# Chapter 2. The Anatomy of Precarity and the Precariat as Historical Class

## For a Notion of the Precariat That Is Coherent With Social Experience

In Italian, precariato (precariat) is used to refer to the institution of contingent work, and it is used indifferently along precarietà(precarity)*.* Transforming the connotation of precariato into a subject, and exporting it to English-speaking lands[[1]](#footnote-1) has worked to a degree, since the precariat is now used in academic literature and journalism[[2]](#footnote-2) to refer to the class of semi-employed members of the population. However, these notions have been cause for misinterpretation in academic sociology,[[3]](#footnote-3) which hasn’t fully absorbed the debate on precarity developed by movements and intellectuals in Continental Europe, where the concepts of precarity and precariat originate from.

Following the popularity of Guy Standing’s book, the precariat was named as the lowest class in the Great British Class Survey released in 2013,[[4]](#footnote-4) which after much elaboration and application of Bourdieu’s key insight – the distinction between economic, cultural, and relational capital – has proposed a seven-class model of UK society:

1. Elite - the most privileged group, distinct from the other six classes through its wealth. This group has the highest levels of all three capitals
2. Established middle class - the second wealthiest, scoring highly on all three capitals. The largest and most gregarious group, scoring second highest for cultural capital
3. Technical middle class - a small, distinctive new class group which is prosperous but scores low for social and cultural capital. Distinguished by its social isolation and cultural apathy
4. New affluent workers - a young class group which is socially and culturally active, with middling levels of economic capital
5. Emergent service workers - this new class has low economic capital but has high levels of cultural capital and high social capital. This group are young and often found in urban areas.
6. Traditional working-class - this class scores low on all forms of the three capitals although they are not the poorest group. The average age of this class is older than the others.
7. Precariat - this is the most deprived class of all with low levels of economic, cultural and social capital. The everyday lives of members of this class are precarious.

Note how the classification uses the term precariat in a distorted fashion, essentially referring only to the unemployed, and the working poor; this classification, for example, includes miners in the ranks of the precariat. However, few in Britain would argue this, instead claiming that miners should be instead classified as belonging to the traditional working-class;few have a better claim than them! Conversely, my notion of the precariat, which is arguably what people in Continental Europe have in mind when they think of people in a precarious condition, refers to both emergent service workers and the low-wage precariat in commerce, government and industry. Thus, in the classificatory terms of this misleading framework, my notion of the precariat actually stands as an umbrella term incorporating all those in Classes 5 and 7.

Again differently from what the Great British Class Survey says, I understand the precariat as not being the poorest of social classes (the residents of banlieuesandfavelas*,* for instance, are not represented by it). The precariat has considerable relational and cultural capital, due both to social media, and its comparatively high education. With respect to this latter element, it stands in stark contrast with the traditional working-class.[[5]](#footnote-5) From the point of view of the technical division of labor, the precariat mostly contains young people working in the information, culture, knowledge, and service industries, who have unstable jobs and suffer from the twin evils of oligopoly and oligarchy.[[6]](#footnote-6) In terms of the social composition of labor, the precariat are young, women, and immigrants working in multi-cultural, and multi-gendered (generally) urban environments.

This book argues that the precariat (temp workers, working poor, migrant laborers, etc.) stands below the Salariat (middle managers, office clerks, factory workers, etc.) and the elite (millionaires), and above the underclass (ghetto youth, refugees, etc.).

Thus, my basic class model is stands as such:

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| I. Elite (high political, high economic, and high cultural power) |
| II. Salariat (high political, middling economic, and low cultural power) |
| III. Precariat (low political, low economic, and high cultural power) |
| IV. Underclass (low political, low economic, and high cultural power) |

Table 1: Basic Class Stratification in Contemporary Capitalism

The political strategy I advocate is essentially an alliance between the two lower classes against the top two, for most of the Salariat is becoming increasingly xenophobic, and lost to any leftist cause, overwhelming choosing the most evil sections of the global elite as their rulers. Pace Slavoj Žižek,[[7]](#footnote-7) there is no anti-neoliberal silver lining in Trump and Brexit, it is a reactionary shift occurring in response to the crisis in Anglo-America. Yet the left, including Žižek, has no real alternatives to neoliberalism. By defending narrow sections of the Salariat, while selling out to neoliberalism and leaving the precariat hang to dry, social- and Christian-Democrats have undermined their key bases of support. Contrary to what was argued at the 2017 World Economic Forum at Davos, it’s certainly not the precariat (young, female, black, yellow, and brown) that’s behind the rise of right-wing populism. Rather, it’s the fear felt by the working-class and petty bourgeoisie at the prospect of losing welfare guarantees, social standing, and cultural identity that is feeding the dragon of nationalist populism. Populist demagogues play on the sentiments of anomie and displacement characterizing societies that have polarized and changed beyond recognition under neoliberalism due to unprecedented migration and technological advancement. The precarious don’t fear precarity because they know no other way of living. They are ready to fight for their rights, and when it comes to fighting, acting in conjunction with the riotous force of the underclass leads to an uprising that will be hard to subdue. The social alliance between the mass civil disobedience of the precariat and the insurgent underclass can block anti-egalitarian and repressive measures, thus defeat the xenophobic right currently striving for world power.

The alliance between the precariat and the underclass could also be unmade by a recrudescence of Islamic terrorism in Europe and America, alongside other forms of sectarian conflict, polarizing society in accordance with ethnic, rather than class, divides. After the Trumpian turn, we are not witnessing a classic head-on capital-labor conflict, but rather the clash between two versions of modernity: one open and liberal, the other closed and illiberal. Combining the traditional left-right political axis with the new open-closed ideological divide that contrasts national and cosmopolitan versions of capitalism yields the following ideal types of contemporary forms of political mobilization. Note how social democracy is still strongly rooted in the nation-state. This is reflected by the fact that in its heartland, Europe, social democracy's greatest achievement – the welfare state – still remains outside the reach of European Union treaties, since national governments consider it their preserve.

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Left** | **Right** |
| *Open* | Social Populism | Liberal Democracy |
| *Closed* | Social Democracy | National Populism |

Table 2: The Quadrant of Contemporary Politics

The clear polarity in the table is the one between social populism and national populism, the two political ideologies that are on the rise since the crisis of liberal democracy. Between Pablo Iglesias and Donald Trump there is a wide gulf, filled by intermediate positions. In simple terms, social populists care about equality like the left nominally does and liberalism doesn’t. Similarly, to internationalist populists like Ada Colau, liberals care about open borders, more for economic than political reasons, so that there are two areas where the interests of social populism might converge with the center-left against the closed-minded populists of the hard right who oppose openness and equality. On the other hand, there are two strong areas of disagreement and potential conflict: the disagreement between populists and liberals regarding resource distribution, and the disagreement between the multiethnic precariat represented by left populist forces, and the domestic working-class usually championed by social-democracy.

A contemporary case from France reveals some of the complexities at hand in the interplay between social mobilization and political outcomes. In the spring of 2016, the student and labor movements rose against the Loi Travail (i.e. the Labor Law, which allowed lengthening of hours and cutting of wages in defiance of industry-wide union agreements), occupying the main squares of French cities large and small, in open defiance of the socialist government proposing it. The political dynamics were not driven by the red union officially calling the strikes, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), but by high school and university students balking at their precarious future and fighting for their rights, one night after the other for a month in Place de la République. In spite of the increasing radicalization of the French youth of lycées and facsin the Nuit Debout movement, the protests were not successful in blocking the law, but merely added to the trademark image of the Hollande-Valls government: a government marred by incompetence and political betrayal. Despite this defeat, and inspired by the autonomous revolutionary theory of the Invisible Committee,*[[8]](#footnote-8)* the movement’s opinions were expressed in a series of powerful pamphlets, The Coming Insurrection, To Our Friends*,* and, in time for the French presidential elections, the even more simply titled Maintenant (Now).

In the recent presidential elections, the liberal Emmanuel Macron ended up squarely defeating nationalist leader Marine Le Pen, after both socialists and gaullists failed to make it to the second round of voting for the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic. Benoît Hamon, a socialist who ran on a platform of basic income, ‘tax-the-robots’, and anti-racism, was betrayed by his own party. The conservative candidate, the républican François Fillon, squandered his early chances to be elected as allegations emerged he had put his entire whole family on the government payroll. The 2016 protests were a major factor in securing 7 million votes to Jean-Luc Mélenchon a leftist firebrand supported by the red union CGT, who ran on anti-elite, and anti-Europe platform. His positions on Putin and Aleppo during the campaign bordered on red-brown, as the French and the Italians refer to those who mix bolshevism with nationalism; were I French, I wouldn't have voted for him. Personal preferences aside, the sum of Mélenchon and Hamon’s votes would have been enough to send a candidate of the left to the second round. But with the left divided, the road to the Elysée was wide open for Emmanuel Macron, a young banker and former economic minister supported by the financial and political establishment, who managed to easily defeat champion of reaction Marine Le Pen by campaigning on a pro-European position, asserting the value of France’s multicultural liberalism. Before founding his centrist movement and seizing control the Elysée Palace and the Assemblée Nationale, he had become famous for deregulating shopping hours with the eponymous Loi Macron. In fact, the candidate most in favor of Loi Travail – due to the flexibility it grants the French labor market – won the elections, a paradox of unintended consequences[[9]](#footnote-9) for a mass movement denouncing flexibility as exploitation. Since the French Socialists have now disappeared from Parliament, Macron and his government, headed by former right-wing mayor Édouard Philippe, are ruling the country with little opposition. It will be the French people in the streets that will bring Macron to account. A so-called 'Social Front' has been constituted by radical unions and the autonomist left[[10]](#footnote-10) to oppose the man they call ‘the CEO of France’. As they say in their protests, liberté should never rhyme with précarité.

## The Precariat: A Salmagundi of Lower Classes

I propose an alternative description of the precariat in the following table, condensing many categories that have been used to describe the new actors emerging out of Jobsian and Walmartian production relations. The ordering differentiates the various sections of the precariat in terms of income received.

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| --- |
| i) *Creative Class* (artists, coders, squatters, engineers, designers, etc., in internships, apprenticeships, or in freelance and/or temporary employment) |
| ii) *New Working-Class* (subcontracted employment as unskilled workers or technicians in warehousing, logistics, industrial manufacturing, food processing, construction, etc.) |
| iii) *Service Class* (waiters, baristas, busboys, cashiers, cleaners, fast-food workers, or employed as education, welfare, health care, child care, or home care workers in part-time and/or temporary employment) |
| iv) *Unemployed Class* (NEETs, short- and long-term unemployed, labor force dropouts, welfare recipients on workfare, illegal migrants, and refugees) |

Table 3: The Precariat: Its Internal Segmentation

Considering the unemployed class, one has to note that the proportion of the adult population not in employment is huge, ranging from about 45% in Italy, to 35% in France, 30% in the US, and 25% in Germany and Japan.[[11]](#footnote-11) In fact, the employment rate - the percentage of people within a given country that are employed - has shrunk dramatically since the onset of the Great Recession in 2008.

The service class is the second largest section of the precariat. The following are the frequent occupations in the United States, according to BLS data for May 2015 (see table 4 below). Note that retail workers make up the largest single category of working people. The service class includes all pink-collar jobs: store workers, supermarket cashiers, food workers, nurses, waiters and waitresses, and janitors and cleaners. It amounts to almost 19 million people working precarious service jobs in the US alone.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Retail Salespersons | 4,612,510 |
| Cashiers | 3,478,420 |
| Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food | 3,216,460 |
| Office Clerks, General | 2,944,420 |
| Registered Nurses | 2,745,910 |
| Customer Service Representatives | 2,595,990 |
| Waiters and Waitresses | 2,505,630 |
| Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand | 2,487,680 |
| Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive | 2,281,120 |
| Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners | 2,146,880 |

Table 4: Largest U.S. occupations in 2015. Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

The creative and/or ‘boring’ office class, either temporary (most assistants and most customer representatives) or not (most clerks), are over 7.5 million. By comparison, the new working-class is fairly small, comprised of merely 2.5 million people.

Radical political scientists like Andrew Ross prefer to consider the global precariat,[[12]](#footnote-12) and emphasize the commonalities between exploited service labor (located in the core of the capitalist world-system), and sweatshop industrial labor (located on the semi-periphery of the capitalist world-system). Other social researchers even include the kind of informal labor common in developing countries in their definition of the precariat. I suggest we limit ourselves to informational capitalism (i.e. the advanced capitalist core in the Global North), and take a different tactic. We should start by considering who actually is precarious, in order to arrive at what the precariat is, and what it might be. First and foremost, it is youth who are precarious, and who overwhelmingly constitute the precariat today.

The precariat and the creative class are the two conflicting signifiers of class positioning in contemporary capitalism. While the first evokes social exclusion and political resentment, the second bespeaks of prosperous bohos enjoying the so-called sharing economy. In reality, the precarious are both excluded from political power yet central to economic innovation. The precariat is a generation in the process of becoming a general class in the Marxian sense; capitalist corporations and state administrations could not function without their labor. This puts them in a league very close to that of the 20th century working-class: disposable as individuals, but indispensable as an aggregate. Unlike the working-class, the precarious class owns the means of production (networked personal computers and smartphones), however juridical and political domination still grant the elite the means to appropriate social surplus. Capitalist command operates through blackmail (the livelihood threat) or coercion (the repressive threat), to mask the fact that capitalists are no longer needed to organize production. Increasingly, contemporary capitalism appears parasitic to social relations, now that wealth has become more concentrated than ever before in human history, with a handful of digital and media corporations controlling the entirety of society’s cultural production and reproduction.

There has been some discussion on whether the precariat is the new proletariat, or whether the precarious are just the children of downwardly mobile middle classes. They are both. It’s a class of people working today, but it’s also a generation: the generation of twentysomethings and thirtysomethings whose exploitation and mobilization affects the society as a whole.

## Matrix of Precarious Labor

In order to better illustrate the various forms of precarious labor in the current economic environment, I have compiled the following matrix. This provides a viewpoint from which we can analyze precarity from the perspective of the kind of labor market prevalent in contemporary information economies around the world.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Paid** | **Unpaid** | **In Labor Force** | **Not in Labor Force** |
| *Short-Term*  *Relation* | Temp | Intern | Precarious,  Laid Off | NEET |
| *Long-Term*  *Relation* | Employee | Volunteer | Unemployed, Permatemp | Outcast |
|  | **Part-Time** | **Full-Time** | **Under-the-Counter** | **Illegal** |
| *Short-Term*  *Relation* | Retail Chain  Worker | Clerical Temp, Construction Worker | Daily Laborer | Mule,  Pusher, Prostitute |
| *Long-Term*  *Relation* | Pink- Collar | White-Collar, Blue-Collar | Squatter,  Indentured Worker | Hooligan,  Gambler,  Gangster |

Table 5: The Precarity Matrix: Precarious and Outcasts in the Labor Market Today

Those employees who have allowed worktime to colonize their lives are in the best position in regard to the labor market. Their minds belong to their employers. In exchange for their loyalty, they are granted access to the salariat, the safe island of guaranteed long-term employment. The benefits of this group, however, do not extend to paid leisure. Every day, weekends included, must be sacrificed on the altar of the employer's superior need. The permanently employed might be overworked and overstretched, but they are the only insiders of today’s labor market.

TheSarariman is a perfect example of this kind of worker. It is the Japanese name given to office workers who, in exchange for a lifetime of employment, slavishly devote themselves to serving their company. They are an overworked, male figure that is fast disappearing from Japanese society. Their profits swallowed by two decades of stubborn deflation (so much so that the Nikkei has yet to recover from its 1990 peak), keiretsus (business groups) are shedding them by the thousands. Yet in spite of this, salaried middle-managers are what the media portray as typical, contemporary employment; they are smartly dressed, travel abroad on business, and the lucky among them may eventually join the upper echelons of company management. These upper levels are still overwhelmingly male, as corporations frown upon motherhood, obviously negatively affecting women’s careers (it is important to note here that paid maternity leave doesn’t yet exist in many parts of the global economy).

At the opposite end of the spectrum are the outcasts of the labor market, a descending segmentation of hidden layers of workplace exploitation and forced precarity. No matter how educated, the precarious are considered as inferior, second-class employees.

Below full-time workers in terms of job guarantees are part-time workers, who are similarly regarded as having a lower status within the company. Alongside them sit temporary workers (temps), who usually work full-time, and are either directly recruited by a company or rented from a temp agency. Temps and part-timers might be granted some pocket-sized benefits (some paid holidays and minimal health care packages), but both are frequently cut loose during lulls in business, and conversely must work extended hours when business picks up.

I consider the temp the ideal type of precarious worker. Younger generations initially thought they could be temporarily flexible under neoliberalism, but in fact became stuck in seemingly permanent precarity, or ‘temp hell’, to quote the name of one of earliest fanzines devoted to the phenomenon. No matter the industry in which they are employed, due to the strictures of their short-term contract, a temp's leverage on their superior is far lower than that of their permanent colleagues’. The demand for permanent workers suddenly dropped thirty years ago, when neoliberalism became the dominant form of economic logic within information economies. Neoliberalism hired temps whilst shedding perms, thus precarious workers are legion today. Just over 15% of all employees in the Eurozone work on temporary contracts. According to Eurostat data and definitions, temporary employees made up 15% of dependent employment in France and Germany in 2013. These same figures hold in Finland and, outside of the Eurozone, Sweden as well. In North America, the share of temporary employment had climbed to 14.5% of the total working population by the end of 2012, according to the OECD’s Employment Outlook. Focusing on this data according to a generational cross-section is yet more worrying. In Europe, short-term and temporary employees account for roughly 25% of people in dependent employment aged 15-39. In Mediterranean Europe specifically, these numbers are even higher: almost a third of workers under 40 in Spain and Portugal work short-term jobs, while in France and Italy, 23% and 21% respectively of young workers are permatemps without hope of long-term employment. In the Netherlands, the corresponding percentage stands at a high 31%. However, unlike most Eurozone countries, this is matched by high, rather than low, employment rates for people under 40. Focusing only on people under 25 years of age, the OECD reported that in Europe more than 39% of employees were temps (up from 36% in 2000).[[13]](#footnote-13)

I call the proportion of workers in temporary employment the precarity rate. It is essentially a proxy for total precarity amongst a given population, since it refers only to a subset of the precariat (this will be explained fully later in this text). Temporary workers *are* precarious workers. The precarity rate within the Eurozone is around 15% (early 2013 figures), the total number of employees is in excess of 115,000,000, thus there are currently more than 17 million precarious workers in Europe. These statistics signify a harsh reality: informational capitalism depends on precarious labor for its extended reproduction. Crucially, when we talk about the gig economy, we’re really discussing labor performed by the precariat (and the precariat alone). The profits of the sharing economy and social media empires would be unthinkable without the flexibility, and knowledge, of the precariat.

Although temps work the same number of hours (if not more) than permanent employees, as well as do the same kind of work, they are paid less by the hour. Their permanent colleagues tend to overlook this patent discrimination, and thus tacitly collude with employers as they work alongside temps at meetings, or converse with them casually by the coffee machine without worrying about their predicament. They extend no solidarity to their temp colleagues when employment contracts expire and are not renewed. Their precarious status is usually knowledge private to them, and permanent employees don’t want to hear about it. One day precarious workers will simply vanish from the office, perhaps preceded by a tearful little ceremony in a cheap restaurant. It is only after they are terminated that long-term employees are confronted with the fact that their able and smart colleagues were in fact temps, existing with an invisible expiration date floating over their heads. In general, the surviving employees merely count themselves lucky, and disregard the destiny of the hapless temps, as if there were some kind of superstition that precarity might rub off them and soon become their destiny as well.

If temporary labor is neglected, internships (i.e. the free labor provided by young college graduates to build up their CVs), barely register in the eyes of permanent and temporary employees alike. Interns (in French and Italian they are called stagiares and stagisti, respectively)constantly rotate every three to six months. The rest of the office doesn’t even remember their names; one young face after another passes them by. Interns start their jobs in a bright mood initially; their expectations progressively dim as the nature of gratuitously imposed free labor becomes apparent even to the most ardent believers in careerism. Young people are often conscripted into internships, because they are educational credits required for graduation, and because they have become stepping-stones to a paid precarious job. The hardened temp was once a hopeful intern.

Sometimes interns work longer hours than everyone else; sometimes to extremes. Merrill Lynch intern Moritz Erhardt died from an epileptic fit in November 2013, at the end of his third night spent in the office. The coroner said overwork (what the Japanese call karoshi) was the cause, yet corporate lawyers tried to make him revoke this: the Wall Street company feared a lawsuit. His young colleagues simply went on working, despite the fact that the bank (embroiled in the financial crisis) had given employees the opportunity to time off to mourning the loss of one of their peers. The living seemed more preoccupied with holding onto their jobs, no matter how precarious, than commemorating the death of an unknown intern.

Employment as an agency worker entails being hired by a temp agency that periodically rents your services out to a company for the duration of a temporary employment contract (typically less than a year). The company has only limited responsibility for a temp’s fate after their contract with the temporary work agency ends. The fee paid by the employer to the agency is indirectly a cut on the temp’s wage, since companies pay temps less by the hour than employees they themselves hire. Originally used solely for office work, temporary labor has penetrated every economic sector, even the manufacturing sector. In fact, blue-collar jobs in the early 10s accounted for 47% of all temporary labor, up from 30% in 1993.

Temporary workers were initially used as substitutes for permanent employees during an interim period where they were otherwise unavailable. In fact, in France, they are still referred to as intérimaires. Whilst temps are still commonly used to replace female employees on maternity leave, for the most, temps do not in fact ‘replace’ anyone. Their temporary work is carefully planned, and managed, by firms on a regular basis in relation to foreseeable business events, rather than to cope with temporary labor shortage. A temp’s contract is with Adecco, Randstad, Manpower, or Kelly Services (once Kelly Girls, when temporary employment was still predominantly feminine), to name but a few temporary employment companies. Their contract is not with the employer that actually manages their labor. These three corporations are among the largest US employers today, and are creating a disproportionate number of jobs as the economy recovers. It is no wonder that The New York Times wrote about the rise of the permatemp economy in relation to the precarious nature of jobs created since the Great Recession.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Temporary labor agencies have only been legal in Europe since the 1990s, due to the entrenched hostility of unions and the left towards private labor intermediation, reminiscent of indignities inflicted on industrial and rural laborers in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It’s revealing that, during the 70s, the first American temp agencies mostly managed female employees, and referred in private to their workers as ‘warm bodies’, or ‘skins’. Whilst the European left forestalled what it saw as a trade in human beings, the battle was finally won by the likes of Adecco, and Manpower. Worse yet, informal labor markets have recently made a comeback in both the European agriculture sector (in the form of migrant pickers), as well as American industry wholesale (in the guise of the raitero system). While emblematic of the new age of flexibility, agency labor is not yet the dominant form of temporary employment in Europe. The standard temp is a young, educated individual who signs a temporary contract with an all-powerful employer, unassisted by a union, and likely unable to find alternative forms of gainful employment if dismissed.

Neoliberalism aims to turn every worker into a free agent, an independent contractor. This tendency is most evident in platform capitalism, which profits from on-demand labor. Drivers, riders, and home workers are considered entrepreneurs-of-themselves by corporations operating service apps, in a travesty of the capital-labor relationship. Uber drivers in Seattle, helped by the City Council and the Teamsters, are making the first serious unionization drive against the most funded company in history (one which has yet to turn a profit). As Trebor Scholz argues, under the platform capitalism that sells itself as the sharing economy, workers are uberexploited.[[15]](#footnote-15) They are self-employed, and have neither sick leave nor insurance against accidents. Gig workers can fight back in two ways, either by unionizing and gaining recognition of their de facto employee status, or by forming online co-ops; by counterposing platform cooperativism to platform capitalism. Since I'm rather a believer in platform syndicalism (for a contemporary expression of this originally Latin American anarchist tendency, the Workers' Solidarity Movement in Ireland is a good example), I believe that precarious workers exploited by the likes of Travis Kalanick have to organize against the power of digital capital. In the United Kingdom, Uber drivers and Deliveroo riders are fighting via the courts for their employee status, minimum wage, and sick pay.[[16]](#footnote-16) In London, Uber is appealing a decision that ruled against the company for its unfair treatment of drivers. After protests across the USA, most notably in New York and Texas, Obama’s National Labor Relations Board sided with drivers in a class-action suit seeking federal recognition of their status as statutory employees. Considering Uber’s Trumpian slant, this is unlikely to continue. That's why the Seattle unionization drive is so important, in the city that was among the first to introduce living wage laws, and where a major portion of the central nervous system of contemporary capitalism (Microsoft, Amazon, and Starbucks) resides. Uber is, via their app, sending messages and podcasts to its drivers, attempting to persuade them to remain as ‘partners’, and vote for the company in the unionization election.[[17]](#footnote-17) Uber cannot afford to lose this battle. Yet neither can its 1.5 million precarious drivers, whose incomes are currently at the mercy of customer ratings, and exploitative algorithms.

The digital and the service components of the precariat have converged, creating the sharing economy. Lyft drivers and Foodora cyclists (to cite the two major competitors of the Uber and Deliveroo) feel they are employees with shared, collective interests, rather than the self-employed individuals that the corporations dominating the online service economy want them to be. These workers are the latest addition to the Pangea of precarious labor. Although their legal status is still uncertain, what is certain is that these precarious workers have started to rebel. In doing so, they have destroyed the veil of complacency surrounding abusive labor practices in the sharing economy, a completely deregulated sector where the value created is not shared with the workers creating it.

## The Precarious’ Universe: Temps, Part-Timers, Freelancers, and Interns

Now that we have in mind how people are variously affected by precarious labor, we can provide an accurate definition of the precariat, via set theory. All things considered, the precariat counts among its members those who: work in temporary and/or part-time private or public employment; are self-employed as freelancers (often for a single employer); work in poorly paid apprenticeships; work in unpaid internships; do not work because they are unemployed; officially do nothing (NEETs) and/or perform under-the-counter, black-market labor.

Essentially, the precarious perform contingent labor for substandard (or even no) wages in an individualized, casualized work environment. Alternatively, they are officially unemployed, meaning they live off a subsidy (if there is one), at times supplemented by jobs paid in cash. This is often a necessity for undocumented migrant workers, tellingly referred to as sin papeles or sans-papiers (those without papers), in Spanish and French respectively.

I played with Euler-Venn sets to draw the borders of the precarious’ universe, and break it down in subsets and overlapping sets of precarious workers, so as to arrive at a precise representation of the precariat. Fundamentally, the precariat set is constituted of the two intersecting subsets of temps (short-term employees and agency workers) and part-timers (who can be either short-time or full-time – the latter are predominately concerned with wage precarity, rather than employment per se). These subsets are united by the legions of (always belatedly) paid freelancers and unofficial workers, and further supplemented by the universe of unpaid labor and idle human capital: internships, unemployment, and inactivity. It is now time to finally draw the contours of the growing reserve army of labor in the wake of the Great Recession: the burgeoning mass of the precariat.



Fig. 1. The Precariat Set

Temps, part-timers, and freelancers make up the subset of paid precarious work. Workers that temp agencies outsource to companies are a significant portion of the total of temporary workers (it is perhaps of interest this portion is larger in regards to America than within the European Union). They can either work full-time or part-time, depending on the job profile they allegedly substitute. It should therefore be noted that the agency labor subset partially overlaps with the set comprised of part-time workers. Paid apprentices are instead a subset of part-timers intersecting temps, since apprenticeships always entail less than a full workweek (since apprentices need time off to study), and have a fixed duration. Interns, a sizable subset of the student population, are the missing link between the world of the precarious at work and the precarious at home: the unemployed, and NEETs. Students are not precarious insofar as they don’t have to work; their precarity is potential, not actual. They will become precarious in the majority of cases, but their non-work is of a different order than the refusal to work of NEETs, (very) young people who do not care to study or seek work so as to obtain additional benefits, as those officially registered as unemployed do. They may live off welfare if they are in a country civilized enough to pay anti-poverty subsidies, or are dependent on their families. Mostly they perform black labor and possibly criminal activities. Conversely, the unemployed are usually subjected to re-training and workfare requirements in order to be entitled to receive social transfers. The NEET rate is counted as a percentage of the young population, while the unemployment rate is counted as a percentage of the active population, i.e. young unemployed people divided by young people in the labor force (the sum of people in employment and unemployment).

Using formal notation with we can thus summarize the basic coordinates of the precariat set:

Paid Precarious

**TEMP U PART-TIME U FREELANCE** with TEMP ∩ PART-TIME ≠ ∅

Unpaid Precarious

**INTERN U UNEMPLOYED** with INTERN ⊂ STUDENT and NEET ⊂ UNEMPLOYED

College and high-school students are of course an endless reservoir of temporary and part-time labor. But the oversupply of educated labor has brought the entry wage down to zero, so that corporations can now hire young people for nothing, as shown by the inexorable rise of internships.[[18]](#footnote-18) Only very few internship programs pay something like the minimum wage – the lucky ones only get food and transport – and this also applies to interns working for prestigious companies and financial institutions. Some parents in Europe are actually ready to pay a company to get their daughter or son taken on as an intern. Furthermore, the institutionalization of internship in Western universities as a preliminary requirement for degrees has created a vast pool of officially sanctioned, unpaid precarious work. Consequently, the majority of final-year students are now unpaid interns for Fortune 500 companies, corporate foundations, and high-flying independent professionals such as lawyers and architects. Others are old-fashioned working students, who toil because they cannot afford not to earn money during their studies, since they have incurred high levels of debt to pay for increasingly expensive tuition.

The luckier students, usually in the less noble but more established trades, where craftsmanship and dexterity still pay a market premium in spite of automation and 3D printing, get apprenticeships via the state in Europe, and through unions in America. An apprentice gets paid considerably less by the hour than a hired employee and works part-time. Outside the apprenticeship, they attend technical classes in a university or union center. In countries such Germany and America, there has long been a tradition of individuals gaining decent, blue-collar jobs through apprenticeship schemes. Whilst countries such as France and Italy want to introduce them in order to improve the performance of their manufacturing industries, to young locals, the schemes feel like yet another way to defer a guaranteed job paying a full wage.

Some exclude formal part-time employment from the precariat. Conversely, I argue that its marked feminization and/or juvenilization, and the fact that much of it is involuntary, on-call, and non-unionized labor, make the inclusion of part-timers into the precariat a matter of course. What could be more symbolic of precarious labor than a McJob?[[19]](#footnote-19) What’s more emblematic of the struggle of the precariat than the Fight for 15’s struggle against US retail chains? McDonald’s employees, just like Starbucks baristas and Wal-Mart associates, earn the minimum wage and have next to zero benefits. If they try to form a union, they are harassed, intimidated, and subsequently fired. Fast-food workers were long seen as unable to form a union and strike; however, the recent drive for service unionization all across the United States has perhaps proved otherwise. Finally, labor boards are beginning to rule against corporations exploiting precarious labor through their franchises, like fast-food chains do. McDonald’s was among the first corporate franchises to force retail workers to all dress alike. Just like army recruits (and prison inmates), chain store workers must wear uniforms; big-box stores (also known as supercenters, or megastores) and fast-food restaurants are totalizing institutions where uniformity and discipline must be strictly enforced, in order to prevent any attempt at organization that would drive up wages. However, history is on the side of the precariat, and the eventual raise of minimum wages to a decent level is likely to (finally) be won across America, Europe, and East Asia.

## Precarity Rankings

I have included below a 10-category precarity ranking, identifying various umbrella categories of precarious people, in order to highlight those most in danger (as well as what they are in danger of). The logic of this ranking is based upon the idea that being a migrant worker (especially if undocumented) is the worst condition possible; they are exposed to discrimination, abuse, and arbitrary detention. The condition of an unemployed person is slightly better, even those who are unemployed long-term, and/or not being eligible for unemployment benefits. If decent subsidies for the unemployed existed, not having to report to work wouldn't be so bad. Yet the callousness of western governments is such that, nowadays, the unemployed are forced to work for free (or next to nothing) as part of a workfare program (known as mini-Jobs in Germany) in order to retain this subsidy. Workfare is for those that governments believe can be reintegrated into the active labor force. Being an unpaid intern (and possibly also having substantial student debt) is one level higher, though still firmly within, precariat hell. After interns come those who are laid off. Being laid off is distinct from becoming unemployed; the term usually refers to full-time workers who are only temporarily made redundant by a large-scale employer, live off a decent wage-based subsidy, can work on the side for cash, and are likely to be rehired by the company when business recovers.

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| --- |
| 1. Migrant |
| 2. Unemployed |
| 3. On workfare |
| 4. Intern |
| 5. Laid Off |
| 6. Contractor |
| 7. Freelance |
| 8. Temp |
| 9. Short-Term Part-Time |
| 10. Long-Term Full-Time |

Table 6: Precarity Rankings (1 = Max. Precarity, 10 = Min. Precarity)

In the middle of the precarity ranking stand contractors: independent workers, or ‘bosses of themselves’. While they usually have a fair amount of income security, they are disproportionately likely to fall victim to occupational hazards (such as those that affect workers in the construction industry).

Similar to contractors, freelancers are self-employed, and as such are worse off than temps, who gain some safeguards from being considered employees, albeit of a non-standard, atypical sort (a regular paycheck, and paid sick leave, for instance). Unless contractors associate for insurance purposes, like the Freelancers’ Union has done in the US, and SMart is doing in Belgium and the rest of the EU,[[20]](#footnote-20) they are on their own if their employers refuse to pay them, or to cease hiring them (it bears mentioning the almost certain termination of their contract if a freelancer falls seriously ill). Contract workers cannot rely on any sort of unemployment or sickness compensation, although this is offset by the fact they make (on average) higher incomes than those workers with a regular wage. They often have a higher mean salary, but also a higher variance in labor income compared respect to temps, who are wage-earning employees and thus at least know in advance what their net pay will be, and usually have the right to unemployment compensation. As already noted, temporary workers can be bought by firms from temporary labor companies, who manage their labor in conjunction with the client firm, leaving temps exposed to a weird form of double exploitation. Short-term part-time workers are practically indistinguishable from temporary workers, save for the fact that being hired directly by the firm grants them a little more leverage in the workplace. Part-time workers who are long-term employees are among the least precarious. Their precarity is due mostly to insufficient income; working part-time usually translates into half the wages of a full-time employee. Furthermore, most part-time jobs are paid only the minimum hourly wage, and the real value of the minimum wage has been steadily falling for three decades.

Thus, we move to examine the final category. Category 10 has long meant living without precarity; it is about being a permanent employee, one who considers it a privilege to receive a 40-to-life work sentence. The employees most secure in their jobs are usually government workers, since not even the largest companies can now guarantee their employees permanent employment. Times of fierce international competition, as well as accelerating technical change, require increasing productivity from an ever-reducing workforce, in order to merely stay afloat. If you can't keep the pace, you can pack your personal belongings before being kindly escorted out by security; you’re on the street, and out of work.

Only in Scandinavia are welfare provisions generous enough to enable workers to give the boss the finger when their patience expires. In fact, it’s in Finland that universal basic income (UBI) is being tested for all people that are officially classed as unemployed or precarious (the money is paid even if you later find a job). The introduction of a basic income would complement the existing employment model called flexicurity, whichand has become a typical feature of Nordic capitalism, characterized by the social-democratic bent of its politics. Although it is not without faults (such as persistent youth unemployment, as well as punitive workfare), it reduces the market’s power over the lives of the precariat (in more academic terms, it decommodifies precarious labor).

However, Scandinavia aside, within the rest of the world of informational capitalism, those in precarious positions are constantly blackmailed by businesses and administrations. It’s either kowtowing, or facing the harrowing prospect of joblessness and financial distress. Unemployment benefits are usually not enough to cope with basic economic needs (such as food, housing, and transportation), especially if you have a family. Furthermore, they are consistently being scaled back. That’s why a fundamental demand of the politicized sections of the precariat has always been UBI, in order to provide some stability independent from the instability of the economy, and secure fundamental rights for all.

The working poor are starting to go hungry even in Europe, whose indifference to the plight of the weakest strata of society is beginning to rival America’s (and also Japan’s, where casual workers and destitute people are treated with contempt). In Britain and Germany there has been serious pressure from governments to push people into workfare programs, thus linking the payment of unemployment benefits to accepting jobs in the private sector at below-minimum wage rates. The disciplining function of workfare is not lost on young people, who resent being subjected to considerable government intrusion into their lives, forced usually into jobs of no social value, and benefit only the companies who are permitted to pay their meager wages. There is a growing call for UBI from the public, not least because of the vast numbers of people forced into precarity by the Great Recession. UBI would mean the end of workfare and all forms of means-tested welfare designed to regulate and stigmatize the poor. It would also make it far easier to enforce a higher minimum wage. It would limit the necessity for workers to accept less than the statutory minimum wage in grey and black markets, since they have some economic stability, in the form of basic income. UBI, therefore, is both a key welfare provision to properly address social insecurity, and also a form of empowerment, one which will unleash social creativity in non-economic activities.

## Precarious Work: Damnation vs. Liberation

Although I have sketched the circles of the precarious inferno, yet I am not sure which is the worst; temporary work, or permanent? In general, leftist writings on precarity portray precarious employment as a negative condition, known as the oppressive model of precarity. On the other hand, there is also a wealth of literature that highlights the liberating energies unleashed by precarity which lead to solidarity with others; one's identity is not defined by one’s work, but rather in relation to one's activities, and relationships with other precarious people sharing a common condition.[[21]](#footnote-21) While there is little doubt that no longer having a job for life is positive, being jobless is not an ideal condition. Both are social life sentences. One must consider that, due to the financial crisis, creativity and solidarity have been undermined by lack of jobs (any job), and surviving the ensuing rat race means undermining your fellow precarious beings. Texts written by the precarious authors underscore the overcommitted, albeit unstable, nature of precarious jobs, but also their unwillingness to return to the regimentation of the office or factory. Most precarious workers wish to attain employee status and benefit from introduction of a basic income and the setting of a high hourly wage, so that precarity can be a way of life, rather than a daily fight for survival. Considering the looming threat of technological unemployment, due to automation and machine learning, worktime reduction also needs to be taken into account.

This book thus proposes a combination of the 4-day workweek, a $/€15 minimum wage, and a $/€1,000 basic income for all adults, starting with people aged between 18 and 30. These basic measures will to bring precarity under control, and reverse the growing economic inequality of the post-crisis world. These reforms are significant, substantial, achievable and also necessary to restarting the economy. The book concludes with an open strategy for the emancipation of the precariat, which will hopefully be subjected to both discussion and criticism. It will be the precariat that will collectively decide its own organizational forms, as well as its social and political program. Since the year 2000, I have been dreaming of founding the revolutionary union of the precarious of world, starting from within the European Union. What is clear is that there must be a decisive step forward in labor organization, advocacy, and conflict, for and by the precariat, and for general social emancipation to take place, beginning with precarious youth.

## Immigration and Discrimination

Immigrants are by definition precarious. Like the young, they are easy to hire and easy to fire. In a country like France, young beurs (French citizens of Algerian, Tunisian, or Moroccan descent) are treated as second-class citizens, experiencing levels of unemployment and discrimination matched only by that historically experienced in American by young black men. France holds to the principle of ius soli(right of the soil): if you are born there, you are a French (much like in Canada and Australia).Its opposite principle, ius sanguinis (right of blood) – the fact that one needs native parents in order to be a citizen, a principle with clear ethno-fascist connotations – rules over the rest of Europe. An Italian born in Buenos Aires stands a better chance of getting Italian citizenship than a young Eritrean born and bred in Milan. By the same token, French-speaking African immigrants are better off if they live in Montréal rather than in Paris. Especially if they’re middle-class, they are respected and treated as equal citizens, and typically acquire nationality in the space of a few years.

During the neoliberal era, Europe trailed behind North America in regard to integration. Poor, immigration-dense banlieues are to blame for the worst nightmares of the European elites: fantasies ranging from class war to apocalyptic jihadism. However, fundamentalism is still very much a minority currency, even in places like Saint-Denis and Molenbeek. Nowadays, Antifa and Antira movements rallying anarcho-autonomist youth, local people, and the hooligan supporters of certain soccer teams, are some of the few remaining antidotes to national populism. Mirroring this, they also stand against the dangerous lure of nihilism embraced by the tiny minority of young, European Arabs, tempted by the extreme nature of Salafi jihadism.

Social movements must find a way to connect with immigrant neighborhoods, or reactionary politics will prevail in Europe, and groups such as Le Front National will gain enough power to fracture it irreparably. Younger generations within the banlieues are rightly enraged at mounting police violence, catalyzed by the state of emergency put in place after the Charlie Hebdo and Friday the 13th attacks. Hollande caused the rebellion of half of the socialist party when he threatened to abolish ius solifor Daesh supporters having double nationality. On the issue of citizenship, as on the issue of labor, the socialist administration betrayed its voters. Thus, Macron has emerged as the champion of openness and change, standing against the National Front, leaving fractured, warring camps of the anti-racist behind.

In the summer of 2015, when Germany and Austria opened their borders to the flow of Syrian refugees crossing the Balkans, as well as fascistic Hungary, a potent image was captured. The migrants on the highway carried a European flag at their head. The symbolism was powerful: Europe was a continent of human rights, and of peace. The good people of Vienna and Munich welcomed the migrants arriving at railway stations, the same migrants who had been blocked by Hungary’s barbed wire fences. It was one of the few moments in recent history that made me proud to be European. Europe will be made or destroyed on the issue of open borders: the dividing line between progressive-, and reactionary-populism. The Trump administration, by decreeing a Muslim ban and planning to build a wall on the America-Mexico border, is honoring its racist campaign promises. Migrants are fleeing the East Coast of America and pouring into Canada, which, under liberal Justin Trudeau, is maintaining the open-door policy on which the country's fortunes were built. America is instead freewheeling backwards, adopting policies reminiscent of the period between 1920 and 1965, when immigration was seriously curtailed in the name of ‘American’ values. In Europe, if the Eurozone were to collapse, the continent would be set to revert to the kind of nationalism that caused the most murderous wars in its history. The precariat must thus continue to stand for the rights of migrants, and for freedom of movement within the European Union, across the Mediterranean, and the Balkans. The precariat must take heed of the actions performed by activists in Ventimiglia and the Brenner helping African and Syrian migrants cross the border.

## Precarious Labor and Autonomous Marxism

In a literal sense, the precariousness of labor has existed since the dawn of steam-powered, industrial capitalism. Karl Marx addresses the issue in the first volume of Das Kapital*,[[22]](#footnote-22)* when he discusses the reserve army of labor. He described how the wage demands of the factory-bound proletariat were kept in check by the precariousness of labor demand, due to the irregular, crisis-prone process of capital accumulation (i.e. investment). If laborers didn’t organize, unchecked exploitation and misery would befall those working in the mills and fields. However, below the proletariat in the socio-economic hierarchy was the lumpenproletariat, whom Marx wrongly despised (and Bakunin eulogized): thieves and other petty criminals, prostitutes, tramps, vagrants, etc. The lumpenproletariat made up a reserve army of potential replacement laborers, keeping those in the factories in check, and keeping wages low.

A temporary workforce is a permanent feature of certain industries, exemplified by seasonal workers in sweatshops, and laborers in commercial agriculture. In this respect, things have not changed much since the 19th century. Informal labor remains the norm in emergent and developing economies. However, the recent swelling of the precariat is a symptom of a troubling return to informal labor markets inside the relatively wealthy societies of advanced capitalism.

While contingent labor has always existed in capitalist societies, Italian Autonomous Marxism was the first to argue that precarious labor had moved from the peripheral position it occupied under keynesian, industrial capitalism, to a core position in neoliberal, informational capitalism. Negri and others argue that informational capitalism - the current technological and social paradigm, according to Manuel Castells’ seminal work of social theory *The Information Age[[23]](#footnote-23)* - is based on casual, affective, creative, immaterial, and precarious, labor.

However, a theory of the precariat is not immediately able to slot into the world as understood by Autonomous Marxism. The precariat comprises of two categories of workers with very different levels of skill and education: pink-collars working in retail and low-end services (cashiers, cleaners, janitors, cooks, waiters, etc.) under constrictive but standardized employment norms, and the digital creative class (editors, graphic artists, programmers, etc.) who are temping, sometimes at high wage rates, in the information economy connecting the world’s major cities. Furthermore, the precariat is also a plurality of young people of different sexes, different classes, and different ethnicities.

Aside from Autonomous Marxism, contemporary Marxist thought tends to discount the notion that this precarious plurality constitutes an analogue of the 20th century working-class; there might be precarity, but there’s no precariat. At most, they make up a section of the working-class. I deny this. The precariat is the successor of the working-class, emerging from the new form of informational neoliberalism expanded and radicalized in the crucible of the Great Recession. The precariat is a generation becoming a class. It has become a new historical subject, and is the only subject capable of progressive collective agency; it's the precariat that both performs general labor, and constitutes the general intellect (to use Marx’s terms). The precarious have their identity based on exclusion from social status, rather than in nationalist, or cultural norms. The centrality of the service precariat for 21st century capitalist accumulation is equivalent to the role played by the industrial proletariat in determining the fortunes of 20th century capitalism.

Autonomous Marxism, as elaborated by Antonio Negri, Mario Tronti, Paolo Virno and others, places the revolutionary agency of the exploited subject at the center of its philosophical analysis. After the defeat of the 1968-1979 insurgency of the western working-class,[[24]](#footnote-24) the theorists of operaismo(workerism) turned to focus on urban movements, as well as emerging forms of service and intellectual labor, as a new Post-Fordist, digital economy was consolidating out of the ashes of industrial Fordism. In the work of Negri especially, this position is made clear: the precariat must be radicalized, in order for the multitude to cast off the dominating weight of imperial structures. It is within the relative obscurity this intellectual tradition that the radical theory of precarity was forged in the 00s, centered around Milan, Rome, Barcelona, Madrid, Paris, Berlin, Helsinki, and Liège.

To summarize my previous point differently: the new digital capitalist class is confronted by a multitude of young precarious workers. It is the precariat’s labor, communication, and distribution that is making internet billionaires rich beyond imagination. The oligopolists have long acted jointly to protect their class interests (low taxes, low wages, etc.). However, the time has come for the precarious to act as class, and work with their collective interest in mind. It is time to work towards the end of income insecurity. Just as Henry Ford needed to be buried for Fordism to rise, not only Steve Jobs, but also his ideology, needs to die for Jobsism to rise. Although in vastly different technosocial paradigms (industrialism and informationalism respectively), the implications of both the Fordist and Jobsian compromises are the same regarding regulation: let workers share the bounty of productivity, either individually in the form of wages, or socially in the form of welfare, else risk economic crisis and class warfare. If an egalitarian solution to capitalist crisis was found against National Socialism in the last century, it can also be found against national populism in this century. Capitalism can be reformed. It has been reformed before, during the Belle Époque, and again after World War Two. However, today we need a simultaneous revision of both social and ecological regulation of capitalism. Social regulation has been experimented before with success, yet ecological regulation has not. If we consider Piketty’s laws of capitalist motion valid, and I think any thinking left-leaning individual should, then growth must be restarted, so that it can jump above the profit rate, and reduce capital-labor disparity. However, this ‘red’ (social) objective is posed to clash with the ‘green’ (environmental) objective, since additional growth would lead to even greater carbon emissions, pushing the planet further towards environmental chaos.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Of course, anti-capitalists of all tendencies will just question why we don’t simply ditch capitalism instead. My answer to them is that capitalism makes innovation and material progress possible in ways that state communism has been unable to deliver at any latitude, even under well-meaning leaderships like those of the Soviet Union’s Mikhail Gorbachev, and Tanzania’s Julius Nyerere. Communism simply doesn’t work as an economic system; look at what China accomplished when it switched from Mao Zedong’s communism to Deng Xiaoping’s capitalism. Immediately following the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia’s GDP was still larger than China’s, at exchange rates reflecting purchasing power parities. By 2016, China’s GDP was more than five times larger that Russia’s (536% larger), making the country the workshop of the world, pulling hundreds of millions out of poverty. It is hard to argue with these facts. Although the Communist party officially retained power in spite of the Tiananmen Square student rebellion, the lives of over one billion people were drastically improved by market reform: the rate of extreme poverty in China went from almost 90% in 1980, to less than 2% in 2013 (World Bank data). China’s might be state-controlled capitalism, but it’s capitalism nonetheless. In light of this, I do not see a viable economic alternative that can replace firms and markets. To adopt an effective, populist strategy, the instinctive anti-capitalism of the precariat must be of the transformative kind: changing both the state, and market institutions, in order to achieve social and ecological regulation of capital, abolishing the dictatorship of global finance, and expanding the domain of commons-based peer production, as an alternative to both state and market production.

## The Precariat is the New Proletariat

I have argued that the core of the precariat includes the emerging social class composed of young, urban temps, of both middle-class and proletarian origins, living and working in the global north. Furthermore, the precariat is disproportionately female and immigrant. In terms of its technical class composition, the precariat performs service labor in low-tech retail industries, and high-tech information industries.[[26]](#footnote-26)

This internal variety is problematic. A social alliance is needed amongst the constituents of the precariat, to further their common cause. Yet this alliance is by no means a foregone conclusion, but a matter of labor agitation, and populist politics. When Oakland residents threw rocks at the Google bus, they were protesting the fact that residents – generally of African-American and Latino descent - had to pay more than double the fare than coders – generally Caucasian – traveling to the Googleplex on buses provided by the city. The city was subsidizing a corporation while simultaneously cutting essential welfare and housing services. The residents’ rage was mainly directed at Google as a company, although its employees were still resented as agents of gentrification. Yet how many of those on the Google bus were interns, or temps? Surely many; a long-term employee at Google does not take the bus, but instead drives a Tesla, or bikes to Mountain View on a $2000 fixie.

From a political perspective, the precariat is the social subject at the vanguard of the political constitution of those opposing both financial and political elites. People are angry because bankers are bailed out while ordinary citizens are left to suffer job losses and welfare cuts. The precariat is a culmination of different grievances, and different constituencies, in the common fight against inequality, and for the reassertion of social and political rights. The precariat might not be the 99% (it stands at around 15-25% of the working population), but it gives voice to the people’s majority. Similarly, the industrial working-class was not the majority of the people (it never grew beyond 33% of the population), yet the social and political logic of its unions and parties permeated the whole of society, its emancipation opening the gates of equality for all. If austerity and inequality are to be defeated, the precariat must achieve full emancipation from social and political inferiority.

The industrial proletariat has been replaced by the service precariat, as the class that is at the spearhead of social movements opposing domestic racism, and global inequality. Marx famously distinguished between class ex se (in itself) and class per se (for itself). The precariat is a class in itself, in the process of becoming a class for itself. Although Standing[[27]](#footnote-27) didn’t acknowledge his intellectual debt to the movement, he was right in arguing that the precariat was making the leap from class in itself to class for itself. These are clearly Marxian categories, yet Marxists have in general been critical of furthering their usage (don’t touch the centrality of the working-class!). Marxists aside, the fact of the matter is that, post-Great Recession, the increasing precarity of the middle class, as well as the pauperization of the service class, have both made precarity a mainstream concern. The precariat stopped being merely the jargon of the moment, and instead was discussed by major media outlets across the globe. Never has the word ‘precarious’ has been used with more frequency, and applied to a larger variety of contexts (see for instance, Judith Butler[[28]](#footnote-28)).

Standing, contradicting his own thesis, envisages the precariat veering to the right. Conversely, I think it is already veering to the left, and is in fact behind the grassroots political revival occurring in Spain, Greece, Portugal, and France. It’s the petty bourgeoisie and the native working-class – not the precariat – that are voting in large numbers for Marine Le Pen in France, Norbert Hofer in Austria, and Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, to name but a few of the despicable xenophobes threatening European unity today.

## Western Middle Classes: Marx vs. Weber[[29]](#footnote-29)

Class theory comes in two large sets: Marxian and Weberian. For Marx (particularly in sociological works such as 18 Brumaire or Civil Wars in France) society can be segmented downwards, from the top of the socio-economic hierarchy, into: the industrial, financial and commercial bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie (shopkeepers, middlemen, government employees, etc.), the industrial proletariat (farmers and the peasantry), and finally the lumpenproletariat (the unemployed / illegally employed). Marx always thought in terms of class polarization, his theory forcing a final showdown between industrialists and industrial workers, organized by vanguard socialist parties and workers unions. In stark contrast, Max Weber[[30]](#footnote-30) instead argued that nationalism was going to lure workers away from the appeal of socialism (as both a liberal and a nationalist, he was well placed as to understand why), and capitalism was bound to integrate the growing middle class, so as to form a political counterbalance to the mass of the volatile proletariat. Similarly, Weber contended, while the bourgeoisie was tiny and stood to lose against mass parties in the emerging sphere of democratic politics, it could either ally itself with old traditional elites,[[31]](#footnote-31) or with the newly emerging bureaucratic and clerical classes, in order to achieve cultural and political hegemony, to borrow the terminology of Antonio Gramsci.[[32]](#footnote-32)

National warfare would end up trumping class warfare, however, in the carnage of the World War One. Peasants and workers from neighboring European countries slaughtered each other over four ceaseless years of trench warfare, disavowing the pacifism declared by both French socialists and German social democrats during the Second International. However, by toppling the Russian, Prussian and Habsburg Empires, World War One actually contributed to the worldwide spread of socialism, and not only in Bolshevik Russia, but also across Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, greatly contributing to early anti-colonial movements.[[33]](#footnote-33)

According to Weber, there were two countervailing trends apparent in spread of socialist ideology: the cross-class appeal of nationalism, brazenly evident at Verdun or Gallipoli, and the growth of the middle class. On the one hand, the modern state was creating an intermediate stratum of bureaucrats, and the modern corporation was creating an intermediate stratum of employees between workers and management (clerks, technicians, secretaries, etc.). These people usually professed conservative values, and were faithful to the party of order and authority. They could be counted on to stave off the socialist threat if workers’ councils attempted to seize factories and government buildings, attempting to replicate in Berlin and Turin what the soviets of Petrograd and Moscow had successfully accomplished in November 1917.

In fact, the defeat of the 1919-20 revolution in Germany and Italy can be attributed to the effective mobilization of the middle classes by the bourgeoisie against bolshevism in defense of the liberal order. This mobilization subsequently degenerated into open fascism, as well as repression of the working-class wholesale. The fascist dictatorships of Italy and Germany, as well as their many imitators on the Continent, enjoyed mass appeal amongst the lower layer of the middle class: the petty bourgeoisie, comprised of state officials, shopkeepers, farm owners, and tradesmen.

Conversely, in France, Great Britain and America, what came to be known as the educated middle class stayed centrist and mostly clear of fascism, both before and after World War Two. During the Great Depression, the middle class of the few surviving liberal democracies veered to the left, as vast numbers of artists, intellectuals, and engineers joined the Popular Front in Europe, and the progressive New Deal in America. Similarly, in the 60s and 70s arose a general discontent with constrictive social structures and hierarchies, as well as large-scale protests against western military intervention against guerrilla armies. The radicalization of the children of the middle class in the universities of America and Europe was a symptom of this, evidenced by the meteoric rise of the Students for a Democratic Society movement, and the proliferation of Marxist and anti-imperialist groups (some even embracing armed struggle), respectively. Revolutionary Marxism exerted considerable influence on the Western middle classes until neoliberalism defeated it, both from inside and outside.

The catastrophic (but also radically reformist) 30s and 40s are much closer to today’s experience than the revolutionary 60s and 70s. A political radicalization of the middle class, as well as a renewed wave of labor conflict similar to that of the Great Depression, is occurring today in the aftermath of Great Recession. Arguably, the middle class has been a major force for social change since 1945. The peace movement, the international student movements, the women’s movement, the anti-nuclear movement; these were all middle class movements. Now that the Great Recession has severely squeezed its living standards and made its children precarious, will the middle class ditch neoliberalism and become progressive, by allying itself with the radicalized precariat, and standing against national-populist reaction?

Certainly, the Occupy movement of 2011-2012 in America was an early sign of this. It was a left-populist movement mainly composed of young people, born into the middle class. Students, interns, and the newly-unemployed laid off constituted the vanguard of an ostensibly anarchist movement, making socialist demands, by virtue of an a priori popular investiture (‘We are the People, We are the 99%!’). The political legacy of Occupy is nurturing the current mass resistance to the Trump administration. Under Franklin D. Roosevelt, it was workers, intellectuals, artists moving to the left of the political spectrum, and since Obama it’s been the precarious young who have become impatiently radical, evidenced in the popularity of the Bernie Sanders’ campaign, and the incredible growth of the Black Lives Matter and Pink Tide movements. With Trump attacking immigrants and women, the issue of the radicalization of the middle class has a renewed political urgency, if resistance to fascist national populism is to prevail in the land of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln.

## Of Generation and Class

The worldwide protests of 1968 was, in my opinion, a case of generation against class.[[34]](#footnote-34) In France, it was the anarchist and Maoist students pushing for revolution, while the working-class pushed for reform under the aegis of the French communist party (PCF); in America, it was SDS, hippies, and Black Panthers seeking to overthrow the system and stop war, while an overwhelmingly patriotic, unionized working-class defended American capitalism because it brought them economic prosperity (it would stop doing so shortly after). In both cases, it was ‘working-class friendly’ reform that prevailed in the short-term, bringing wage increases, and more generous welfare provisions. In the long term, however, it was the generational aspect of 1968 that won; the baby boomers soon discarded leftism to embrace the market, create new digital industries, impose new sex-and gender-norms, and in doing so, ended up replacing previous paternalistic elites.

The 68ers themselves didn't lose much sleep at witnessing the defeat of the socialist leaning working-class. Neoliberalism provided plenty of room to fulfill their personal and generational aspirations. Some of them, of the ilk of Steve Jobs and Bill Gates, went on to become billionaires, or join the ranks of the political class (countless former 1968 revolutionaries are now party officials and Eurocrats). Anti-Vietnam protesters morphed into upwardly mobile yuppies, as baby boomers started entering the establishment. They rode the wave of the information and media revolution they had created, and became rich and influential in the process. The precariat is made up of those that came after them, and weren’t nearly as lucky.

## The Making of the Precarious Class

Following E.P. Thompson and Stuart Hall,[[35]](#footnote-35) we have to ask where the precariat derives from, how its associated subculture(s) counters domination, and how this counterculture potentially creates a new space for a form of hegemony. The precariat is an urban, multicultural, rebellious class. It is strongly influenced by pop subcultures (punk, techno, reggae, and hip-hop, essentially), the cyberpunk culture of the 90s, and the free media and hacker movements of the 00s. A whole generation of uprooted cosmopolitans came together in squats, raves, and street parades, determined to change the world by reclaiming the streets and producing political art. Instinctively, the early precariat detested racism and forged multicultural bonds of friendship and solidarity, prescient examples being the SOS Racisme movement, and Le Mouvement de l’Immigration et des Banlieues (MIB), which were active in France during the 80s and 90s.

The politicization of the precariat has occurred over three seminal issues: the politics of partying, the fight against fascism and racism, and more recently, youth unemployment and the accompanying protests against corrupt elites engendering this.

Spain is a test case for considering reactions to these three issues. The country has, traditionally, had a higher rate of youth unemployment than the rest of the Eurozone. In the 80s, the la movida in Barcelona and Madrid attracted youngsters from all over Europe. In the 90s, Valencia and Ibiza became the world capitals of euphoric house music. In the 00s, as Spain’s youth dispatched the pro-Bush Aznar government by sending millions of text messages denouncing him as a liar, the country boomed. Floating on a real estate bubble, the mid-00s saw Socialist Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero legalizing gay marriage, as well as legislation protecting women from domestic abuse: it seemed as if Almodovar had gone to power.

Unfortunately, this wave of progress didn’t last. When the global credit crunch started hitting the Spanish economy, young Spaniards felt doubly betrayed. Their aging country seemed to only offer joblessness and evictions, while bankers were still getting fat off corrupt practices. In 2011-2012, precarious Spanish youth led millions to occupy the central squares of cities across the country. The Indignados were Europe’s most powerful movement in 2011, the year of global revolution. Although Zapatero’s nemesis, the current Prime Minister – conservative catholic Mariano Rajoy – was not thrown out of power; the political legitimacy of the post-Franco establishment was gone forever. The precariat in charge of organizing the acampadas, however, succeeded in reclaiming democratic sovereignty for the people of Spain. The movement against mortgage evictions became more powerful than labor unions under the charismatic leadership of Ada Colau, who was then elected mayor of Barcelona in 2015. Her election was, to date, the most significant political victory of any achieved by the anarcho-populist movements that shook the world in the 10s. Since then, Spain's major political developments have centered around the actions of Podemos, a political party born during the elections of 2014. Under the leadership of former tuta bianca(white overall)[[36]](#footnote-36) Pablo Iglesias, and Laclauian ideologue Inigo Errejon. This party, comprised of former Indignados, could soon become the second largest in Spain, dethroning the socialist party of their majority.

The proletariat that developed over the course of first two industrial revolutions built tight, mostly male, communities centered around working-class solidarity in industrial towns and cities. These communities, which successfully existed as lived acts of resistance for most of the 20th century, were shattered by the deindustrialization engineered by monetarist policies in the early 80s. From the aftermath of this shattering, the precariat coalesced amidst the relentless drive of neoliberalism toward individualization. The trend toward singlehood in urban and suburban environments, or uneasy communal living among underpaid temps, made community much harder to achieve for young precarious workers. However, the internet (chat rooms, mailing lists, social media platforms, etc.) acted as a substitute for traditional working-class milieux (the factory, the bar, the sport stadium, etc.) in the age of postindustrial labor. Dilapidated neighborhoods in neglected areas of cities connected to the global network of financial and informational transactions acted as a magnet for the multicultural precariat. Rich in ideas and short on cash, they have flocked to major world cities, their only capital a university degree and a PC with internet access. In urban areas on the verge of gentrification (where, during periods of unprecedented economic growth, the so-called creative class of affluent bohemians were to be found), young knowledge, culture, and service workers have coalesced informally, often around localized non-market or anti-market economies. Pertinent examples of these informal economies include squats, social centers, communal spaces with free-wifi, food and clothing exchanges, freegan food distribution networks, civil rights associations, and environmental activism hubs. Bushwick, Hackney, Kreuzberg, Ixelles, and Isola: these are the hubs in which the precariat lives and acts in New York, London, Berlin, Brussels, and Milan.

These multiethnic neighborhoods are spaces of interaction and aggregation, often catalyzing protest movements against precarity, evictions, urban speculation, and ecological degradation, acting in solidarity with migrants, and in opposition to fascists and xenophobes, whose influence has been steadily growing since the Great Recession. The precariat acts as the general intellect in the social factory of information, goods, and needs, brought about in the recent transition from Fordism to Jobsism. It raises claims, and formulates demands to improve its own welfare, as well as that of society in general. It is at the forefront of anti-racist movements, present at the front of demonstrations fighting austerity and corrupt politicians, and does not shy away from rioting when police are too many, and the unemployed too angry. Clashes with the police always garner media attention and keep pressure on established power, but what is really at hand is something under-reported: the emergence of a social economy based on peer production and open technology; software, services, culture, and entertainment. Of course, just like the dot-org activism of yore, the contemporary sharing economy has already been colonized by a digital oligarchy. Whilst the realm of non-profit platforms is steadily expanding (both online and offline), the ubiquity of smartphones maintains the dominance of market logic with regards to online interactions. Nevertheless, a new social economy based on mutuality and reciprocity, respect for all genders, and the environment is clearly emerging, and municipalities and corporations are grappling with both citizens and consumers beginning to assert their power.

## Postcapitalism and Anti-capitalism

Journalist Paul Mason[[37]](#footnote-37) sees in this burgeoning third sector as evidence that the transition toward postcapitalism has already begun. He envisages the world of postcapitalism as a not-too-distant situation in which the current abundance of both informational and financial wealth is distributed more equally across the whole of society. Capitalist corporations, in this world, have gone the way of feudal castles, and are simply relics of a distant past. Although Mason doesn’t explicitly say it, it is the sharing economy – which is supported by the post-working-class precariat alone – that will dissolve the exploitative capitalist power relations present in contemporary labor and goods markets. Giuseppe Allegri and Roberto Ciccarelli label this new class as the Fifth Estate (succeeding the bourgeoisie and the proletariat), but reduce it unconvincingly to the world of self-employed professionals and freelancers. What Standing and Mason treat too broadly, they treat too narrowly. All these authors seem to hint at an organic growth in the size and reach of the social economy, thinking that a solidaristic polity will emerge, built around mutuality. However, this growth (and the polity that comes with it) is not something that we can take for granted now the precariat has been put on the defensive by the Trumpian turn.

Mason, in spite of his Trotskyist politics (suggesting a penchant for permanent revolution), implies that capitalism will die of natural causes. However, that seems unlikely at best: capital is about power over people, and only struggle and counter-hegemonic actions can begin to dislodge its current economic, political, and social stranglehold. Both the reversal of neoliberal inequality, and the defeat of nationalist-populism, require huge conflicts to take place involving massive, populist mobilization in order to be achieved. Bear in mind that these are necessary merely to abolish neoliberalism, not capitalism wholesale. Unfortunately for my anti-capitalist persuasion, I don’t think postcapitalism is on the cards in the post-Great Recession bifurcation. Those alternatives currently available consist of a choice between reform and reaction, not between reform and revolution. What the precariat can achieve, via its struggles and revolutions, is the final defeat of neoliberalism and petro-capitalism, and a return to progressive social and economic policy making. It cannot overthrow capitalism itself. It can bury neoliberalism, and it will. In order to do that, precariat-led resistance will have to win against the reactionary forces currently spreading across Europe and America, forces which stand an equal chance of prevailing in the chaos created by the crisis of neoliberalism. In a historical bifurcation, ideology is what determines which version of regulation (of capitalism) will emerge out of global strife and war. After World War Two, both the welfare state and social democracy emerged as responses to the devastating memories of Great Depression and war. Now, in the wake of the Great Recession and in the face of burgeoning ecological crisis, informational democracy and ecological populism should be used to redefine the boundaries between the individual and the market, as well as those between the social economy, private enterprises, and the public sector.

1. ‘Precarity’ is a word of everyday usage in Romance languages (precariedadin Spanish, precariedade in Portuguese, précaritéin French, and precarietà in Italian), that has become increasingly common in media and popular discourse in a number of countries in the European Union over the last two decades. Its transfer to the English language as precarity occurred at the start of millennium, and began to appear across the board, from European Union documents to pan-European, anti-globalization marches and protests. The EuroMayDay movement, which had a strong German component, also fostered the use of Prekariatin political and theoretical pamphlets in Germany, Austria, and German-speaking Switzerland. As for France, précariathas not really caught on, but précaires and précarité have been objects of academic investigation, journalistic discussion, and activism, for at least twenty years. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ‘The American Precariat’, New York Times*,* 10 February 2014,https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/11/opinion/brooks-the-american-precariat.html?\_r=1 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Stephven Shukaitis, ‘Recomposing precarity: Notes on the laboured politics of class composition’, Ephemera, http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/recomposing-precarity-notes-laboured-politics-class-composition [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ‘Huge survey reveals seven social classes in UK’, BBC News*,* 13 April 2013,

   http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-22007058; ‘Social Class in the 21st Century by Mike Savage review’, The Guardian, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/13/social-class-21st-century-mike-savage-review [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In fact, the precariat is an ill-defined concept and this book intends to pay remedy to that. Standing includes all those who are underpaid and/or economically insecure, and thus at risk of downward social mobility. The precariat is dangerous, he argues, not because it’s composed of an underclass ready to loot and riot, but because the precariat could veer to the right by becoming nativistic. His notion seems more an analogue of the right-leaning petty bourgeoisie in Marx (18 Brumaire) and Poulantzas (Fascism and Dictatorship), than a description of the normally left-leaning generation of Millennials and Generation Z. He has written that the precariat is both a major resource for the renewal of the left, but also that it is feeding reactionary populism. The New Left Review has dismissed the concept out of hand, quoting the remarks I made in a video interview: ‘The precariat: is it a social subject, a social stratum, a class, a category, a cohort, a generational concept—who cares?’ In that context, I simply meant that loose theory didn’t prevent the precariat from acting out its grievances: definition could wait, activism could not. Even if this work takes a different route to the precarious question, Standing’s book does not deserve haughty rebuff, because the notion of the precariat as a class-in-the-making is to be welcomed and should be widely embraced by social research. Standing is right, however, in arguing that only by building a practical utopia for the precariat can democracy recover and thrive again. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Franco Berardi (aka ‘Bifo’) and other autonomous writers speak of precariand cognitari: of average precarious workers and cognitive precarious workers. See Franco Berardi, La fabbrica dell'infelicità: New economy e movimento del cognitariato, Rome: Derive Approdi, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. ‘Zizek: Electing Trump ‘Will Shake Up’ the System’, Al Jazeera, 16 November 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/upfront/2016/11/zizek-electing-trump-shake-system-161116062713933.html. See also his BBC interview on YouTube: https://youtu.be/2ZUCemb2plE. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Invisible Committee, The Coming Insurrection*,* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009; To Our Friends, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015; [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Mutatis mutandis, this also occurred in 1968, with Pompidou in France and Nixon in the US ending up being the main short-term political beneficiaries of seismic student protests. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A record number of people didn't vote (12 million) or voted blank (4 million) in the second round, a position expressed in the streets by the slogan: ‘Ni Le Pen, Ni Macron, Ni Nation, Ni Patron’ (Neither Le Pen nor Macron, neither Nation nor Boss). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Comparative data from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), https://data.oecd.org/emp/employment-rate.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Andrew Ross, Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times, New York: University Press, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. OECD, Employment Outlook, Labor Force Statistics and Standardized Unemployment Rates. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Erin Hatton, ‘The Rise of the Permanent Temp Economy’, New York Times*,* 26 June 2013, https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/01/26/the-rise-of-the-permanent-temp-economy/?\_r=0. See also “Feeling the 'Pressure All the Time' on Europe's Treadmill of Temporary Work”, New York Times, 9 February 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/09/business/europe-jobs-economy-youth-unemployment-millenials.html [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Scholz, Uberworked and Underpaid. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Kirsty Major, ‘Uber's happy go lucky drivers never existed - it was exploitation from the start’, 28 October 2016, The Independent, http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/uber-drivers-employment-tribunal-never-existed-a7385691.html; Homa Khaleeli, ‘The Truth about Working for Deliveroo and the On-Demand Economy’, 15 June 2016, The Guardian, https://www.theguardian.com/money/2016/jun/15/he-truth-about-working-for-deliveroo-uber-and-the-on-demand-economy; Cara McGoogan ‘Tribunal to rule on Deliveroo riders’ employment status’, 6 March 2017, The Telegraph,

    http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2017/03/06/tribunal-rule-deliveroo-riders-employment-status/ [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Greg Bensinger, ‘Uber Gears Up to Block Bid to Form a Union in Seattle’, 11 March 2017, Wall Street Journal, https://www.wsj.com/articles/uber-gears-up-to-block-bid-to-form-a-union-in-seattle-1489237201 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. ‘Generation i’, Economist*,* 26 September 2014, http://www.economist.com/news/international/21615612-temporary-unregulated-and-often-unpaid-internship-has-become-route [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The term McJob was first popularized by Douglas Coupland in Generation X, his first novel, published in 1991 and set in L.A. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. SMart is a non-profit organization based in Belgium. It helps those who are self-employed and work in creative industries across several EU countries with potentially problematic issues such as getting paid, and various other occupational pitfalls, like invoicing. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See the elegantly written and argued Patrick Cingolani,Révolutions précaires*,* Paris: La Découverte*,* 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume I: The Process of Capitalist Production, 1867. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Manuel Castells, The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture Volume 1, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. An insurgency that Autonomists had predicted would occur (much to the surprise of traditional communist and socialist parties), and came in the form of an extensive wildcat strike coupled with union demands, rendering factories unmanageable for a decade. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. This is what climate activist George Monbiot argues in his dismissal of a Keynesian way out of the current crisis of capitalism. Theoretically, a carbon-neutral form of capitalist accumulation can exist, mitigating this issue, and will be discussed in the final chapter of this text. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Although this divide is being bridged by the app economy, that mixes geo-location technology with personal services performed by digital labor. When everybody owns a smartphone, everybody is a digital worker, independent from their occupation or education. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Standing, The Precariat*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Judith Butler, Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence, London: Verso, 2004. See also Isabell Lorie, State of Insecurity: Governing the Precarious, London: Verso, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Like anyone with an interest in social science, I am indebted to Michael Mann’s fundamental quadrilogy The Sources of Social Power, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986-2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Max Weber, Economy and Society, Vol. 2, University of California Press, 1928. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Something which Joseph Schumpeter abhorred – it attributed the war-mongering bent of German capitalism to its unholy alliance with Prussian and later Nazi elites; liberalism had to eschew any intermingling with nationalism for capitalism to be peaceful, and the international economy unperturbed. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Antonio Gramsci, Quaderni del carcere, Torino: Einaudi, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See Michael Mann, Sources of Social Power: Volume 2, The Rise of Classes and Nation States, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man*,* Boston: Beacon Press, 1964. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working-class, London: Penguin 2013, and Stuart Hall, Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain, London: Routledge, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Term referring to Negrian anti-globalization protesters, who wore white overalls in Genoa and other early 00s counter-summits. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Paul Mason, PostCapitalism: A Guide to Our Future, London: Penguin, 2016. Although I hereby highlight my differences with Mason, I was so struck in 2012 by his book proposal read on his agent’s Kindle at the Frankfurt Book Fair, that I immediately pre-empted the Italian translation rights. When the book was finally published in Italian in 2016, my job was no longer there. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)