, migrant rights groups, queer groups, and artist collectives (see Precarias a la deriva 2005). Described as a "fluid transnational network of activist groups" (Mattoni 2008, 108), the EuroMayDay Network has in the past held bi-annual face-to-face coordinating meetings at which individuals, activist groups, other networks, and initiatives from as many as fifteen European countries come together to discuss and set "common objectives" for the parallel protests, and to share experiences of local struggles (Cosse 2008). While the conflict that has beset this network is not denied (Cosse 2008), organizers like Foti initially saw in this platform the promise of "cross-networking" radical sections of trade unionism with elements of the counter-globalization movement (Foti 2005a). Other activist networks viewed EuroMayDay as a potential site for linking together struggles around migration and those around precarious labour (Frassanito Network 2005).

A fourth aspect of the process of recomposition concerns the role of "autonomous media" (Langlois and Dubois 2005), including the information and communication technologies supporting the decentralized organization of EuroMayDay. As Mattoni (2008) explains in an analysis of the communicative practices of EuroMayDay, the Internet came to play an integral role as the scale of MayDay shifted in 2004 from an Italian event to a transnational campaign. Email lists enabled cost-effective coordination of the parade among geographically dispersed individuals and collectives (ibid., 112). The formation of the EuroMayDay Network was followed by the creation of a central EuroMayDay website at www.euromayday.org. By hosting graphic communication materials like posters (see Appendix C) as well as call outs for the parade, Mattoni suggests that the web site helped to allow the various transnational metropolitan nodes on the network to maintain local organizational autonomy while still projecting across the

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participating cities a "collective identity" (ibid., 108) and sense of "common belonging" through the use of a shared "protest aesthetic" (ibid., 113).

Autonomous media was not just organizing tools, but also the main vector of the circulation of alternative perspectives on labour conditions. In the lead up to the above-mentioned transnational meeting in London, Italian organizers had collaborated with Amsterdam-based social justice publication *Greenpepper Magazine* (2004) on a special "Precarity" issue that was circulated at the gathering. "This mechanism of diffusion," says Mattoni (2008, 115), proved to be "the first step in the construction of the transnational social movement network, which organized the EMP in many European countries in the following years." Part of a tactical information campaign to spread the precarity meme, the contents of the issue introduced a "precarious lexicon" (Foti 2004b) and also included a copyleft *Precarity DVD-Magazine* (P2P Fightsharing 2004), a compilation of videos showcasing activist groups, activists, and interventions in the field of precarity-based activism. Chainworkers also collaborated with activist videogame makers at Molleindustria, which operated out of a Milan social centre, on the creation of an online virtual world, *MayDay Net Parade*, which invited MayDay supporters to design their own avatar, providing another promotional media tool for the protest (BBC 2004). And EuroMayDay media activists sought to further connect the virtual and the actual by creating an online "geographical visualization" of the protagonists engaged in anti-precarity activism (unions, collectives, militant research projects, social spaces) in the form of a Precarity Map of Europe (www.precarity-map.net). This circulation of the code of precarity was accompanied by, and sparked, increasing discussion and debate outside of academic venues and mainstream media, across media-art activist print publications (*Mute*), public forums (Precarity Forum), and, in particular online, in non-commercial, open-access web-based journals (e.g., *Fibreculture Journal*, *republicart*), and the web sites of political collectives (e.g., *In the Middle of a Whirlwind*) (Neilson and Rossiter 2008).

Within the space of a few years, the EuroMayDay Parade and the term *precarity* had been integrated into the vocabulary of many activists and, reflecting the global reach of the digital networks on which it circulated, was spilling beyond the borders of Europe. In the next section I take a look at circumstances surrounding just one instance of its apparent transnational traction.

The Freeter: "Politico-Semiotic War"

Since 2004, Japanese organizers have put on alternative May Day demonstrations. Reflecting the transnational circulation of the precarity meme, web sites promoting a 2008 Tokyo protest called on "the precariats"—notably pluralized—"to expand and

connect" (Freeters Union n.d.). If the San Precario placards that have appeared at the demonstrations indicate a link to the Italian activists, the participants in anime costume underscore the significance of local context. Central to the Japanese precariat and its struggles is the 'freeter.' First proposed in a recruitment publication in 1987, this term splices the English word 'free' with the German word for worker, '*arbeiter*,' and is loosely used to designate an unmarried person, eighteen to thirty-four years-old, who earns her or his livelihood hopping between part-time jobs or short-term contracts (The 'Freeter' Issue 2000; Obinger 2009).

Integrated into the lexicon of Japanese journalists, government officials, and popular culture, the figure of "the freeter" is the locus of what Mark Driscoll (2007, 171) calls "a kind of politico-semiotic war." It is the site of a struggle over meaning that very much pivots on the normative status of lifelong employment. On one side, Driscoll suggests that the freeter is the object of a "moral panic," coded as variously lazy, "irresponsible," aberrant, and even disloyal to the nation (ibid., 166, 181; see also Yoshitaka 2005, 22). This panic is gendered, however, as the male freeter in particular generates social anxiety, with the hidden ideological implication that atypical work is more "ordinary" for women (Yoshitaka 2005, 28). On the other side, these intermittently employed workers have been portrayed as youthful libertarians refusing the "stifling environment" of the cradle-to-grave career paradigm (Cortazzi 2001) and denying the "big companies the selfless loyalty of their fathers" (Brooke 2001). In either case, says Driscoll (2007, 172), "in their very being, embedded as such in Japanese capitalism, freeters are … a transgression."

To the extent that the moral-panic and liberal-individualist perspectives on the freeter assume that these workers' participation in nonstandard employment is a matter of personal choice, Driscoll argues that these dominant interpretive frameworks problematically ignore the systemic compulsions of neoliberal capitalism. As elsewhere in the Fordist core, lifelong employment was a gendered pillar of the Japanese postwar social contract: in return for loyalty, the paradigmatic "salaryman," recruited in his youth by a large firm, was reasonably assured access to a decent pension, health insurance, and a steadily rising pay packet as he aged (*The Economist* 2007). Such opportunities, while never universal in the first place, grew more scarce as Japan's economy contracted in the 1990s when the country's asset-inflated "economic bubble burst" into recession (Driscoll 2007, 168).

The cohort that came of age amid economic down times in the 1990s and early 2000s, including the freeters, would come to be known as Japan's "lost generation" (Rowley, Hall, and Tashiro 2007). Unemployment rose as national capital took international flight, and labour laws were revised to allow the expanded casualization of the workforce; the latter in turn helped corporations offset the pricey protections on the

salarymen (*The Economist* 2007). Since the mid-1980s, the proportion of nonstandard workers has virtually doubled to 34% of the Japanese labour force (Wiseman and Nishiwaki 2009), and nearly half of the employed population under the age of twenty-four is reported to be an irregular worker (Tabuchi 2009). In this light, the "delinquent work habits" of the freeter conform perfectly with the hegemonic requirements of flexploitation (Driscoll 2007, 167).

Although the freeter is a functional subject for Japan's flexible labour market, Mori Yoshitaka (2005, 23) argues that this label can be used to designate "new cultural and political actors in the age of globalization." Indeed, the inaugural alternative May Day event in 2004 was dubbed "Freeters May Day," and was coordinated by the fledgling Freeters General Union (EuroMayDay 2008). Called May Day for Freedom and Survival in 2008, these protests voice grievances that, at this point in this dissertation, will be familiar: freeters are paid less than their permanent counterparts (Wiseman and Nishiwaki 2009; Obinger 2009), are often ineligible for paid holidays, medical insurance, and pension programs (Wiseman and Nishiwaki 2009), and are discriminated against in a labour market that frowns upon candidates with a track record of irregular work (Yoshitaka 2005, 22; Obinger 2009). Ending the "rake off" (Ichiyo 2008) system from which proliferating temporary employment agencies profit, expanding accommodation for the homeless, and designing a "new safety net" for nonstandard workers insufficiently protected by current welfare systems (Shimizu cited in Wiseman and Nishiwaki 2009) are among the demands that have been expressed around the protests. The overriding concern of the freeters is perhaps best captured in a statement circulated at a Tokyo demonstration that insisted: "The right to live must not be monopolized by those who have the ability (to obtain a full-time job)" (cited in Hongo 2007).

The Japanese state's response to the deepening social inequality accompanying the flexibilization of labour have included band-aid measures such as offering a modest financial incentive to firms to convert a freeter to a full-timer (Rowley et al. 2007). Discourse around the May Day event suggests, however, that the 'salaryman' is not necessarily a coveted ideal in these circles: "don't diminish your life" and "abolish … long working hours" were among the slogans promoting May Day (Freeters Union n.d). Echoed in these statements is the ethos the Italian autonomists know as the "refusal of work," a notion which Yoshitaka (2005, 24) brings up in relation to an amorphous association called the *Dame-ren* that emerged in Japan in the early 1990s: the Association (*ren*) of Good for Nothings (*dame*) termed the *dame* "those who cannot, or do not want to work," advised "all *dame* people should give up improving their careers," and provided a platform for discussion and mutual aid among those who did not want to assimilate into a dominant social pattern of getting and spending. While this organization operated in the radical margins, something of its spirit would seem to be diffuse, at least according to a

2000 government study which found that of the 4,000 freeters surveyed, 35% suggested they do not prefer standard work (The 'Freeters' Issue 2000). At least one segment of the freeters, adds Yoshitaka (2005, 21), consciously rejected white-collar employment in order to get "involved in creative works, such as musicians, DJs, and artists."

An unlikely incubator of the "politicized freeter" was the anti-war movement (Driscoll 2007). At the front of Tokyo's 50,000-strong 2003 protest against the US-UK invasion of Iraq was what Yoshitaka (2005, 17) describes as a vast "street art performance" involving a few hundred or so youthful demonstrators. The "political energy" of this creative resistance emanated from a network of "autonomous groups," many of which drew inspiration from Japanese artistic activism against the war in Vietnam (Driscoll 2007, 178; Yoshitaka 2005, 18). On the heels of the 2003 mass mobilizations, organizers put on a series of smaller-scale anti-war-infused raves that were a part of a wider "rebirth" of urban politics in the country (Driscoll 2007, 178). These participatory protests introduced cultural elements that Yoshitaka says were successfully "attracting young people who have not been interested in politics before" (Yoshitaka 2005, 23). Driscoll adds that a discernable quality of the anti-war assemblies was demographic: the participants were overwhelmingly part-timers; the "street raves," he writes, "served as the political coming-out party for the freeters" (Driscoll 2007, 180).

After the 2003 anti-war protests, the first Freeters May Day in 2004 was promoted not as a labour march but a "sound demo" (Freeters Union 2008). Like their Italian comrades, the Japanese precariat sought to inject a militant creativity into collective dissent. To take just one example, at one freeter protest, participants collectively lifted over their heads a massive expanse of blue tarp, turning a symbol of the tent-dwelling urban homeless into an expression of solidarity (anju 2007). One of the chief organizers of the alternative May Day was the newly formed Freeters General Union, some of whose members were previously involved in the anti-war protests and in *Dam-ren*. In 2008, at May Day for Freedom and Survival, freeters danced behind DJs on audio trucks in what was described as "colorful, sonorous, and cheerful action," reclaiming the streets of a Tokyo district better known for its commercial cultural economy (Ichiyo 2008). This self-described "precariat" and its culture of protest was enthusiastically welcomed by 78-year-old academic-activist Muto Ichiyo (2008) who saw in this nascent youth labour movement a sign of a potential "sea change" in the "political culture" on the Japanese left.

Pedagogy of the Concept

From the email lists that have been used to coordinate the transnational EuroMayDay event to the tactical media productions that have been used to disseminate alternative perspectives on contemporary labour conditions, one does not need to strain to see in the autonomous communication activities touched upon in this chapter that the immaterial labour and networked platforms that are so integral to flexploitation have been bent to serve alternate ends: to conceive, conduct, and circulate anti-precarity struggles. In conclusion, however, I want to emphasize the counter-application of a more basic communicative capacity, namely, the use of language. As Tarì and Vanni (2005) write: "the words 'precarious-precarity-precariat' are a linguistic innovation..." Indeed, it is at this linguistic level that the precarity movement has arguably made its most distinctive contribution with respect to autonomous communication. At the start of the 21st century, planning a protest via the Internet or leveraging digital DIY media to publicize a social issue are major but not entirely novel achievements. More striking is that the protagonists of this movement proposed, developed, and circulated a *concept* that within a few years was being steadily integrated, albeit unevenly and not unproblematically, into the lexicon of the left.

In this sense, the currents of anti-precarity activism explored in this chapter might be viewed as an example of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994, 15-34) have called the "pedagogy of the concept." As Pierre Bourdieu (1999, 53-54) remarked in a discussion of struggles against neoliberalism in France: "We are dealing with opponents who are armed with theories, and I think they need to be fought with intellectual and cultural weapons." Concepts can be thought of as "tools" that, as Brian Massumi (2002, xv) puts it, "pack a potential in the way a crowbar in a willing hand envelops the energy of prying." And while concepts are raised in relation to specific problems, they also strive to disrupt what Deleuze (1995, 147-148) calls a "dogmatic image of thought," where an "image of thought" refers to "something deeper that's always taken for granted, a system of coordinates, dynamics, orientations…" Finally, and vitally for Deleuze and Guattari, concepts are intended not to merely recognize or represent a situation but to aid in transformation, enhancing our sight and ultimately our capacity to enact new ways of living. Indeed, in an unabashedly utopian moment, they write: "The creation of concepts in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 108).

Laura Fantone's (2007) abbreviated etymology of the Italian word *precario* provides a window into the practice of concept-creation. At the beginning of the 1990s, says Fantone, *precario* served as a "derogatory" label attached to "substitute school teachers," and in the "public sector" more broadly, the term carried the "negative"

connotation of the worker without "lifetime security" (ibid., 7). The "stigma" of *precario* was challenged in the late 1990s, however, when activists appropriated the word "in an attempt to raise consciousness and dissent over increasing temporary work contracts." In the early 2000s, the term's meaning once again mutated, as *precario* was enunciated "with increasing pride." This turn to a more defiant tone is attributed to the MayDay activists, and, according to Fantone, partly drew its inspiration from "the success of reclaiming words like 'gay' and 'queer'…" So although language games are hardly a new tactic in subaltern politics, it is not surprising that a resistance movement that sprung from a post-Fordist generation whose members are trained as active media audiences, are inhabitants of a universe of brand names, and are employed as manipulators of code would seek to put language to work for rebellion.

By suggesting that the concept of precarity as such is the creative act of this movement, I do not mean to privilege the intangible but rather to point to the constituent role of language in a process of political recomposition—however experimental and ultimately precarious that process might be. In terms of the nexus of political recomposition and concept generation, I want to reiterate three points.

The first point is captured by *Precarias a la Deriva* (2004a, 157) when the collective speaks of the urgent need for "words to talk about what is happening to us." The concept of precarity is one response to this need. It was proposed as an incisive name for a quotidian experience, where the act of naming serves as a preliminary step in a process of visibilization. Referring to her experience of people's initial response to the idea of precarity, Italian communication activist Zoe Romano (2009) says, "in a certain way, they realized that what they were living had a word." If precarity first resonates at the level of personal experience, however, the concept begins to reveal its radical pedagogical potential to the extent that it is capable of drawing connections to systemic forces and of preparing conditions to explore solidarity.

The second point is that the concept of precarity not only named a condition but also activated dissent. The concept is coterminous with a terrain of political engagement. This is what Dimitris Papadopoulos et al. (2008, 228) have in mind when they distinguish a sociological account of precarious employment from the concept of "precarity," emphasizing the "concept's role in conjuring up alternative modes of experiencing and in mobilising alternative forms of action." And although the resistant practices described in this chapter are not neatly attached to a single political program, it is clear that the desires and demands the precarity movement is associated with exceed that which could be delivered through a rehabilitated standard employment relationship. It is more than a movement about work, as is underscored in the terminological shift "from labor precarity to social precarity" (Fernández 2006), where the ontology of precariousness is located on a continuum spanning employment rights, affordable housing, citizenship status, access

to culture, and a sustainable natural environment. Precarity is, in short, a scalable concept.
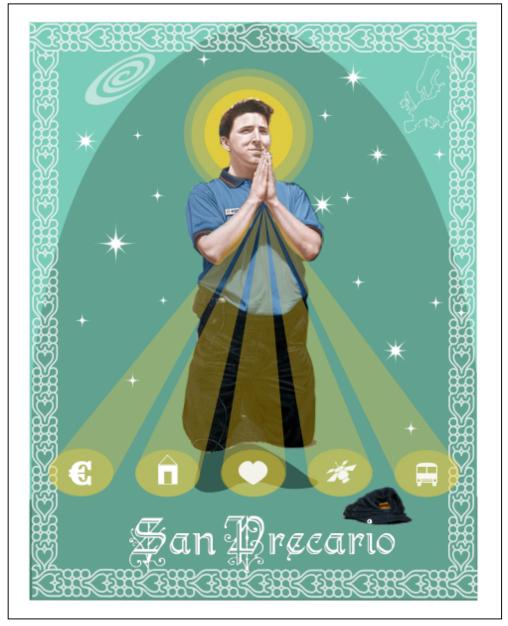
The third point is about affinity. If one of the functions of a concept is to construct problems, then one of the main problems that the concept of precarity poses is that of "solidarity across difference" (Gill and Pratt 2008, 12, see also 19-20). Many activist voices in this debate have been careful to stress that precarization affects different social subjects and occupational groups in radically dissimilar ways (Precarias a la Deriva 2004b). The same voices have, however, refused to abandon a search for points of commonality. The Frassanito Network, for example, has been specifically concerned to deepen the connection between struggles around precarious labour and those around migration. In a text circulated for a EuroMayDay coordinating meeting, they put the challenge this way: "We are confronted here with the problem of imagining a process of political subjectivation in which different subject positions can cooperate in the production of a new common ground of struggle without sacrificing the peculiarity of demands which arise from the very composition of living labour" (Frassanito Network 2005).

Although *precarity* has condensed a counter-narrative on flexibilization, has spawned new forms of creative activism, and has thrown up the problem of solidarity, the activist concept of precarity is not a panacea. A number of critical questions have been asked of this concept. Has precarity become a high profile issue at the very historical moment when those who expected to inherit the gendered privileges of Fordism realize they may not get them? To the extent that the precarity concept assumes that the Fordist standard employment model is preferable, does the discourse on precarity risk ignoring or recapitulating the social exclusions upon which they latter was built? (Brophy and de Peuter 2007) How would organizing across the different strata of precarious labour avoid replicating the hierarchies of command and obedience that mark the existing social division of labour? (Mitropolous 2005) How translatable is the concept? (Neilson and Rossiter 2008). Does the concept's limited geographic reach into the very places where labour is most precarious suggest that memory of a standard employment relationship and a Fordist social state is a condition of possibility for the term's "traction"? (Rossiter in Romano 2009) Indeed, Fantone (2007, 7) suggests that the term has become "even trendy, and perhaps too difficult to use." This difficulty arguably stems from the "overburdening" of the concept, as "precarity" has been stretched too thinly to encompass the gamut of social and existential insecurities and to "bear the load of a common cause" (Neilson and Rossiter 2008).

There is also the question of the broader political efficacy of the currents of anti-precarity activism touched on in this chapter. There are a myriad of ways in which this might be gauged. For example, the ascent of the anti-precarity movement in the first

decade of the 2000s coincided with the increasing attention being given in labour policy circles in the European Union to 'flexicurity,' a controversial governmental framework that ostensibly promises to balance capital's want for flexibility with labour's need for security (see chapter six). In terms of EuroMayDay, Cosse (2008) suggests its "principle success … has been the creation of the network itself." Cosse is not sanguine, however, about the political effects of the anti-precarity movement. In an assessment of the European movement, Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter (2008) report that opinion among activists is split on the achievements of MayDay, with some feeling that it realized its aim of increasing the visibility of precarious conditions of labour and life, and others concluding that the coordinating network did not succeed as a sustained platform for "common forms of organisation and praxis…" (Mezzadra and Roggero cited in ibid.). And Mattoni (2008, 120) suggests that the sophisticated communicative skills of the anti-precarity activists brought about its own problems, as the high online profile of the MayDay movement created the impression that the "protest campaign was managed and participated in by a more rooted transnational social movement network than it actually was."

Despite these limitations, the currents of activism and analysis that took precarity as its keyword demonstrate that at the start of the 21st century labour politics was being given new energy by nonstandard workers. In the next chapter, I turn to another set of collective responses to precarity, shifting the focus from autonomous communication to new worker organizations involving nonstandard workers engaged in immaterial production.

Figure 2
San Precario (santino) Saint Card - front

Figure 3
San Precario (santino) Saint Card - reverse

Oh Saint Precarious,
Protector of us all, precarious of the earth
Give us paid maternity leave
Protect chain store workers,
call centers angels,
and all flexible employees hanging by a thread

Give us paid leave and pension contributions,
income and free services
keep them from being fired

Saint Precarious defend us from the bottom of the network,
pray for us temporary and cognitive workers
Extend to all the other
our humble supplication
Remember those souls whose contract is coming to an end,
tortured by the pagan divinities:
the Free Market and the Fexibility
those wandering uncertain, without a future nor a home
with no pension nor dignity
Grant hope to undocumented workers
and bestow upon them joy and glory
Until the end of time

MAYDAY

Figure 4
MondoMayDay Poster

Source: http://euromayday.org

Notes

[1] Autonomous communication, while integral to labour struggles writ large, has special importance to workers in non-standard employment situations: workers who are isolated from each other as a result of the disaggregation of the spaces of labour and time of production require coming together and sharing experiences as a condition of possibility of solidarity; to the extent that nonstandard workers have tended to lie outside of organized labour's traditional stronghold, their needs, conditions, and desires may be excluded from representation by the unions with greatest voice in the corridors of power; nonstandard workers experience is occluded by powerful discourses of 'flexibility,' 'free agency,' and 'the creative class'; and to all of these points can be added that the fact that newspapers' commitment to labour reporting has been steadily eroding.

[2] *Précarité* has been a part of the vocabulary of the left since the 1980s in France, where it has been bound up with the struggles of the unemployed and the *sans-papier* and the rebellion of the *intermittents du spectacle* that will be considered in more detail in the next chapter (see Cosse 2008).

[3] Referring to the Barcelona event, Raunig (2007) spoke of a "foretaste of a new social composition." Keenly aware of the fragility of this assemblage, Raunig would nonetheless catch a glimpse of the complementarity between this precarious composition and the "multitude" concept "in the potentiality that its singularities concatenate into the precariat in all the heterogeneity and autonomy of the struggles."

[4] See the Flickr euromayday pool: http://www.flickr.com/groups/euromayday/.

Chapter 5

Experiments in Union Renewal and
Precarious Immaterial Workforces

The trade-union movement, once again, needs new ideas
for the needs of new workers, new occupations, new forms
of work organization, new employment relationships.
(Jordan cited in Munck 2002, 192)

Union Crisis

If the benchmark is, say, 1886, when tens of thousands of workers marched through downtown Chicago on May Day to support the introduction of an eight-hour working day, or, if it is the New Deal years, when labour pressured capital into a social contract that significantly redistributed wealth in favour of wage-earners, then, at the start of the 21st century, the labour movement appears dramatically weakened. Indeed, the assessment that in the global North trade unions currently "are in a crisis of historic proportions" (Chaison 2006, 429) is a commonplace in labour studies (Silver 2003, 1). The blow that has been dealt to labour is documented in the statistics on steadily declining unionization levels across most OECD economies over the past four decades. To cite just a handful of figures from recent data on trade union density compiled by the OECD (2009), in Australia, the proportion of the total workforce that is unionized plummeted from a high of 48.2% in 1964 to a low of 18.5% in 2007; in Canada, from 36.8% in 1982 to 27.4% in 2007; in Italy, from 50.5% in 1976 to 33.3% in 2007; in Japan, from 35.5% in 1964 to 18.3% in 2007; in the United Kingdom, from 51.8% in 1978 to 28% in 2007; and, in the US, from 30.9% in 1960 to 11.6% in 2007. And so on.

The shedding of union members at these rates has been attributed to a myriad of political, economic, social, and technological factors. Socialist economist Michael D. Yates (2009) enumerates some of the debated explanations for the declining fortunes of organized labour. Although Yates' geopolitical referent is the US, his schematic points arguably plot more widely (c.f. Munck 2002; Silver 2003). Among the "external forces" driving the diminishing presence of unions, Yates flags such claims as: the past three decades have witnessed a paradigmatic economic transition in which service-oriented industries are supplanting the manufacturing industries in which unions have tended to be better represented historically (Yates 2009, 191); capital, rendered increasingly mobile through free-trade agreements and electronic communication networks, can more easily

evade and undermine union power by moving to a friendlier far-flung locale (ibid., 192); workers, increasingly empowered in the workplace and in the marketplace, have a reduced need for the type of support and services that unions have traditionally provided (ibid., 191); the "harsh legal climate" in which unions operate stacks the odds against workers seeking to establish themselves as a bargaining unit (ibid., 193); and the neoliberal "anti-union 'corporate agenda'" has made collective organizing practically, and ideologically, difficult (ibid., 194).

In terms of "internal forces" factoring into the downward spiral in union membership, Yates signals to the disenchanting political effects of centralized, bureaucratic union structures (ibid., 196); the trend towards a "'servicing model' of unionism" in which "almost no attention" is put "to organizing the unorganized" (ibid., 197, citing Moody); the emphasis in collective bargaining on real-wage and social-wage type gains which, while undeniably important, can sideline the potentially significant appeal of unionizing as a means for workers to increase the control that they have over their work on a daily basis (ibid., 197); and the reluctance on the part of organized labour to consistently articulate, explore, and advance a transformative, compelling "vision of a better society," a continuing effect, perhaps, of the purging of radicals from the union movement in the Cold War years, and of the ongoing alliance between segments of organized labour and of constituted political powers (ibid., 198). To this list of internal forces behind the crisis of unionism must be added the criticism that "systemic racism" both within and without the labour movement has contributed to the "lower unionization rates of workers of colour compared to white workers" (Das Gupta 2006, 319). There is, moreover, the difficulty that unions have evidently had in terms of making inroads into the youth demographic; in the US, for example, young people aged sixteen to twenty-four accounted for less than five percent of the total unionized workforce in 2009 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010).

Adding to this list of challenges, labour researchers John Anderson, James Beaton, and Kate Laxer (2006, 316) contend that "[t]he fundamental challenge facing unions is to adapt their organizing strategies to deal with the realities of the growing number of workers in precarious employment." Several labour scholars suggest, however, that unions are not as well equipped to meet this challenge as they might be. Union coverage tends to correlate with improved job security, income, social wages, control over the work process, and equity policies in the workplace (Cranford et al. 2006, 355; Yates 2009, 31-46). It stands to reason that there is a strong incentive for a convergence of labour unions and nonstandard workers—but the relationship between the two is not straightforward. In the 20th century, organized labour amassed a core base around full-time waged-workers concentrated in large-scale industry, and, later, among salaried workers in the public sector—"our traditional heartlands," as one British unionist put it

(Morgan cited in Munck 2002). The labour movement has thus tended to find its stronghold among workforces that are closest to the standard employment relationship. In the words of Dimitris Papadopoulos et al. (2008, 245): "Not all parts of the working class are represented in the trade unions."

Despite the growth of nonstandard work, "most unions," argues Tania Das Gupta (2006, 332), "still function on the model of a traditional workplace and a standard worker who works 9 to 5 and is white, male, and English-speaking." Moreover, it has been suggested that in the Canadian context, for example, unions tend to devote the greatest supply of their often-limited organizing resources to prospective members who are closest to their 'heartlands' (Anderson et al. 2006, 316; Das Gupta 2006, 333). The marginalization of nonstandard workers from union representation is also attributable to "the dominant model of collective bargaining," which, as Cynthia J. Cranford et al. (2006, 375) write, presumes "a standard job in a single worksite," and, as a result, excludes nonstandard workers with a high degree of job mobility, such as freelancers, temporary workers, short-term contractors, or the self-employed. The spread of nonstandard work arrangements under post-Fordism means that established labour movements are often faced with a disaggregation of both the spaces of work and types of worker to which they are accustomed. Due to the process of "'flexibilization' in particular," says political economist Ronaldo Munck (2002, 190), "unions at the start of the twenty-first century are facing a different reality…"

It would be a mistake, however, to assume cut-and-dried distinctions between the union movement and precarious labour—both within and beyond immaterial production milieus. From the construction trades to the Hollywood crafts, unions are not without historical experience in representing the interests and raising the collective voice of workers who are mobile and fragmented from each other. There are, furthermore, clear examples of unions responding to the challenge of mobilizing workforces in occupations where precarious employment is widespread. With more than two million members, the Service Employees International Union is the fastest growing union in North America, and it represents and organizes workers in sectors such as child care, janitorial, garment manufacture, and security that are typically marked by low-wages, part-time employment, and by a highly gendered and racialized workforce composition. And in the European Union, there are signs that trade unions are "[extending] their representation to new groups of workers which are formally self-employed…" (Pedersini and Coletto 2010, 39). In Italy, the rank-and-file union Cobas has a track record of organizing among precarious workers (Fumagalli 2009a), and, in Greece, unions have launched influential arbitration cases against "bogus self-employment" (Pedersini and Coletto 2010, 46) or the misclassification of employees as contractors. In short, precarious workers are entering into varying articulations with union organizations.

In the communication and cultural sectors, too, there is evidence of unions that may predominately represent a standard workforce but have shown solidarity with the more precarious workers in their midst. For example, the Canadian Media Guild (CMG), an independent local of the Communication Workers of America (CWA), negotiated a contract with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) guaranteeing freelancers the same rate of pay as full-time counterparts performing similar work (Canadian Media Guild 2010). The CMG has also fought against casualization at the CBC. In a 2005 lockout, the CWA-supported guild members crushed managerial hopes to offset government-imposed budget cuts by flexibilizing the CBC workforce writ large. Thanks to the combined strength of the CMG, its international allies, and its public supporters, the "management at CBC went from an initial proposal to open all jobs at the public broadcaster to temporary contract status to accepting that fewer than one in 10 would have that status" (Mosco and McKercher 2006, 742). In another example involving the CWA, the 700,000-member-strong union struck a bargaining agreement in 2008 with the US telecommunications company Verizon Communications Inc., stipulating that 1200 temporary positions would be converted to full-time (CWA 2008).

Another instance of union solidarity with precarious workers was on display in an eighty-six day strike in 2009 at the Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation (Lefebvre 2010). Museum workers represented by the Public Service Alliance of Canada walked out in a dispute in which the decisive issue was the insecure employment conditions of nonstandard staff (PSAC Local 70396 Executive Officers 2009). Virtually all of the fifty-odd guides at the Museum of Civilization and the War Museum were in non-permanent positions, and experienced both chronic uncertainty about contract renewal and recurrent barriers to advancement (Lareau 2009). Highlighting that women comprised the vast majority of the temporary museum workforce, the Ad Hoc Coalition for Women's Equality and Human Rights (2009) lent their support to the striking museum staff through a solidarity march and a widely circulated press release. The Ad Hoc Coalition emphasized the wider social and political relevance of this labour conflict, citing both the deeply gendered distribution of employment insecurity and the increasingly common federal government practice of contracting out. The strike concluded with what was considered a successful new bargaining agreement, which featured, among other gains, enhanced parental leave benefits, new protections against casualization, improved job security for temporary workers, and the creation of new full-time posts (Lefebvre 2010; PSAC 2009).

Fighting to protect permanent positions is a vital element of a union strategy to mitigate precarity. By itself, however, this is an insufficient response to flexploitation, for at least three overlapping reasons. First, nonstandard employment is de facto "industry standard" in a number of occupations and sectors, including many of those associated

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with the expanding creative industries (Horowitz et al. 2005, 3). Second, a union strategy that exclusively focuses on standard employment would reinforce the marginalization of those workers who remain in precarious employment (Papadopoulos et al. 2008, 245). Third, a labour-politic that is organized around the standard employment norm runs the risk of neglecting the needs (e.g., access to unemployment insurance) or disregarding the desires (e.g., lack of desire to return to a lifelong, full-time permanent job) that may be specific to the precariat. It is for these and other reasons that nonstandard workforces have in recent years been responding to the particular conditions of precarious employment that they face through the creation of new institutions to variously articulate their concerns, organize their struggles, develop their capacities, meet their needs, and assert their demands (see Cranford et al. 2006; Warskett 2007).

This chapter takes a closer look at just three collective organizations formed by precarious immaterial workforces and their allies. The first example is WashTech, or the Washington Alliance of Technology Workers. Based in Washington State, WashTech is a union affiliate of the CWA with about 1500 members. It was initiated at the end of the 1990s by information-technology staff at Microsoft who had been hired out to the software giant via temporary employment agencies. WashTech has evolved into an important voice in the US debate around high-tech offshore outsourcing. The second example is Freelancers Union. Founded in the early 2000s and based in New York City, Freelancers Union is a rapidly growing membership organization serving what the union calls 'the independent workforce,' particularly, but not exclusively, in the creative industries. Freelancers Union provides services to members and presses for policy change in the name of putting nonstandard workers on a more even footing with their standard counterparts from a safety-net perspective. The third example is *Coordination des intermittents et précarias d'Ile de France* (CIP-IDF), an autonomous labour organization started by contract-based media workers and live-performance workers and other precarious workers and activists in 2003 in response to cutbacks made by the French government to the unique unemployment benefit system available to the flexible workforce in media and cultural industries.

In focusing in this chapter upon collective associations of workforces engaged in immaterial production at the relatively privileged end of the value chain, I do not mean to suggest that the plight of these strata of labour are of greater significance than other, more precarious groups of workers. On the contrary, I hope to offer a few glimpses of how, as flexible labour management strategies climb up the occupational hierarchy (Ross 2008), those affected are responding through collective activity. Moreover, these examples counter the assumptions—not entirely off the mark, of course—that the "independent-mindedness" of "autonomous contract workers" in creative occupations (Haiven 2006, 89) and that "'new' workers" in emerging industries (Munck 2002, 186) are averse to

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unionism. Rather than a comprehensive account, the pages that follow provide snapshots of three initiatives indicating some of the varied responses by nonstandard workers to their precarization. These are, at a broader level, examples of how precarious immaterial workforces are searching for new organizational models fit to the age of flexploitation. And while the workers' organizations that are touched on in this chapter are not without their limitations, they may nonetheless be viewed, against a backdrop of 'union crisis,' as promising experiments in a wider laboratory of "union renewal" (see Haiven 2006), a process in which media, IT, and cultural workers are playing an important role.

WashTech

Investigating the organizational culture of the new media workplace at the height of the dot.com boom, Andrew Ross (2003) identified a "no collar" sentiment among a digital labour force whose members appeared to be convinced that hierarchy in the workplace was being flattened by self-managed teams, funky workspaces, and other embellishments characteristic of what Ross termed "the industrialization of bohemia." At the Redmond, Washington headquarters of digital capitalism's most famous company, Microsoft, the persistence of rank was, however, readily visible—not in the colour of the collar, but of the badge: blue for standard workers, orange for nonstandard (Wilson and Blain 2001, 41). In the late 1990s, more than a third of Microsoft staffers was a temporary worker hired on contract via a third-party employment agency; many of these workers were on short-term contracts that had been renewed so regularly that they were known as "permatemps" (ibid., 42).

Despite what that label might suggest these workers were not peripheral to Microsoft's business. Many had "made key contributions while performing core functions," potentially over "several years" of employment (ibid., 41). Excluded from the healthcare packages, pension programs, employee discounts, stock options and other perks that were extended to full-timers, the orange-badges occupied the lower rung of what permatemps called Microsoft's "workforce caste system" (ibid.). While this dual labour-market strategy brought obvious cost-savings to Microsoft, this differential treatment also stoked the discontent that eventually took organizational form in the Washington Alliance of Technology Workers or WashTech. Examined by Enda Brophy (2006) as a grassroots response to "labour precarity," WashTech is, for sympathetic commentators, a promising sign of the labour movement grabbing a toehold in the typically "union-averse constituency" of "white-collar" private-sector professionals (Sirota 2008). The WashTech "experiment," write Vincent Mosco and Catherine McKercher (2008, 168), is "a hybrid of traditional unionism, information clearing house, and social activism."

In terms of traditional unionism, the Microsoft permatemps who initiated the WashTech organizing process understood that the concerns which drove earlier generations of industrial workers to organize collectively—wages, benefits, job security, and generally having a say in the terms and conditions of their employment—remain relevant to a post-industrial workforce (Wilson and Blain 2001, 36). The need to consolidate the voice and defend the interests of information-technology workers was driven home in 1997 when the State of Washington capitulated to a corporate lobby and agreed to "[exempt] high-tech companies from having to pay temps time-and-a-half for overtime" (Sirota 2008). Backed by a Democratic governor, and assented to by local corporatist unions, the passing of this legislation, at the request digital capital, incensed local tech workers and hastened the formation of WashTech as a non-partisan union (ibid.). After preliminary collaboration with local labour organizations, WashTech agreed in 1998 to affiliate with the CWA (Mosco and McKercher 2008, 167). While this partnership with the 700,000 member-strong CWA confirms that established unions in the information and communication sector are willing to support the organizing of nonstandard workers, WashTech remains a decidedly independent local.

As noted earlier, flexible labour management techniques present no shortage of obstacles to workplace-based union formation. Preliminary efforts to organize permatemps at Microsoft confronted what David Sirota (2008) called "Dilbert's Purgatory": Microsoft claimed it was not the legal employer—the staffing agency was; and then the multiple agencies to whom Microsoft dispersed the contractors asserted that the permatemps did not constitute a legitimate bargaining unit according to federal regulations. On top of this challenge, the steady churn of contingent labourers tends to conflict with the amount of time that a labour organizing process—from building trust among prospective members to electing a union, negotiating an agreement, and voting on it—typically requires (Wilson and Blain 2001, 52).

Challenges such as these bring labour scholars Richard B. Freeman and Joel Rogers (2002) to urge unions to adapt their strategies to flexible labour conditions. Doing so, they suggest, requires that organized labour widen its repertoire beyond a view of union certification and collective bargaining as exclusive objectives of organizing. Freeman and Rogers (2002, 30-31) cite WashTech as one example of an alternative model of worker organization, one that these authors term "open source unionism." A feature of the latter is a concept of membership that is not limited to workers with "majority representation" at a worksite (ibid., 34). Freeman and Rogers' proposition is that a union such as WashTech could count only a fraction of Microsoft's total workforce among its membership—but nonetheless it may be able to expand the labour movement by, for example, making inroads into unorganized sectors, and, it may be able to exert pressure that might lead to meaningful improvements in working conditions.

WashTech was not, however, the first collective contest surrounding the plight of the Microsoft permatemps. The union arose amid a protracted class-action suit (*Vizcaino v. Microsoft Corp.*) against the software giant for misclassifying thousands of full-time staff as independent contractors, thus denying the plaintiffs the benefits received by permanent employees. Along with this legal challenge, the launch of WashTech, its attempt to organize a Microsoft project team into a bargaining unit, and its picketing outside corporate headquarters were among the resistances that in the late nineties had made it increasingly clear that, although labour flexibilization had reduced Microsoft's indirect employment costs, it simultaneously "created new vulnerabilities for the company" (Brophy 2006, 627). The seriousness with which Microsoft took its mounting opposition was revealed in a leaked management memo describing the temps as "ripe for unionization" (cited in ibid.). Indeed, according to WashTech activists Gretchen Wilson and Mike Blain (2001, 42), it was in reaction to the lawsuit and the union's interventions that Microsoft "significantly restructured its workforce" at the end of the nineties, converting "several thousand long-term contract jobs" to full-time positions. Microsoft also allowed contractors to work with a staffing company of their own choosing, and pressured the employment agencies to enhance the benefits packages available to the temporary workers (Mosco and McKercher 2008, 168).

Although these struggles helped to raise the visibility and reduce the precarity of many permatemps, Microsoft did not halt its practice of temporary hiring. Management instead refined its technique, reasserting its temporal control over labour through a loophole that threatened to make its nonstandard workforce still more precarious: when in 1999 US federal courts ruled that permatemps were entitled to parity with full-time staff on select benefits, "Microsoft retaliated by instituting 100-day leaves between work projects for contractors assigned to the company for more than 364 days" (Rodino-Colocino 2007, 213). If this period of imposed unemployment could be expected to make it that much more difficult to create lasting relations of solidarity among the temps, the success of the contractors' court-room strategy for seeking economic justice also brought about its own problems. There was worry among some WashTech activists that the class-action suit—in which the denial of lucrative stock options to more than 8,000 temps was a key issue—"ultimately hurt organizing efforts at Microsoft because people were pacified by the belief that they would get a big payout from the settlement" (Nachtigal 2005).

In the ten years or so since the first stirrings of permatemp struggle, WashTech has gone on to build a dues-paying membership of about 1,500 as of 2007 (Sirota 2008). More than one thousand of these are AT&T call centre workers for whom the union became the collective bargaining agent in 2005 (ibid.). In terms of its approach to unionization drives, WashTech (2010) insists that the process begin with the workers

themselves, in particular, with a collective definition of the issues that matter most to them and the goals that they hope to achieve through collective organization. As an open-source union, WashTech also has an "at large" membership of about 400 who are not covered by a bargaining agreement brokered by WashTech, but pay monthly dues to support the union (Sirota 2008). Many, but not all, of these members are Microsoft temps in technical support or technical writing (Brophy 2006, 627). Accommodating to the mobility of the workforce it seeks to represent, a member maintains her or his union membership even as she or he they change employer. Finally, WashTech's open membership model holds out the potential that, as Brophy writes, the dispersed "individual members who join can operate as seeds within Microsoft or other companies, theoretically acting as the forward edge of a movement to organize high tech" (ibid., 626).

WashTech also serves its members by functioning as an information clearing house (Mosco and McKercher 2008, 168). It is not surprising that WashTech, a union formed by and for IT workers, has leveraged the Internet. The union runs a listserv with 17,000 subscribers to whom it distributes a regular newsletter. The WashTech web site acts as a media resource for tech workers, featuring news items, reports, and blog posts on IT labour market conditions, policy issues, and workplace organizing. Displaying the union's public-relations savvy, WashTech posted to its web site (and forwarded to the press) a leaked copy of a corporate presentation by a Microsoft executive encouraging managers to relocate development work to India, where, in the blunt arithmetic of the executive, Microsoft would get "2 heads for the price of 1" (cited in Rodino-Colocino 2007, 216). Increasingly, WashTech has come to focus on the issue of the offshore outsourcing of high-tech jobs. It moved in this direction when Amazon.com and Microsoft, two Washington employers at which the union had organizing efforts underway, announced plans to transfer jobs to the Subcontinent. The union's efforts helped to make outsourcing a high-profile issue in the US in the early 2000s, and WashTech representatives have established themselves as a source in US press coverage of outsourcing issues. To spotlight the loss of American jobs to outsourcing, in 2004 WashTech initiated Offshore Tracker, a web-based project documenting cases of US tech jobs moving offshore, and tallying the total jobs lost. While that project seems to have been short-lived, WashTech' shift in focus from precarious labour to a staunch "anti-offshoring position" (ibid., 217) in part reflects a shift in the post-bubble IT labour market: "the militancy of the contractors has died down, as the labor market has gotten more difficult," reports WashTech President Marcus Courtney (cited in Brophy 2006, 632). Yet, as noted in chapter three, outsourcing remains an issue of precarity, as it is fundamentally about job security, which will increasingly be determined on a global scale of capital operations.

In terms of social activism, WashTech has carried out legislative advocacy on a range of issues related to precarity. It entered a struggle over meaning in regard to so-called free agency when it supported a study of the Washington State IT labour market so to dispel mistaken assumptions about the "elite" high-tech workforce by illuminating a twenty-percent-plus "wage gap" between temporary and permanent staff (Rodino-Colocino 2007, 212-213). It has participated in campaigns to introduce stricter regulations in the state of Washington against the misclassification of temporary workers and to pressure the federal government to investigate the job-loss consequences of offshore outsourcing. WashTech and the CWA have also lobbied against the expansion of the H1-B visa program (see chapter three). While this temporary immigration program is presented as a means for American business to recruit the best and the brightest the world over, the unions argue that US employers utilize the H1-B visa as a mechanism to access cheaper, and more disciplined, labour power, due to the "more precarious conditions" that visa-permit holders work under (ibid., 214). The thornier issues this raises with regard to exacerbating divisions within the IT workforce on lines of nation and race are discussed in more detail in chapter three.

Michelle Rodino-Colocino (2007, 210) describes WashTech as "a leading organizer of workers whose labor has been made spatio-temporally mobile through temporary contracts and offshore outsourcing." Despite its trailblazing role, Rodino-Colocino identifies daunting challenges facing the WashTech project to unionize IT workers. One obstacle is the disciplining effect of precarious labour control mechanisms themselves: "Contingent contracts and the threat of offshoring," she writes, "make IT employees feel less secure and fear reprisal" (ibid., 218). Another formidable barrier is the "anti-union sentiment" among IT professionals (ibid., 219). As WashTech President Marcus Courtney reports: "Many people in these industries say, 'I hate unions' just on principle" (cited in Sirota 2008). According to one estimate, a slim band of "2 to 5.5 percent of high-tech workers are unionized" in the United States (Sirota 2008). The anti-union mindset has been attributed to the prevalence in IT circles of an ethos of "libertarianism," an ethos which can swing toward grassroots activism, open-source politics, or the Democratic Party—or just the same—toward a free-market credo, a Republican vote, or the "individualistic, pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps principles" of enterprise (Rodino-Colocino 2007, 219). Still another difficulty arises from the tendency for offshore outsourcing to provoke jingoistic responses which, along with the depiction of the IT worker as a wholly singular figure, suggests Rodino-Colocino, "obscures commonalities" and foments division between domestic and foreign labour as subjects of capitalist exploitation (ibid., 218). WashTech is, finally, challenged by its own precarious fiscal state. Presently unable to sustain itself based on its own limited dues-paying membership, the union is dependent on the financial support of the CWA (ibid.,

217-218). This issue of economic self-sufficiency is at the forefront of the next union experiment I want to introduce, Freelancers Union, which, like WashTech, is responding to the precarization that arises from the standard/nonstandard employment dichotomy.

Freelancers Union

It was a risky move for workers with little job security. On December 10, 2007, about two hundred freelancers at MTV Networks walked off their non-unionized jobs, and started a picket outside the office of the youth-culture icon's parent corporation, Viacom Inc., in New York City's Times Square, a metropolitan centre of media capital. Some of the protesters had been freelancing at MTV for so long that they were known as "permalancers" (Stelter 2007). Sparking the strike was the announcement that Viacom, one of the largest media conglomerates on the planet, would cut back the benefits package available to the company's nonstandard workers, many of whom were content producers in their twenties and thirties. The changes on the table included a reduction in paid vacation, the elimination of a 401(k) program (a US employer-supported retirement savings plan), and the adoption of an alternate health insurance package that would require freelancers to restart their probationary clock (ibid., 2007). Brought to wider public attention through a post to the media industry gossip blog gawker.com titled "The Viacom Permalance Slave System," information about MTV Network's plans were callously relayed to the permalancers when they went to pick up their invitations to the company's seasonal holiday party (Gawker 2007).

Even prior to the announced amendments, however, the permalancers' benefits were lower than those extended to their full-time colleagues. "I've worked here every day for three years," said one demonstrator: "They just call us freelancers in order to bar us from getting the same benefits as employees" (Yonda cited in Stelter 2007). While this raises the controversial issue of employers misclassifying full-time workers as independent contractors so to trim their indirect labour costs, Viacom could not confirm its exact permalancer count—it fluctuates by nature; some MTV workers estimated, however, that in some departments more than half the staff is freelance (Kamenetz 2007; Stelter 2007). At the picket, the permalancers shouted out their grievances: "We care about dental. We care about health care. We care about our 401(k)s" (cited in Stelter 2007). Discontented staff arrived at the Viacom holiday party sporting shirts emblazoned "permalancers get cancer too" (Kamenetz 2007). Joined in solidarity by local craft and trade unions (see Rosati 2010), the MTV picket attracted considerable media attention, from *The New York Times* to the blogosphere.

Viacom's initial reaction to the "largely unorganized" demonstration was defensive (Stelter 2007). The company claimed that the pared-down perks remained

"competitive within the industry," and that full-time staff was not exempt from some of the changes (ibid.). Quit grumbling, in other words, because everyone is leveling downward. Following a couple more days of protest, MTV Networks, having tested how far its media flexworkers would bend, ceded: it reinstated the 401(k) program, prolonged access to the existing healthcare plan, retracted the work-hour eligibility criteria for the new medical plan, and committed to 'evaluating' the possibility of converting some temporary positions to full-time (Chan 2007).

Doubtless emboldened by the high-profile Writers' Strike (Writers' Guild of America) with which it coincided, this self-organized insurgency again shows that nonstandard immaterial workers are fully capable of fighting back in order to defend what protections they have against precarity. Industry insiders suggested, however, that this is unlikely to be the last of the media mogul's effort to roll back its contribution to its workers' reproduction needs: Viacom, subject to the discipline of financial markets, must "prove to Wall Street that the company is managing costs" (Hayes 2007). This prospect, added to the fact that most freelancers are, by definition, without employer-supported benefits, underscores the need for nonstandard workers to act collectively to improve their employment conditions.

Emerging from the same media labour milieu that spawned the MTV revolt, the Freelancers Union is a non-profit membership organization based in Brooklyn, New York. While it grew out of other organizations that have been active since the mid-nineties, the Freelancers Union was officially launched in 2003 by union organizer and former labour lawyer Sara Horowitz (*The Economist* 2006). "Working for the radical notion of fairness" is a tagline of the Freelancers Union, a reference to the various ways in which nonstandard workers are at a security disadvantage relative to their counterparts in traditional employment relationships. As of 2010 the Freelancers Union has over 130,000 members nationally, most of them in New York (Khan 2009). Building its membership base by more than 85% since 2008 (ibid.), the Freelancers Union is fast becoming one of the largest workers' organizations in New York (*The Economist* 2006), and it is expanding its presence in California.

Freelancers Union refers to its constituency as the 'independent workforce.' This umbrella covers a vast and varied group whose single point of commonality is an employment status that deviates from the standard employment model. About thirty percent of New York City's labour force is estimated to be an independent worker (Dunham 2003), and a significant number of these sell their labour power in the city's signature immaterial industries in occupational roles spanning from freelance copywriter to itinerant performer, contract new-media developer, and self-employed event planner (Horowitz et al. 2005, 2006a). Describing itself as "a federation of the unaffiliated," Freelancers Union has a membership that ranges from part-timers to independent

contractors, but the union reports that self-identified "creative workers are the fastest growing segment of its membership" (Horowitz et al. 2006b, 6).

Notably, Freelancers Union was not initiated to fight for the rehabilitation of standard work. It was, on the contrary, borne from the recognition that the destandardization of employment and the flexible reorganization of work are inexorable tendencies in the contemporary labour economy (Coy et al. 2010). The union acknowledges, moreover, that nonstandard work is the working standard in many of the occupations and sectors associated with the creative economy (Horowitz et al. 2005, 3). Not merely accommodating to structural trends in the labour market, however, Freelancers Union's discourse on independent work is unique in the way that it respects and affirms the existential rewards that at least a segment of the independent workforce finds in nonstandard work arrangements. Basing its claims on the results of a 2005 online survey of 2,800 independent workers in the New York City area, Freelancers Union concludes: "The greatest percentage of freelancers in New York work independently because they want to," express "dissatisfaction with traditional work," and "do not measure success merely in dollars and cents, but rather in control over their time and their work" (Horowitz et al. 2005, 3, 4, 8).

Not surprisingly, however, the same survey research found that independent workers resent the precarity that typically accompanies their allegedly atypical employment. Germinating during a research period that Horowitz spent at Harvard University, the argument underlying the Freelancers Union is that the vulnerability experienced by the independent workforce arises from a mismatch between its employment status and the established system of social protections and labour regulations, which, in the US context as elsewhere in the core Fordist economies, have been designed to a significant extent around the standard employment relationship (*The Economist* 2006; see also Vosko 2000). "Independent workers," the union contends, are generally on their "own to access services traditionally provided by employers and government," from unemployment insurance to health coverage (Freelancers Union 2010). The mission of the Freelancers Union is thus to improve the fit between employment patterns and social protections in the hope of making independent work more workable.

The task of aggregating freelancers who are geographically dispersed, independently minded, and occupationally diverse is, to borrow an analogy from labour reporter Steven Greenhouse (2007), akin to "herding cats." Seeking a form of collective organization that might be adequate to a highly mobile workforce, the Freelancers Union exemplifies elements of "open source unionism" (Freeman and Rogers 2002) in that it departs from the model of "worksite-based unionism" (Cranford et al. 2006, 355), it exists independently of a single employer, and it does not engage in collective bargaining.

Freelancers Union pursues its goal of achieving greater parity between standard and nonstandard workers through a combination of policy research, advocacy work, and member services—but its rapid membership growth is largely attributable to the herding power of insurance.

Probing the challenges that independent workers face, surveys by Freelancers Union show that a lack of insurance coverage is a major source of stress among this labour force (Horowitz et al. 2005, 2006a, 2006b). Nearly forty percent of New York respondents said that in the past year they spent time without health insurance coverage, and eighty percent of the uninsured reported "avoiding" medical care when it was perhaps needed, thus potentially increasing both their future health risks and the costs tied to treatment (Horowitz et al. 2006a, n.p.). Freelancers Union again traces the source of this problem to a national system of social protection that was designed in the early decades of the 20th century around the model of a lifelong relationship with a single employer (Freelancers Union 2008). For example, over sixty percent of US workers had some degree of employer-sponsored health insurance coverage in 2004 (Horowitz et al. 2006b, 4). Independent workers, argues Freelancers Union, are penalized under this system, because most of them are unattached to one stable employer. The union suggests, moreover, that the majority of independents hover in a class midway position that increased their likelihood of being without coverage: their income is too low (or perhaps too erratic) to afford the costly monthly premiums charged by private insurance companies to individual buyers, but too high to qualify for state-funded Medicaid (Freelancers Union 2008, 1).

In response to the need among US independent workers for access to affordable medical insurance, Working Today, the organization from which Freelancers Union sprang, created the Portable Benefits Network (PBN) in 2001. Its premise was that workers who experience high levels of job mobility require a system in which benefits are attached to an individual rather to a job at a fixed employer (*The Economist* 2006). Like other labour unions or professional associations, PBN set out to imitate "the large employer model" (Freelancers Union 2008, 3), establishing itself as a market intermediary that combined the buying power of a pool of consumers so to be able to access group-rated benefits. It began selling discounted insurance packages to contractors working in New York City's new-media district, Silicon Alley, in the early 2000s (*The Economist* 2006; Knight 2002; Working Today 2001). Growing out of the success of the PBN experiment, the Freelancers Union now offers its members insurance coverage which, according to some reports, have in some cases halved the premiums members previously paid as isolated consumers buying insurance privately (Greenhouse 2007).

In 2008 Freelancers Union went a step further by launching its own private insurance firm. Created with the backing of charitable organizations such as Rockefeller

Foundation, the Freelancers Insurance Company is—in line with state regulations—a for-profit entity, though it remains a wholly owned subsidiary of the non-profit union (Freelancers Union 2009). The ambivalence of the enterprise is clear. On the one hand, the union's open support for a "market-based approach" (Freelancers Union 2008a, 3) reproduces the commodification of care and the privatization of welfare state functions. This stance has also put the union in tension with the admittedly uncertain plans by the Obama Administration to move towards a universal style healthcare system.

On the other hand, operating within the constraints of the US political economy, the Freelancers Union responds to and improves the material conditions of its members. Access to less expensive insurance, says one member, "plain and simple" enabled him to stay working how, and at what, he wants (cited in PBS 2009). Moreover, Freelancers Union positions its insurance subsidiary as a counter to the prevailing accumulation imperative in the medical insurance industry. Framing it as a social-economy enterprise whose goal is to provide affordable coverage rather than "maximize profit" (Freelancers Union 2010b), the union adds that Freelancers Insurance Company is partly financed by foundations that expect a two percent return as compared to the thirty-percent surplus that the union claims "private equity investors would likely require" (Freelancers Union 2009).

The socio-political weakness of the nonstandard labour force derives in no small part from the fragmentation characterizing it. The Freelancers Union's effort to counteract this fragmentation arguably begins with the discursive construction of 'the independent workforce' itself, marking it out symbolically, generating knowledge about its composition through research, and attempting to represent it as a coherent constituency at a political level. Moreover, the union's insurance services not only aggregate a disparate workforce for a private benefit, but also provide a basis for economic self-sufficiency, with its revenues parlayed into research, advocacy, and lobbying activities that are oriented toward policy reform to mitigate precarity.[1]

One example concerns unemployment insurance (Freelancers Union n.d.). The union learned from its surveys that one of the main sources of insecurity among freelancers is the "unstable income" associated with a project-to-project rhythm of paid work (Horowitz et al. 2005, 5). Generally speaking, however, independent workers do not have access to the income protection mechanisms that, however nominal, are available to standard workers who experience a disruption in their employment. With its eligibility criteria predominantly structured around the norm of standard employment, the self-employed, misclassified workers, temporary and part-time workers are frequently excluded from unemployment insurance programs (Freelancers Union n.d.). Finding that a majority of independent workers it surveyed would be willing to pay into such a

system, Freelancers Union is developing a proposal for a federal unemployment insurance program customized for freelancers and other nonstandard workers (ibid.).

The union is also lobbying for the US Department of Labor to appoint a representative for independent workers who, the union contends, confront problems like that of "deadbeat clients," yet do not have access to the grievance process open to standard workers with unpaid wages (Freelancers Union 2009, 1). In addition to its efforts to work through legislative channels for policy change, Freelancers Union offers services that are intended to help its members better negotiate the workaday realities of precarious mobile labour, from disability coverage and retirement savings programs to networking events and discounts on co-working facilities that provide shared space and resources for mobile immaterial workers.

While it does not engage in collective bargaining at the individual workplace level, the Freelancers Union has asserted itself at a metropolitan scale. In a 2006 report *Creative Workers Count*, the union applauded the financial support that the New York City government has provided for arts and cultural institutions—but challenged city officials for failing "to view arts and culture support from a labor perspective as well" (Horowitz et al. 2006b, 2). In a bid to increase the public recognition and bargaining power of dispersed creative labour, the report emphasized that companies in the creative industries are drawn to the city to access its creative labour pool, and that these workers also make substantial indirect contributions to the urban economy through tourism, for example. The report also invokes the threat of creative worker flight: "If creative workers begin to leave New York as a result of persistent instability, the city could lose both its status as the creative capital and the economic contributions of the creative sector" (ibid., 2).

The voice of the Freelancers Union has evidently been heard at City Hall. Mayor Michael Bloomberg, speaking in 2009, pledged "to make New York City as freelance-friendly as possible" (cited in Engquist 2009). The Mayor's office has supported union policy initiatives such as its successful campaign to revise the city's Unincorporated Business Tax, which, the union argued, put self-employed workers at a disadvantage relative to standard workers by 'double-taxing' the income of the former as individuals and as corporations (Cooke and Goldman 2009). The city is also collaborating with the union on the preparation of the proposal for a national unemployment insurance program for independent workers, and the Mayor has committed to creating more co-working spaces for freelancers (Engquist 2009). Bloomberg's backing is, of course, strategic: the viability of the freelance life and viability of the creative economy in the metropolis he governs go hand in hand, and an increase in the number of independent workers in the city is expected to be one of the effects of the economic crisis (ibid.).

Freelancers Union has both possibilities and limitations as a critical response to flexploitation. It is a successful example of a workers' institution meeting one of the major challenges facing unions with regard to flexible labour, namely, to "find ways to represent the interests of workers who move in and out of employment" (Cranford et al. 2006, 356). As an open source union, membership to Freelancers Union is open to people who do not necessarily share a place of work but rather a way of working. The union has also shown that the disparateness of the independent workforce is not an insurmountable obstacle to collective organization. Media savvy, Freelancers Union is becoming an increasingly quoted voice in US press coverage around transformations in the world of work. It is not only raising the profile of nonstandard workers, but also problematizing the exclusionary effects of a social protection system that was stitched around the standard employment relationship. What's more, the organization has begun to explore and propose more inclusive policy alternatives, alternatives, which, potentially, would benefit nonstandard workers far beyond those in Freelancers Union's relatively privileged membership. At the most basic level, Freelancers Union is an example of workers acting collectively to address the problems that they confront.

Although there is a social-change orientation to Freelancers Union, it is highly circumscribed. No less than the neoliberal weekly *The Economist* (2006) finds value in Freelancers Union for its "customer-centric" approach and for abandoning the "traditional model of union confrontation." In addition to the absence of a politics of production (e.g., organizing around rates), it is also important to point out that, in the Freelancers Union model, despite its gains, still leaves labour, not capital, bearing the costs of flexibility. It is, perhaps, most accurate to read the Freelancers Union as a reformist project, one whose choice of tactics must be contextualized within the constraints on the contemporary US political economy. In an environment in which there is faint talk of another New Deal, Freelancers Union is likely to earn increasing attention in the years ahead for its efforts to help forge what it calls "the next social safety net" (Freelancers Union 2006a). Another way of putting this is that, from state policies it promotes to the member services it offers, the Freelancers Union may prove to be an experiment in the bottom-up design of a mode of social regulation appropriate to flexploitation in America.

Coordination des intermittents et précarias

In France, *intermittent du spectacle* is an official designation for temporary workers in the audiovisual industries and live-performance sectors. Inaugurated with the occupation of Théâtre National de la Colline in Paris, *intermittents* broke into rebellion on June 26, 2003 (Corsani 2007a). That day a reform agreement was signed to significantly reduce

the unemployment insurance benefits available to tens of thousands of *intermittents*. Their initial anger was directed in no small part towards the unions that ostensibly represented them in the negotiations that led to the reform. In accordance with government regulations, the agreement had been struck between representatives of a small group of union confederations and employers' associations, and was then summarily endorsed by the French government (Corsani 2007a). The unions that helped broker the agreement represented only a minority of workers in the relevant sectors, but nonetheless enjoyed the "legally representative" status that invested them with the authority to participate in the making of decisions whose outcome would potentially affect the livelihood of intermittent workers nationwide (Sinigaglia 2009, 3). Some signatory unions defended their assent to the reform by claiming that they rescued the benefit plan "from possible extinction" (Sauviat 2003). This instance of concessionary bargaining left many unionized *intermittents* with "a general feeling of betrayal"—*and* with "a new spirit of resistance" (Bodnar 2006, 684).

Maurizio Lazzarato (2004), a co-researcher close to the mobilization against the reform that ensued, describes the intermittent workers' response as one of "flight" and "creation": on the one hand, they exited the prevailing conventions of union negotiation, and, on the other, they experimented with alternative practices of collective dissent. The struggles of the *intermittents du spectacle* have a national specificity, historical depth, and political scope that far exceed the discussion in this section (see Bodnar 2006; Corsani and Lazzarato 2008). In what follows I want to zero in on just three overlapping points. The first concerns the form of organization that the *intermittents* adopted, namely, what French activists know as the "coordination" (Lazzarato 2004). The second point is the spirit of affinity that marked this labour insurgency, an ethos encapsulated in the movement's linguistic articulation "'intermittent' *and* 'precarious'" (Corsani 2007a, emphasis added). The third and final point relates to the social right to income security— *régime d'intermittence*—that these nonstandard media and cultural workers were fighting to defend. Around these three points rose in 2003 a wave of labour revolt that "reached unprecedented scale in this sector," and persisted into 2006 (Sinigaglia 2009, 3).

Before elaborating on these points, it is necessary to delineate the figure of the *intermittent du spectacle*. As the theorist and co-researcher Antonella Corsani (2007b, 49-51) explains, *intermittent du spectacle* is a legal category in the French Labour Code. It encompasses a broad range of artistic and technical occupations in the media and performance sectors, from classical musician to camera operator, backstage hand, circus performer, video editor, and much else besides. *Intermittent du spectacle* refers more specifically, however, to the nature of the employment relationship within which these workers' immaterial labour is performed. In French labour law, full-time indefinite employment is treated as the contractual "norm" (Sinigaglia 2009, 4). Recognizing that

the temporal organization of media and cultural work often precludes such permanence, *intermittent du spectacle* is a legal "exception" (Corsani 2007b, 50). Intermittent workers are classified as neither regular salaried employees nor self-employed individuals but rather as "employees of discontinuous employment" (ibid., 49): that is, nonstandard workers who are hired on temporary contract for a relatively short period of time, are likely to have a steady churn of employers, and are liable to receive a variable rate of pay from one contract to another (Corsani 2007a; Corsani 2007b, 50).

More unusual than the unstable employment rhythm of the *intermittents du spectacle* is the unemployment indemnity that has been available to this group of workers since the late 1960s (Corsani 2007b, 49-50). Financially supported by worker and employer contributions, *régime d'intermittence* is an unemployment insurance program carrying the promise that the model of work organization in media and cultural industries should not, in the words of Corsani, "be allowed to imply the precarisation of people's conditions of life" (ibid., 58). Intermittent workers thus have a social right to income continuity in light of the employment discontinuity to which they are systemically subject (ibid., 50). Providing these just-in-time workers with an income to bridge the gap between gigs, projects, or contracts, this income protection scheme ensures a degree of economic stability in an employment situation that would otherwise be marked by an erratic cash flow predicament.

As of the early 2000s, an intermittent worker would be eligible for the benefit if she or he had held contracts totaling 507 hours (or about three months consecutive employment) over the preceding twelve months; this in turn entitled them to draw the equivalent of one year of unemployment benefit (Staines 2004). The *intermittent du spectacle* thus constitutes a legislative "zone of exception where the 'hyper-flexibility' of employment [is] combined with a certain 'security' for the employee" (Corsani 2007b, 50). This system, says Corsani, not only "allowed for a relatively easy access to unemployment benefits" (ibid., 50), but also opened "zones of autonomy" in terms of what kind of paid work one takes on, and when (Corsani 2007a). Even if many intermittent workers were consistently anxious about attaining the threshold hours, independent arts workers outside France, as one European cultural policy analyst remarked, would almost certainly view a safety net of this sort as a "distant dream" (Staines 2004).

All the more reason, then, for the intermittent workers to fight back when the cuts were announced. Employers' associations had been pushing for reform for some time in order to stem a deepening deficit in the unemployment insurance fund. The debt was attributed to a growing claimant pool: the population of intermittent workers had doubled over the course of the 1990s to 150,000 (Corsani 2007a, 53). This growth derives from an admixture of economic, political, and subjective determinants, including the proliferation

of small-scale production firms whose labour management strategies are in line with dual-labour market logic (see Bodnar 2006, 680-682); the agenda of "the promotion of cultural work" in the 1980s and 1990s associated with French socialist governments in particular (Sinigaglia 2009, 3); and the "desire" to participate in the production of culture, rather than only its consumption, which drew a "huge influx of young people" into nonstandard cultural employment in this period (Corsani 2007a). If some American commentators were inclined to characterize the intermittence regime as a "ridiculously generous unemployment-insurance deal" (Gopnik 2003), critical analysts suggest that this labour provision could also be viewed as a cultural "subsidy" working significantly to the benefit of employers (Bodnar 2006, 681) to the extent that it "enables them to organise the sector so as to obtain major labour market flexibility and keep wages down" (Sauviat 2003).

Under the imperative of debt management, the goal of the insurance fund managers was to shrink the population of claimants. The 'social partners' in charge of the fund agreed to do this by tightening the eligibility criteria and by reducing the benefits period. An intermittent worker now would need to reach the requisite hours within ten months as opposed to one year; and, if they met this requirement, they would be entitled to eight months coverage rather than twelve months (Sauviat 2003). It was estimated that the stiffened regulations would shed thirty-five percent of the then current recipient pool (GlobalProject/CIP-IDF 2004). It was also anticipated that the revised qualification terms would harden the division between, on the one side, a leaner population of intermittent workers whose employment routine is already closest to that of a permanent job (i.e., a steady, reliable flow of contracts and thus more or less stably employed), and, on the other side, "an unspecified number of 'artists' who are not indemnified and who live in a state of even greater precarity" (Lazzarato 2007). Younger intermittent workers lacking well-developed networks would be hit especially hard by the new regulations (Sauviat 2003). By expelling thousands of *intermittents* from an insurance fund into which they had paid, by forcing the casual workers who remained outside the system to work more for less, and by weakening the regulatory device that granted this workforce a modicum of freedom to choose jobs offering more desirable content or more favourable conditions—the reform protocol would, in these and other ways, exacerbate precarization, and it was against this prospect that the intermittent workers resisted.

Based on a three-year ethnographic study of the mobilization that ensued, Jérémy Sinigaglia (2009) reports the locus of the contract workers' resistance was autonomous from established union structures, emanating in particular from a form of political organization that French activists know as "coordination." Continuous with a tradition of radicalism in the sixties that sought more participatory alternatives to the hierarchical structures and representative procedures associated with traditional left institutions such

as the political party or the bureaucratic trade union (ibid., 9), coordinations, as Lazzarato (2004) explains, were prominent in French struggles against neoliberalism in the 1990s, and were organized by care workers, educators, students, transport staff, and the unemployed. Lazzarato describes the coordination as a "multiplicity of committees, initiatives, forums for discussion and planning, political and union activists, a multiplicity of trades and professions, friendship networks, [and] 'cultural and artistic' affinities, which form and break up at different rates and with different aims" (ibid.). Launched on the heels of the announcement that their unemployment benefit program would be cut, the largest and most active of the intermittent workers' coordinations was that of the Paris-based *Coordination des intermittents et précarias d'Ile de France* (CIP-IDF).

CIP-IDF was the force behind many of the interventions marking a long summer of protest in 2003 after the reform agreement was signed. Swiftly, intermittent workers participated in diffuse actions with a theatricality and media savvy befitting their occupations: they launched strikes that forced the cancellation of prestigious arts festivals in the country; they occupied press offices; they won the support of celebrities who gave them a platform at press conferences; they swept in on a live television news broadcast to communicate their grievances directly to the French public; they blockaded a distribution depot delaying the delivery of film to the Cannes film festival—where one thousand riot police were on standby; they infiltrated movie theatres, plastic-wrapped the box offices, and declared screenings free for the day; they occupied the offices of the French Minister of Culture and employer associations…. (see *Intermittents du Spectacle* 2004). As Lazzarato (2004) put it at the time: "Deregulation of the labour market and social rights is being countered by a deregulation of conflict that is following the organization of power right into the communications networks, into the expression machines… something," he added, "those involved in the conventional union struggles ought not to ignore."

Coordination, says Lazzarato, encourages "the appropriation of political action by all" (ibid.). CIP-IDF was structured as a scalable network of "autonomous commissions," the focus of which ranged from media relations to graphics and video production, union relations, and policy development (Sinigaglia 2009, 10-11). While the "sovereign" body of the CIP-IDF was the "general assembly," individuals and collectives were more or less free to auto-initiate a commission or intervention. The flexible and participatory qualities of the coordination, Sinigaglia suggests, resonated with intermittent workers, in part, because it complemented their working methods (e.g., the self-organized troupe, the temporary project group). Sinigaglia also found that to survive in their informal labour market, *intermittents* created informal "networks of sociability" that in turn served as one of the "cornerstones of the movement" (ibid., 8).

Researchers have highlighted the political significance of the CIP-IDF name, in particular, the articulation *intermittents et précaires*. According to Sinigaglia, the

inclusion of "*et précaires*" reflects the involvement in the founding of the CIP-IDF of a small group of political militants who supported the intermittent workers' struggle and brought to it activist experience in other conflicts around precarious work and the movement of the unemployed—conflicts they wanted to link to the intermittent workers' battle (ibid., 9, 11). Lazzarato (2004) adds that the introduction of the term *précaires* invited *intermittents* to view their labour in terms other than those prescribed either by professional identities (e.g., artist, technician) or by legal classifications (i.e., *intermittents du spectacle*). Viewing one's labour as precarious, Lazzarato suggests, also potentially opened the struggle of the *intermittents* to the participation of a broader group of workers and thus opened possibilities for the formation of new solidarities. At a broader level, Lazzarato would discern in *précaires* the potential for a post-identitarian composition: "the term 'precarious' denotes the point where categories, attributions and identities become blurred," he says, adding that "the word 'precarious' is sufficiently ambiguous and polysemous to open up to multiple situations" of labour, beyond those faced by workers with official status as *intermittents* (ibid.).

Corsani (2007a) argues that the conjunction "and precarious" helped the movement avert "the risks of corporatism and identitarian demands." In the French labour code, *l'intermittent du spectacle* is characterized as an "abnormal figure" (Corsani 2007b, 49). This worker is assigned a special social right to income continuity in the light of the peculiar labour market phenomena that are confronted in the media industry and live-performance sector. In this sense, one possible response to the reform of the intermittence unemployment system would be to frame the struggle in a logic of "'cultural exception' in the sense of a professional privilege" that requires protection (GlobalProject/CIP-IDF 2004). Other elements of the CIP-IDF emphasized that the *intermittents* are hardly alone in their exposure to precarious employment. When a group of young intermittent workers took over a live evening news broadcast, a woman, trembling with anger, read a prepared statement: "We know this is not a sectoral struggle. By demanding new social rights for those in discontinuous employment, we are opposed to the precarization of employment. What we defend, we defend for everybody" (*Intermittents du Spectacle* 2004). In this way, the *précaires* element of the coordination proposed another way to view the plight of the *intermittents*: "to understand the insurance of artistic precariousness as an example for all those precariously employed, thus inscribing one's own, initially relatively limited demands in the battle for social rights" (GlobalProject/CIP-IDF 2004).

Sinigaglia attributes the public visibility, wide rank-and-file participation, and endurance—months upon months of nearly daily interventions of some sort (14)—of the intermittent workers' struggle in no small part to the coordination's openness to "heterogeneity" (11). A diversity of tactics was brought into play. Here, Sinigaglia flags the CIP-IDF phrase "the inside" and "the outside," where the "inside" refers to a stance

heeding "the rules of the political game" (e.g., cooperating with the unions to challenge the reform on legal grounds), while the "outside" points to those participating in direct action (e.g., occupying the offices of the government agencies involved) (ibid., 12). Sinigaglia learned that protagonists came to appreciate that the pursuit of "both types of action" was a "strength of the movement" (ibid.). Specifically, the open participatory structure of the coordination allowed for the "multiplication of forms and venues of intervention" (13); as one intermittent worker remarked, "the best thing we invented was to do everything at once" (cited in ibid., 11). In addition, the coordination held together in one political composition potentially divergent understandings of what was at stake in the struggle. For example, if some *intermittents* saw the conflict exclusively in terms of opposition to the reform, others viewed the reform of the intermittent benefits as "only a concession among others on workers' rights (including the unemployed) and that the fight for that status should be embedded in a wider struggle to obtain new rights for *précaires* workers" (ibid., 11). Overall, says Lazzarato (2004), the experiment of the CIP-IDF was that it did not seek to achieve unity "at all costs," but accepted the risks of a necessarily "unstable … multiplicity."

More than direct action, the CIP-IDF described its struggle as an opportunity for "in-depth reflection about our professions" (GlobalProject/CIP-IDF 2004). The adequacy of employment time as a measure of productivity was one area of reflection. Drawing on an inquiry carried out with *intermittents*, Corsani (2007b, 49) reveals how some workers were problematizing the assumptions embedded in their claimant form. The form, complained one intermittent, asks, "Have you worked in the last month?" S/he suggests this be revised to: "'Did you have any employment?' Because I work all the time, and every now and then I am employed" (cited in ibid., 54). Auditioning, rehearsing, training, reading, grant writing, networking, volunteering, generally expanding one's knowledge and capacities, and, indeed, conceiving of new projects that might later mobilize other intermittent workers in paid employment: it is in light of these and other activities that Corsani (2007a) viewed the struggle of the *intermittents* as "a struggle to win recognition for a wealth created outside of time spent in employment." While the aforementioned activities are indirectly compensated by the regime of intermittence, Corsani raises questions about the justice of the program's calculus in terms of what can and cannot be declared as 'work' (i.e., the unpaid labour that goes into the production of culture). In this respect, one contract-based cultural worker contrasted the situation of the intermittent labour force to that of the scientific worker in a standard public-sector job: "a researcher in medicine, physics or literature is not paid per discovery, but for the duration of the research" (cited in Corsani 2007b, 54). For Corsani, what is at stake here is the legitimacy of the unemployment/employment binary as such, arguing that "[e]mployment,

conceptually and in real practice, does not cover the full nature of work. Activity exceeds employment…" (ibid.).

The intermittent workers' struggle, writes Sinigaglia (2009, 14), "ended with a defeat." The 2003 reform agreement that sparked the protest was with modest amendments ratified by the French government. And 2006 saw the approval of a new agreement that stiffened the eligibility criteria still further. Sinigaglia suggests that a combination of hopelessness, activist burnout, and severe precarization for several intermittent workers all contributed to the depletion of the resistance (ibid.). The CIP-IDF continues to be maintained, he reports, but by a small collective of activists essentially keeping alive "a structure that might be reactivated" in future (ibid.).

The movement of the *intermittents* nevertheless left its mark. The conflict achieved a high profile in French media, and attracted public attention to the problematic of *précarité* as an upshot of the neoliberal dismantling of social rights and the flexibilization of labour. In this sense, it is important to note that the mobilization of the *intermittents* was one of the inspirations for the French students who in spring 2006 initiated what would become a countrywide campaign of direct action and general strikes that ultimately forced the French government to repeal its First Employment Contract (CPE) bill (ibid., 13). The CPE was a contractual mechanism that would have vanquished job security for workers under the age of twenty-six, by allowing employers to dismiss young staff from their first full-time job without explanation—conceived by the government as a 'flexible' tool to encourage companies to hire young people in a country with a youth unemployment rate that at the time exceeded twenty percent (BBC 2006; see Vercellone 2007).

Despites its 'failure,' the intermittent workers conflict leaves lessons for future struggles against precarization: the coordination as a way to widen grassroots participation; the solidarity that is gained by rejecting a sectoral logic of struggle; and, perhaps above all, the example, however strained, of a social right for labour to be protected from the income discontinuity induced by a flexible labour regime. In this respect, the articulation for which the intermittents ought to be remembered is their slogan: "No culture without social rights" (GlobalProject/CIP-IDF 2004).

Union Renewal

In his 1990s *Information Age* trilogy, the sociologist Manuel Castells (1997, 354) spoke of how "the labour movement fades away as a major source of social cohesion and workers' representation," because of, among other reasons, the inability of unions to adjust to the "individualisation of work" in late 20th century flexible, information capitalism. Indeed, the individualizing logic of flexploitation throws up no shortage of

obstacles to a collective politics of labour, from the reported antipathy towards unions among IT contractors (Sirota 2008) to the legal designation of the self-employed as companies which typically precludes them from forming collective bargaining units (Warskett 2007). And, on the union side, as noted at the start of this chapter, nonstandard workers are more likely to be without union representation (Cranford et al. 2006, 355); modern organized labour's "heartlands" have tended to be standard workers in industrial production and in the public sector (Morgan cited in Munck 2002). In light of these obstacles, initiatives like WashTech, Freelancers Union, and *Coordination des intermittents et précaires* are, despite their challenges and shortcomings, inspiring instances of contrary tendencies. Contra Castells, these and other experiments in collective organization show us that the quintessential individualized information-age worker—the IT permatemp, the freelance graphic designer, or the intermittent media operative—has the *potential* to help stoke the labour movement rather than close its curtain.

Commentary on the crisis of unionism has been matched by a countervailing discourse on "union renewal" (see Haiven 2006). Stated broadly, union renewal refers to the process through which unions "reorganise and recompose themselves to meet the problems of work and employment" (Fairbrother cited in Munck 2002, 190) within an environment in which the composition of capital and labour are continually transforming. Exploring ways of organizing the unorganized within newly expanding employment zones (Haiven 2006), challenging the model of "business unionism" by foregrounding a social-transformation agenda (Mosco and McKercher 2008, 151-179), and reworking the structures of unions themselves in the name of deepening their "participatory, inclusive and democratic" character (Schenk 2006, 336) are among the overlapping concerns associated with the notion of union renewal. What I want to suggest in conclusion is that precarity is one of the catalysts of union renewal today.

WashTech, Freelancers Union, and the CIP-IDF are not isolated experiments. In recent years, a number of nonstandard workers' organizations—some created autonomously, others offshoots of established unions—have been emerging in response to the precarization of immaterial labour. For example, in 2009, independent media workers officially launched the Canadian Freelance Union as a local of the Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers Union. Identifying plunging rates and diminishing intellectual-property rights as central points of contention, the union presents itself as a response to the "direct and sustained attack" on the independent communications workforce by "media owners" (Canadian Freelance Union 2010). In Denmark, one of the country's largest white-collar unions started an initiative called HK/Freelancer. Its goal is to organize workers in occupations that have proven susceptible to contracting out, especially "workers in IT, graphic design, and

administrative jobs" (Pedersini and Coletto 2010, 45). Reflecting the gendered nature of occupational precarity, the majority of HK/Freelancer's 2500 members are women who work in publishing and translation. And in Austria, the Union of Salaried Employees, Graphical Workers and Journalists has extended itself to non-salaried workers through the creation of work@flex, what the union calls an "interest community," to begin to address the particular concerns of "atypical workers" in the communication industries (ibid., 44). Union initiatives along these lines will need to assume a higher profile if the labour movement is to respond to and challenge post-Fordist capital's continuing drive to externalize its immaterial workforce.

Labour historian Beverly J. Silver (2003, 19) notes that, for Marx, "old forms of workers' bargaining power are undermined only to create new forms on a larger and more disruptive scale." The classic instance of this is the transition from the "craft worker" to the "mass worker" of large-scale industrial unionism (see Dyer-Witheford 1999, 72-76). If, however, the factory is seen as a bastion of "*associational power*" (Silver 2003, 19), at least potentially, then the flexible restructuring of work threatens to decompose that potential. Silver argues that Marx's perspective on class conflict and capitalist development is not so much teleological as it is attuned to the dynamism of capital-labour conflict, where it can be expected that as the organization of production is transformed, so, too, do "new agencies and sites of conflict along with new demands and forms of struggle" take shape (ibid.). It is in this context that we might situate the workers' organizations touched upon in this chapter. They show just a few of the ways in which precarious immaterial workforces and their allies are beginning to respond to some of the challenges that have been raised by the restructuring of work and the growth of nonstandard employment in spheres of immaterial production. They respond, more specifically, to one of the major themes in discussions of union renewal, namely, the need to devise structures and strategies that are more adequate to a fragmented, isolated, and mobile workforce (Cranford et al. 2006; Haiven 2006). They are, in short, preliminary experiments in reconstituting associational power among spatially dispersed and temporally disaggregated post-Fordist labour.

Organizational alternatives to worksite-based unionism are, then, one of the themes in and around union renewal. Here one concept that has come up is that of "occupational unionism," which perceives the continuing relevance in post-industrial times of a craft-like union approach in which mobile workers are organized according to skill-set or job-type rather than worksite (Cobble cited in Cranford et al. 2006, 357). This, it should be noted, is an approach in which the media and cultural industries have a well-established tradition. Cultural industries in Canada, the United States, and Western Europe are, for example, often underwritten by an array of guilds and unions devoted to the negotiation of minimum terms and conditions of employment for workers whose

contract or freelance labour is performed across a rotating cast of employers. Historically, film and television in particular have been highly unionized sectors in North America in which freelancers and other independent workers across a wide occupational spectrum are assembled on a project basis (Christopherson 2008, 160-165; Wasko 2003, 47-49)— bringing some media labour representatives to propose that unions in the motion picture and television industries provide a possible model for representing other workforces in the "new economy" that are marked by a high level of job mobility, a multiplicity of skills, and a diversity of income levels (Amman 2002).[2]

The experiments described in this chapter suggest other pathways for union renewal as well. These examples suggest that it is not so much a specific form of labour but a type of employment relationship (that tends to engender precarity) that is a potential basis of the formation of new solidarities and labour institutions. Here the Freelancers Union is a particularly strong instance of the galvanizing *potential* of the uneven distribution of social rights and security provisions around the standard/nonstandard employment dichotomy. And to the extent that diverse professional and occupational differentiations come together in some of these worker organizations, they are promising attempts to explore solidarities across difference. Here the CIP-IDF in particular, with its insistence that theirs "is not a sectoral struggle," bears an important lesson, conjuring up the importance of what has been called "community unionism," an ethos of "labour-oriented community organizing inclusive of the employed and the unemployed, and it is based on the realization that mitigating precarious employment requires developing a mass base and engaging a range of actors" (Cranford et al. 2006, 360).

These experiments in union renewal also have a relevance to populations beyond the specific, relatively privileged, groups of workers to which they are most closely linked. For example, when Freelancers Union develops a proposal for unemployment benefits that would cover the independent workforce, this potentially spills over to other nonstandard workers far beyond its own membership, such as temporary and contingent workers who almost certainly face the greatest income instability. The same is true when WashTech fights for protections against outsourcing or when the *intermittents* in the CIP-IDF insists that income protections against discontinuous employment ought to be extended to cover other groups of precarious workers. In these and other ways, the workers' organizations introduced in this chapter are floating proposals and raising questions that hold the promise to mitigate the precarity not only of their own members but of a much wider swathe of workers. And although precarious workers face legal and practical challenges in terms of engaging in collective bargaining with a single employer, the workers' organizations looked at in this chapter suggest that the terrain of conflict plays out increasingly at the level of the state. What is clear is that workers in media and cultural sectors, due to the established traditions of flexible work organization in these

areas, are an important actor among others in renewing not only labour politics but also and more broadly exploring new social safety nets.

This chapter has shown that the destandardization of employment, the flexible organization of work, and the disaggregation of the workforce have not rendered labour politics completely irrelevant, obsolete, or impossible. It has shown that immaterial workforces—specifically those in media, cultural, and information-technology sectors where flexibilization is a well-established labour management strategy—are fully capable of assembling autonomously or in alliance with established unions to combat their precarization. In conclusion, it is valuable to remember that workers' organizations are, like capital, historically constituted, and thus "capable of mutation, transformation, and regeneration" (Munck 2002, 190). The experiments looked at in this chapter are symptoms, then, of a deeper historical process whereby changes in the nature of labour's institutions and in the sites of labour unrest can be expected to correspond to the continual process of the making, unmaking, and remaking of working classes (Silver 2003). As Sara Horowitz of Freelancers Union puts it: "The labor movement went from guilds through mutual aid societies through craft unions and through industrial unionism. You're not going to persuade me that there is not going to be a new form of unionism. The story's not over on what we're creating" (cited in Greenhouse 2007).

Notes

[1] In 2006 it was reported that Freelancers Union generated thirty-eight million dollars in revenue, and devoted four million dollars to advocacy (*The Economist* 2006).

[2] It must be acknowledged, however, that recent trends such as increasing ownership concentration, swelling labour supply, escalating inter-regional competitive pressure induced by 'runaway productions,' deepening lack of interest from younger industry workers in union membership as a mark of success, the continuing normalization of risk in the business, the spreading of the various craft and trade workforces involved in film production across potentially many unions, and rising levels of non-union production have had mostly deleterious consequences on the established Hollywood unions in the film and television sectors, resulting in a diminishing bargaining power of many workers and an increasing bifurcation in the fortunes of the workforce (Christopherson 2008, 160-165; Wasko 2003, 47-49).

Chapter 6

Counter-Proposal:
Basic Income against Labour Precarity

> [T]oday the basic income for precarious workers is what
> the eight-hour day was for the working class before the turn
> to the twentieth century.
> (Papadopoulos et al. 2008, 247)

Flexicurity

In the European Union an incipient policy response to labour precarity is *flexicurity*. This portmanteau word broadly refers to an approach to labour market regulation that would reconcile employers' want for flexibility and workers' need for security (see Bekker and Wilthagen 2008). Flexicurity rapidly climbed the policy agenda of the European Commission in the first decade of the 21st century against a background of concern about controlling unemployment and maintaining global competitiveness. What attracted the attention of EU policy architects were the comparatively low jobless levels and the steadily rising growth rates in Denmark and the Netherlands. In the 1990s these two countries introduced distinct measures for enhancing the income stability and employment security of their highly flexible labour forces: the Danes complemented lax job protection with increased unemployment benefits and retraining programs (Madsen 2008), and the Dutch upgraded the entitlements available to such atypical workers as part-timers and long-term agency temps (Bekker and Wilthagen 2008). Partly inspired by these national exemplars, the European Commission initiated a process of drafting recommendations for EU member states as a preliminary step toward a pan-EU flexicurity framework. While rejecting a "one-size-fits-all approach" (ibid., 68), the thrust of this mode of regulation is to adapt the system of social protection to the reality of labour flexibilization, where the latter substantively includes nonstandard employment relationships (European Expert Group on Flexicurity 2007). Phrases like "protected mobility" that have come up in discussions around flexicurity suggest a promising progressive platform for mitigating precarity (O'Connor cited in Dobbins 2007).

Flexicurity is, however, a "contested concept," according to Maarten Keune (2008, 97) of the European Trade Union Institute. Its parent organization is the official representative of labour in EU employment policy deliberations. Despite its avowed commitment to balance, the prevailing interpretation of flexicurity, argues Keune, "sets

flexibility above security, economic goals above social ones and employers' interests above those of workers" (ibid., 97). For example: although the European Commission has in general suggested that flexicurity requires robust "unemployment benefits," in its country-specific "recommendations there is not one case in which it calls for the improvement of those benefits" (ibid.); although narrowing the gap between secure labour-market 'insiders' and precarious 'outsiders' is one of the laudable goals of flexicurity, this objective is difficult to square with suggestions that the protections and entitlements for workers on "standard contracts" could be extended more "gradually" (European Expert Group on Flexicurity 2007, 12); although flexicurity strives to substitute the ideas of employment security and employability for the allegedly outmoded concept of job security, unionists argue that such a move would in practice undermine many existing hard-won collective agreements (Denny 2008); and although flexicurity is said to be "about making sure workers are empowered to grasp new employment opportunities" (BusinessEurope cited in Keune 2008, 98), this proposal maintains continuities with workfare-style methods, which have been criticized for imposing tough conditions on jobseekers that can pressure the unemployed into a process of occupational downgrading (Gray 2004). Flexicurity, in the view of one UK unionist, "hides behind a language of equality to propose measures to force … insecurity on to every worker in Europe" (Simpson cited in Denny 2008).

This is not only a battle of words. The prospect of flexicurity sparked Portugal's largest demonstration in two decades (Bugge 2007). On October 18, 2007, representatives of EU unions and employers converged in Lisbon at a European Commission meeting to discuss principles that might orient future discussion of flexicurity. Assembled outside this meeting were 200,000 unionists and their allies, some of whom unfurled banners defending "Jobs with rights—against flexicurity" (da Paz 2008). Portuguese labour organizers denounced "flexicurity" as a case of old wine in new bottles—"a slogan to impose liberalization and a lack of job protection…" (da Silva cited in "Portugal Union Stages Protest," 2007). And so not all European workers are convinced of the framing of flexicurity as a model of "mutual risk management" (European Expert Group on Flexicurity 2007, 14). Indeed, if there is any predictive value to the Lisbon protest, flexicurity may yet turn out to be not so much a linguistic masterstroke of industrial relations, but an unwitting lightening rod attracting anti-precarity dissent in Europe. The political future of flexicurity is therefore uncertain: Keune (2008, 98) believes that while flexicurity is discussed ad infinitum, its definition is too amorphous, and European Commission governance too feeble, for it to become a "consensual motor" of substantive employment reform. Be that as it may, it seems unwise for those opposed to precarization to out-and-out dismiss flexicurity. For despite its apparent problems, this platform has the merit of opening for wider debate, within and

without the corridors of official representation, the question of what security might mean in an age of post-Fordism.[1]

Discussions around flexicurity—not to mention allusions to the need for a "new New Deal for the 21st century" (Friedman 2007, 371)—indicate that at least some of capitalism's counselors are searching for regulatory frameworks that might stablize the reproduction of labour under conditions of flexploitation. Such high-level expressions of concern about the durability of contemporary labour management practices are an opportunity for the exploration and advancement of counter-proposals. According to labour economist Guy Standing (2004a, 611), the "mainstream political response"—a.k.a. neoliberalism—has demonstrably failed to reduce inequality and "achieve basic security." Currents of analysis and activism around *precarity* constitute one autonomous crucible within which a search for alternatives is underway. As Papadopoulos et al. (2008, 246), conclude: "life in precarious conditions needs a different form of protection, one which allows people to perform their everyday re/productive activities and at the same time guarantees an existential security when they are affected by the intensification of neoliberal (or postliberal) forms of exploitation." One counter-proposal for a "new mode of protection" that has been floated in various political quarters over the years is that known as 'the income of citizenship,' 'universal guaranteed income,' or, simply, "basic income" (ibid., 245).

Basic Income and Labour Precarity

One of the leading exponents of the basic income proposal, Belgian philosopher Philippe Van Parijs (2005, 7), refers to it as an "exceedingly simple idea." While there are numerous variations on this proposal, its kernel is the allocation of an annual income—independent of the performance of work—to all residents. Basic income is therefore both unconditional and universal. Although estimates of its potential monetary value vary, most proponents agree it ought to be set at an amount to cover basic life needs such as food and housing. This proposal, like flexicurity, is controversial in progressive circles. This is so not least because a version of the basic income idea has in the past won the support of neoliberal thinkers who view it as a means to transfer a number of state-based social welfare services to the private market. For most of its advocates on the Left, however, a basic income is understood as a tool of economic justice that would supplement rather than eviscerate the social state.

Hardt and Negri (2009, 380), for instance, consistently include the basic income proposal in their more programmatic statements. They voice the demand that, globally, "governments must provide everyone with … a basic income sufficient for the necessities of a productive dignified existence." Because that prospect may come across sounding

extremely remote, perhaps exceedingly naïve, it is worth pointing out that there are at least partial precedents for a basic income type program. In Canada, for example, Old Age Security is a federal scheme that provides a modest pension to citizens over the age of sixty-five. And in Alaska a portion of the state's annual oil proceeds are redistributed to residents through a constitutionally enshrined Permanent Fund Divided, the value of which has fluctuated between about one and two thousand dollars over the past decade. Different proposals for financing a basic income have been floated, with some proponents suggesting that this income security mechanism could be supported by the implementation of a Tobin Tax or a tax on intellectual property.

The germ of the basic income idea has been detected in a spectrum of Left political tendencies and traditions of political and moral philosophy (see Raventós 2007 for an overview). While basic income grew into a more coherent proposal in the 1980s, Van Parijs (2005, 7) observes "unprecedented" contemporary interest in the topic, where it has resonated among activists, politicians, and academics engaged in discussions of new social rights and alternative economic possibilities at a time of widening income polarization. This surge of interest is reflected in, and is partly attributable to, the Basic Income Earth Network, an expanding assembly of academics, activists, and policy analysts that organizes international conferences and publishes the scholarly journal *Basic Income Studies*. Another vehicle for the circulation of the basic income proposal is, as mentioned earlier, the anti-precarity movements in Europe (see chapter four), with EuroMayDay coming to be identified with the political demand for an "income of citizenship" (Negri 2008, 215). This call bears the imprint of the Italian autonomist tradition, which since the 1960s has pursued theoretical and political positions that dovetail with the basic income idea, even if this proposal has remained the subject of intense debate in autonomist circles for some years (see Wright 1995/1996).

Informed by general arguments for basic income and particular autonomist inflections on it, in what follows in this section I take a narrow cut into the proposal, touching on five cases for basic income as a policy response to labour precarity.

First, a basic income—the total annual monetary value of which would be dispensed at regular intervals throughout the year—would help to bridge the gap in income between contracts that intermittent workers identify as a major source of economic insecurity (Horowitz et al. 2005, 5; Gill 2007, 7): rent must still be paid and groceries purchased when the flow of work slows to a trickle or simply evaporates. The financial vulnerability stemming from an erratic income pattern is amplified for those independent workers who face difficulties accessing income protection schemes like unemployment insurance, which still tend to be biased toward workers in standard employment relationships. Provision for a basic level of income stability would contribute to a more genuine flexicurity in labour economies where discontinuous

employment schedules are a familiar feature. In this sense, the unemployment benefit program available to intermittent workers in the media and performance sectors in France (see chapter five), despite its continuing retrenchment, provides one model of an income security mechanism expressly designed to alleviate the precarity of an immaterial workforce subject to a fragmented employment rhythm.

Writing from a perspective that combines elements of autonomist Marxism and Regulation theory, the Italian economists Stefano Lucarelli and Andrea Fumagalli (2008, 71-72) do not view basic income as a "utopian proposal, but rather an economic intervention necessary to deal with the unprecedented flexibilization of the labor market required by the post-Fordist accumulation paradigm." Understood in this way, basic income is proposed as one component of a new mode of regulation, which would lend greater stability to segments of the labour force subject to flexible employment. Some autonomists are reluctant, however, to appeal to prevailing labour market practices to justify the introduction of a guaranteed income. Implementing a basic income to iron out the uneven flow of paid work stints could be viewed as allowing the flexible labour market to "function more effectively" (De Angelis cited in Wright 1995/6). Perhaps with this ambivalence in mind, Negri (2008, 214) distinguishes between "radical" and "weak" forms of the basic income proposal, where a "weak" argument for basic income is one that presumably accepts the subordination of labour to the requirements of capital, and does not yet challenge fundamental premises of the labour-capital relation.

Second, the introduction of a basic income would compensate precarious workers for their participation in time-consuming activities that are oriented toward obtaining paid employment, and that feed into the capitalist valorization process, but are nonetheless unpaid. Contrast, for example, the situation of the standard worker for whom continuing employment is virtually guaranteed to that of the non-guaranteed media freelancer for whom it feels as if "[l]ife is a pitch" (cited in Gill 2007, 26)—a phrase that invokes the potentially extensive network sociality in which the precog may participate, and in so doing, help to sustain the informally organized talent pools from which employers of flexible labour may conveniently and inexpensively recruit (Ursell 2000). Or, contrast the situation of the standard worker in an internal labour market with access to employer-sponsored training to that of the precarious worker in an external labour market who must independently finance her or his reskilling in order to remain employable in occupations where the nature of the work may be subject to perpetual innovation. By indirectly compensating activity of this sort, basic income would arguably put standard and nonstandard workers on a marginally more equitable footing.

From the perspective of a more "radical" argument for basic income, the significant point about this second case is that it counters the narrow identification of value-contributing activity with activity undertaken in the context of paid employment.

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Raising children, pursuing qualifications, answering market research calls, reinforcing the symbolic value of a brand or a neighbourhood, learning to be a dutiful consumer, performing free labour online, participating in cultural practices parasitized by cool hunters, or occupying the reserve army of the unemployed that reduces capital's wage bill and thus raises its surplus: "We are," says anti-precarity activist Alex Foti (2004a), working "100% of the time part of the (re)production of capital." It is on this basis that autonomist exponents of basic income make the clarification that basic income is not conceived as a welfare support for those excluded from production—but as a "social salary" for those always already participating in it (Vercellone 2007).[2] Basic income is thus a mechanism for recognizing "a wealth created outside of time spent in employment" (Corsani 2007a; see discussion of the *Intermittents du spectacle* in chapter five). Challenging the hierarchical distinction between productive and unproductive labour, as feminist militants in the Wages for Housework struggles had done in the 1970s, Hardt and Negri (2000, 403) write: a basic income "extends to the entire population the demand that all activity necessary for the production of capital be recognized with an equal compensation…"

Third, access to a basic income would ease some of the pressure on an individual worker to submit to precarious labour conditions. It would weaken capital's capacity to wield the wage as a mechanism of command. In this sense, Daniel Raventós (2007, 73) speculates: "The security of income that the guarantee of Basic Income would offer would put hard-pressed workers in the position of not being obliged to accept a job under any conditions, however bad they might be." A basic income would, in this way, enhance the "bargaining power" of workers in their dealings with employers (ibid.). At the same time, some basic income advocates believe that this instrument would also serve as an incentive for employers to improve job quality—again, insofar as "fear" of survival would not be a sufficient compulsion to accept work in dubious circumstances (Standing 2004a, 614). Moreover, Raventós (2007, 73, 74) imagines that the safe "refuge of a regularly paid basic income" would increase workers' capacity to withdraw their labour in a strike, by essentially providing access to an "inexhaustible resistance fund." In the light of the sexist, racist, and ageist character of flexible labour market composition (see Peck 1996), this third case for basic income would arguably most benefit women, people of colour, and youth.

Social precarity is not, of course, restricted to waged workers. Informed by feminist arguments (see Robeyns 2008), Raventós (2007, 70-71) contends that basic income would not only compensate the unpaid caring labour that continues to be disproportionately performed by women, but it might also be leveraged as a device of "domestic 'counter-power.'" In other words, it provides a mechanism to potentially "modify the relations of domination and subordination between the sexes and increase the

negotiating power of women in the household, especially those who are dependent on husbands or partners, or who receive a very low income from discontinuous or part-time jobs." A similar point could arguably be made with regard to other social groups traditionally lacking monetary capacity such as young people. In these and other ways, the "economic independence" provided by a basic income would potentially act as an "autonomous base," that is, a condition of possibility for expanded social freedom (ibid., 70, 72).

Fourth, a basic income would insulate against the most extreme edge of labour precarity: immiseration. The most compelling ethical case for basic income is its promise to act as a swift means for "eradicating poverty" (ibid., 107). As the phrase "working poor" makes plain, a job doesn't guarantee economic security (ibid., 100-103). Nor has so-called workfare, the preferred response of the neoliberal state to joblessness, proved capable of quelling the unemployment to which those with the least job security are the most susceptible (see Gray 2004). Egalitarian access to the economic resources to meet basic human needs, for advocates of the basic income proposal like Standing (2004a, 616), ought to be conceived as a human rights claim consonant with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, namely, the defense of collective entitlement to an "existence worthy of human dignity" (United Nations 1948). In a similar vein, Negri (2008, 213) believes that the material resources necessary for one's reproduction ought to be guaranteed by the institution of citizenship.

This fourth case for basic income is a continuation of egalitarian movements demanding the social redistribution of wealth. In this vein, Lucarelli and Fumagalli (2008) attribute increasing income inequality to the absence of a social contract between labour and capital in the post-Fordist era. "[C]ompromise between capital and labour," they write, "is founded on the redistribution of productivity gains" (Lucarelli and Fumagalli 2008, 72). Under Fordism, real wages were indexed to productivity increases. Since the Fordist compact collapsed, however, Lucarelli and Fumagalli argue that there has not been a just replacement mechanism to protect precarious workers (ibid., 82). They suggest that basic income is a potential plank in a new social compromise adapted to post-Fordist accumulation, providing a regulatory mechanism to begin to share out, among other sources of contemporary wealth, the high returns accrued from intellectual properties and other lucrative frontiers of capitalist rent (ibid., 72) whose basin is, in the language of Hardt and Negri (2009), "the common."

Fifth, a basic income would convert sustained periods of time spent outside of paid employment—which the majority in capitalist societies currently experience as an oppressive side of precarity—into a potentially emancipatory existential and social resource. Proponents of basic income typically view full employment as neither a feasible nor a desirable objective (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 196-197). Indeed, the demand for basic

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income coming from elements of the European anti-precarity movement is, Negri (2008, 214) observes, "increasingly presented as a refusal of work." In this way, the political composition of the precariat is carrying forward a longstanding theme of Italian autonomist theory and politics. As Kathi Weeks (2005, 133) explains, the autonomist concept of "the refusal of work" encompasses a "rejection of the notion of work as the necessary centre of social existence, moral duty, ontological essence, and primary focus of time and energy." The refusal of work is, then, not oriented toward the "liberation *of* work" in a socialist-humanist sense (ibid.) Instead, it names a desire for "liberation *from* work" (Virno and Hardt 1996, 263). To refuse work is to seek the shortening of the working day—something which flexploitation accomplishes, but is widely experienced negatively, as in a situation of, say, involuntary part-time work. Others in the Marxian tradition have also pursued a refusal-of-work type argument with reference to the category of "disposable time," the enlargement of which Marx believed to be a condition of possibility for the flourishing of human freedom (Mészáros 2008, 176-178).

In the autonomist tradition, the refusal of work is entwined with the argument that, because waged-labour is the vital core of capital, struggling against the reduction of living labour to waged-labour is one strategy of anti-capitalism (Tronti 2007). This position is continuous with the autonomists' call for the separation of work and wage via the introduction of an unconditional guaranteed income. It is important to add that the refusal of work and the proposal for a basic income carry within them a radically utopian vision with respect to the social possibilities that might be opened by reducing the amount of time given over to waged labour and by allocating an income independent of employment (see Weeks 2005, 122-123). Take, for example, experiments in alternative economic organization, such as worker co-operatives, initiatives in collective creativity, such as artist-run centres, or research and development on low-impact urban development, such as green housing. Under current conditions, activities of this sort are frequently not 'viable.' Where a basic income would guarantee the usually precarious protagonists supplementary economic resources to ensure their reproduction, experiments such as these would be put on a more stable material foundation. To the extent that it would actually help to support cultural, ecological, political, and economic counter-initiatives, the promise of a basic income is, in the words of Fumagalli (2009b), a "tool of counter-power."

Radical Reformism

In the epigraph to this chapter, Dimitris Papadopoulos et al. (2008, 247) offer an "historical analogy": "today the basic income for precarious workers is what the eight-hour day was for the working class before the turn to the twentieth century." The

shortening of the working day was not, of course, a gift of the boss, but a product of struggle. Which raises the question—what political agency might articulate, advance, and agitate around the basic income proposal?

One candidate is the union movement. In general, the unions that have tended to be more receptive to the basic income idea are those that represent workers closer to the vulnerable side of the employment spectrum (Van Parijs 1997). In the early 2000s in South Africa, the idea of a Basic Income Grant (BIG) began to receive increasing attention. The proposal has been backed by some trade unions, and the country's BIG Coalition has been in formal dialogue with the government on how this reform proposal might combat poverty in South Africa (Standing and Sampson 2004). According to Van Parijs (1997) however, broadly speaking, "the organised working class has been rather hostile to the [basic income] idea." Some unionists, he suggests, have a skeptical response to a proposal that questions the "centrality of work," while others are apprehensive that the distribution of a guaranteed income would diminish the "role for trade unions" (ibid.). Nonetheless, Standing (2004a, 607) maintains that the union movement "should champion a basic income as part of a strategy for economic security and redistribution." He contends that integrating this proposal into the platform would help unions to enhance their appeal, not least because it would speak to mounting concerns around "time" and "intensification of labour" which, Standing believes, cut across diverse sections of the employed population (ibid., 609)

Even so, to the degree that job creation, employer subsidies, and business unionism are the horizon of union strategy to respond to the problem of labour insecurity, Papadopoulos et al. (2008, 246) are doubtless correct when they write: "Unless unions are radicalised and accommodate demands beyond the logic of wage labour, such efforts [to advance basic income] will bypass them." One alternate incubator is the Basic Income Earth Network, which I already mentioned. Its community spans dozens of countries across North and South, and is made up of activist-oriented academics as well as policymakers within government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and international institutions. Another channel is, as discussed, the EuroMayDay Network (see chapter four).

Energy could come from less familiar sources, too. This much is suggested by a recent real-world basic-income experiment in Otjivero, a village of one thousand in Namibia in southern Africa. As Dialika Krahe (2009) reports, Otjivero is mired by "absolute poverty," wracked by AIDS, saddled by crime, and awash in alcoholism. Otjivero is, says Krahe, "the perfect place to test ways to make the world a more just place" (ibid.). Instigated by a social welfare initiative of a Lutheran church in Germany, a collection of aid organizations including other German church groups, AIDS organizations, and charitable foundations, pooled resources to launch a trial basic income

in Otjivero in January 2008. Via an automated cash machine, every resident under the age of sixty was unconditionally entitled to about thirteen dollars (CDN) per month, a "moderate income" by local standards. The goal of the project was straightforward: to assess the capacity of a basic income to "alleviate poverty." Writing as the experiment was approaching its one-year point, Krahe reported that, to all but the area's wealthy white farmers, the trial was an unqualified success:

> Parents are now able to pay tuition, and the proportion of children attending school rose to 92 percent last year. … The rate of malnourishment among the children has plunged from 42 to 10 percent. The local police crime statistics show a decline in theft and poaching. People with AIDS are responding more effectively to treatment, now that their nutritional needs are being met more consistently. (Krahe 2009)

Krahe observed a flurry of small-scale business activity organized around basic life needs; coordinators estimate that local economic activity has jumped by ten percent. This experiment arguably provides a glimpse of what a more bottom-up, low-bureaucracy model of aid delivery and economic development might look like in the most impoverished regions of the global South. The United Nations Commission for Social Development, reports Krahe, "has defined Otjivero as a 'best practice' model."

This is not to suggest that basic income is a panacea. Indeed, serious criticisms have been made of the proposal within and beyond the debates around precarity. I will mention only two. First, there is a question about how a basic income that is distributed in only select political territories would avoid reinforcing the profoundly uneven development patterns of global capitalism (see Van Parijs 1997; Vishmidt 2007, 286). Second, some feminist critics have questioned whether, by implicitly paying for domestic labour, the basic income would not only deepen the monetization of human activity, but would also potentially function as "hush money, discouraging women from striving for more far-reaching gender equality" (Robeyns 2008, 1).

Despite these and other concerns, a growing number of activists and researchers are currently exploring basic income as a promising counter-proposal directed at a post-Fordist capitalism that neglects the reproduction needs of its labour force. That elements of the anti-precarity movement are engaging with the basic income proposal reflects its commitment to not only contest flexploitation, but also to search out pathways beyond it. Fumagalli (2000, 11) captures the politics of the basic income proposal well with the phrase "radical reformism." Basic income may be viewed as reformist insofar as it is conceived as a possible outcome of a new compromise between labour and capital—and as a mechanism that would, in turn, serve as a pillar of a mode of social regulation for post-Fordism. It is radical, however, to the extent that the introduction of a basic income

would serve as a means of redistributing wealth and rooting out poverty. Basic income is also a radical measure in that—depending on its level—it promises to snap the link between work and wage that is integral to capitalist domination. That is to say, the delinking of income from employment short-circuits a basic structural source of labour's precariousness—the social necessity to sell one's labour power to survive. As Roberto Mangabeira Unger puts it: "Reform is radical when it addresses and changes the basic arrangements of a society: its formative structure of institutions and enacted beliefs" (cited in Munck 2002, 21).

Perhaps the closest thing to a basic income prototype designed specifically for flexible immaterial workforces is that of the *regime of intermittence* in France, which was described in chapter five. Here I invoke the French intermittent workers' struggle to preserve their social right to income security specifically to highlight the understanding among members of their movement and its allies that "the strength of a political movement" lies not only in its concrete gains, but also in the "new questions" it generates (GlobalProject / Coordination 2004). Writing of the intermittent workers' conflict, Lazzarato, for his part, arrived at these questions:

> Do we take the … problematic situations conjured up by precarity back to what is known in established institutions and their forms of representation: wage earning, the right to work (employment), the right to state benefits indexed to employment, the joint democracy of employers' and trade union organizations? Or do we invent and impose new rights encouraging a new relationship to activity, time, wealth, democracy, which exist only virtually and often in a negative way, in conditions of precarity? (Lazzarato 2004)

The idea of a basic income lurks in these questions. This counter-proposal has thus begun to enter into discussions of immaterial labour and the creative economy. For example, in the context of an analysis of the often-precarious circumstances of independent cultural workers, Jim Shorthose and Gerard Strange (2004) bring up the guaranteed income as a possible funding model. By variously easing the pressure of conforming to market expectations, reducing the economic insecurity of nonstandard workers, and making flight from standard employment more feasible, the basic income might serve as one component of what Shorthose and Strange term "governance for autonomy" (ibid., 58). While the fate of the basic income proposal may be as uncertain as it is speculative, what is evident is that, just as workers' organizations transform over time, so, too, do labour's demands, questions, and visions.

Notes

1 For example, Gollmitzer and Murray (2009) provide a comprehensive account of "flexicurity" as a potentially guiding policy principle in the extension of income security to self-employed cultural workers in the Canadian context.

2 This point is taken further by Van Parijs (1997). Basic income, he insists, does not "[give] people something for nothing." Instead, he argues, "part of what looks like the product of a person's labour … simply consists of the value of those scarce resources which that person has to appropriate in order to produce what she or he produces, and in order to earn the associated income. People fail to realise that much of the income that goes to labour in fact derives from our common inheritance of resources… So what I ask people who make this free-rider objection [to basic income] to realise is how large this background of gifts that we receive in all sorts of forms, actually is. These gifts are appropriated to a very unequal and unfair extent by the people who happen to be able to contribute by having the best paid and most attractive jobs."

Coda

This dissertation opened on the observation that labour, work, and employment have tended to be neglected subjects in intellectual traditions devoted to the critical study of media, culture, and communication. In the past few years, however, we have seen the emergence of a counteracting analytical tendency, one in which work, workers, and workplaces are brought to the forefront. Indeed, very recently, there have been preliminary signs that the labour blind spot is slowly being overtaken by a creative convergence of labour studies and communication studies. This dissertation sought to contribute to the growing efforts to bring labour out of the margins by drawing on and contributing to currents of analysis and activism directly confronting, or strongly resonating with, the problematic of labour precarity. Initially circulated at the start of the 21st century by autonomous labour activists in Europe, the concept of precarity that constituted the focus of this dissertation was broadly understood, for the purpose of this project, as a contested multiform condition of experiential, income, and social insecurity exacerbated by the flexibilization of labour associated with post-Fordism.

I set out to argue for the value of precarity as a critical conceptual tool with which to engage in a struggle over the meaning of contemporary transformations affecting the world of work. Many of the transformations afoot are congealed in discourses in and around the *creative economy*, arguably the emerging successor to the New Economy as a hegemonic aggregating term that seeks to identify and mobilize post-Fordist accumulation strategies revolving around the production of knowledge, information, culture, and technological innovation. Mainstream discourse on labour and economic transformation has been a saturated field in the past decade: terms like *the free agent*, the *creative class*, and *the flat world* have predominated the official media landscape. While it is perhaps too early to assess the longer-term material effects of these and other efforts to promote independent work styles, Web 2.0 activity, and creative industries, it remains that the dominant field of meaning being constructed around contemporary work revolving around cultural creativity and information technology is broadly affirmative of the post-Fordist, neoliberal framework of contemporary capital. Looking at the creative economy not from the point of view of glossy creative city publications or statistical tables intended to impute the importance of creativity to competitiveness, but, instead, from a labour standpoint, will yield a rather different conclusion than the optimistic ones that typically emerge from the more celebratory takes on wikinomics, free agency, or creativity-oriented occupations.

The Left needs concepts to contest the ever-upgraded "post-industrial fantasy" (Mosco 1983, 239). Precarity is one linguistic device for challenging dominant ideological frames around the spheres of work and employment. Many of the prevailing

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terms pack a positive connotative punch. Foremost among these is flexibility, with its senses of choice, mobility, the loosening of hierarchies and rigidities and so on. So hackneyed is this euphemism that even the digital pieceworker earning pennies a task via Amazon Mechanical Turk is portrayed by one of the company executives overseeing the enterprise as enjoying "flexibility," because this online labour platform allows a parent to work from home and thus remain available to care for children when they return from school (cited in Bingham and Dunn 2009). If precarity is one of the human costs exacted by the flexible reorganization of work, the dictionary definition of "flexibility" is cunning—"the ability to bend or be bent repeatedly without damage or injury" (Microsoft n.d.). Instead, "flexibility," as Neil Lazarus writes in a different context, "mostly spell[s] out exploitation in new letters" (cited in Harindranath 2006, 10).

Another recurrent phrase is the "free agent" (Pink 2002) or the "independent worker" (Horowitz et al. 2005). Despite my sympathies with the latter term, to the extent that it gives the impression that such workers enjoy enlarged scope for self-determination vis-à-vis capital, it belies structural continuities: commodification of living labour; exclusion from entitlements; the circumscription of labour activity by the discipline of the market; and the confinement of increased control over the labour process to a relatively privileged group of independents. Finally, there is creativity—the word in this discursive field that is perhaps the most impervious to critique. Here I again quote policy analyst and cultural theorist Monika Mokre who captured this issue well, when, in the context of discussions around creative industries, she remarked: "Creativity is such an empty term. All you can say is that it is positively connoted (similar to 'democracy'). In mainstream discourses it is used to sell a concept that is a special form of exploitation" (cited in Lovink 2007, 248). Despite its democratic air, the grafting of the language of flexibility, independence, and creativity to worlds of immaterial work occludes the expression of their precarious flipside. The ambivalence of this semiotic field suggests that struggle against precarity must also be a struggle over meaning.

This dissertation pursued two broad lines of inquiry. Creative economy discourse has been challenged for either uncritically celebrating work revolving around cultural creativity and information technology, or problematically downplaying the underside of such work from a labour perspective. The first part of the dissertation attempted to provide what is an inevitably partial profile of the precarious immaterial workforce animating industries associated with the vaunted creative economy—arguably the latest hegemonic label for post-industrial accumulation strategies organized around knowledge, information, aesthetics, and technological innovation. Concerned to de-emphasize precarity as a generic or uniform state of insecurity, the dissertation introduced a framework of precarious labour personas—the autonomous worker, the precog, and the

cybertariat—to explore some of the myriad mechanisms and quotidian manifestations of precarization.

The second line of inquiry turned from precarity as post-Fordist exploitation to precarity as a site of struggle. It made the argument that although the flexibilization of labour since the 1970s was an attempt by capital and its state to decompose the counter-power of segments of the working class, the spread of precarious working conditions in the post-Fordist core has not entirely exhausted dissent. Through creative public protest, experimental workers' organizations, and novel policy proposals, working people within and beyond immaterial production contexts have begun to collectively respond to precarity. Terms such as precarity, precariat, and precariousness are linguistic devices that workers *themselves* are increasingly using to name a qualitative feature of their labour and life conditions. What's more, these terms signal a promising laboratory of labour solidarity, organization, and imagination within, against, and, potentially, beyond flexploitation.

The contested convergence of precarity and immaterial labour confirms that not all recognize themselves in the optimistic stories about the free agent, the creative class, or the flat world. Nonetheless, the concept of precarity comes with its own problems (see chapter 4). Just some of the concerns that have been raised about the concept are worth reiterating here in conclusion. One criticism is that the framing of precariousness as a distinctly post-Fordist phenomenon risks giving the mistaken impression that the condition is novel (Ettlinger 2007). Labour's precariousness is as old as capitalism itself (Böhm and Fernandez 2005): labour is always precarious under capital, in that most individuals depend for subsistence on the sale of their capacity to work—a sale that is never guaranteed.

A concomitant problem is how Fordism is sometimes represented in these debates. The employment stability associated with Fordism cannot be treated as a norm; Fordism was, on the contrary, an "exception" in the history of capitalism as far as the balance of power between labour and capital is concerned (Neilson and Rossiter 2008). This exception—which manifest in the ascent of the standard employment relationship as a social institution—speaks to the combined power of labour and economic crisis, which had sufficiently threatened capital to force it to make unprecedented concessions during the post-war period. Holding Fordism up as an egalitarian ideal also problematically recapitulates the latter's patriarchal character: the stable income of the male wage-earner frequently rested upon the unpaid domestic labour of women (Mitropoulos 2005).

Still another concern is that the generic term precarity groups together experiences of labour and life that are radically dissimilar. *Precarias a la Deriva* (2005b) therefore warn that "any project which aspires to produce something shared" must acknowledge the forms of stratification among the precarious—a sensitivity to the differential nature of

precarity which brings the collective to prefer the term precarization. This in turn has impacts on the ethics of political organizing; that is to say, there are dangers in positing a unified subject of precarity, and, consequently, in assuming a one-size-fits-all set of organizational strategies, tactics, and goals.

I would like to close by acknowledging just some of the various limitations of the dissertation. I will do this by enumerating a fragmentary set of questions that might simultaneously signal to possible directions for future research on precarity within and beyond the context of critical approaches to media, culture, and communication. What of symbolic representations of precarity—in popular media culture? In contemporary art? What is the role of symbolic ascriptions of differential social value to different forms of labour in terms reinforcing what work, and which workers, tend to be precarious? Could we arrive at a more precise theoretical account of the precarization of labour in the creative industries through an empirical exploration of distinct "logics" (Miege 1987) of precarization specific to different sectors? How does the precarization of cultural producers 'set limits and exert pressures' (Williams 1991) on the products they create? How do artists and other cultural workers understand the current fascination with 'creativity'?

Might extended case studies of particular groups of nonstandard immaterial workers allow us to arrive at a more nuanced account of precarization? If precarity is a continuum, how might labour research projects be designed to be sensitive to the variation that it entails across and within social subjects? Might the concept of "intersectionality" (Hill Collins 2000) inform a more situated understanding of the multiform character of precarity, by forefronting the intersection of subjects and discourses of gender, race, class, and age in the constitution of precarious subjectivities and their struggles? How might research on the precarization of immaterial workforces be undertaken alongside workers themselves and their collective organizations? With this last question we confront an incisive statement by Franco Berardi (2005): "With the decline in the force of the workers' movement, the natural precariousness of labour relations in capitalism and its brutality have reemerged." Does this sound a death knell? Or does it pose a challenge that calls for the exercise of genuine creativity?

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