THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Freedom In and Out of Work
Platforms, Precarity, and the Democratization of Work

Thijs Keulen

PhD Politics
University of Edinburgh
2023

Lay summary

This project explores and defends a seemingly simple proposition: if democracy is to be radical, the democratization of work should be a priority. Two contrasting observations motivate this exploration. The first is that a logic of work has extended into more and more areas of life while the place of formal employment has become increasingly precarious. Low pay, long hours and insecure working arrangements are now hallmarks of otherwise wealthy societies. The second is that despite this development, and despite resurging interest in some quarters of democratic theory, work is relatively neglected as a concern within much contemporary democratic theory. This neglect is all the more puzzling because of the contradiction between democratic ideals of equality and freedom that are shared, albeit in different ways, within this literature, and the many forms of domination people face in their working life and through the latter's slide into precarity. Therefore, this project explores contemporary democratic theory for, 1) the critical perspectives it can offer on what is wrong with much work today, and 2) the ideals it harbors that could enable the charting of different, more emancipatory ways of organizing work and economic decision-making. This exploration is guided by listening to the experiences and critiques of on-demand couriers working in the UK gig-economy. That is, I draw on original qualitative research carried out in the form of in-depth interviews with members of the independent grassroots union the Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB), specifically those of the Couriers and Logistics branch (C&L) who work for platform companies such as UberEATS, Deliveroo, or JustEat. These interviews sensitize me as a theorist to the problems and struggles these precarious workers face and attune me those social relations that stand in need of democratization.

Throughout, I make several, related key arguments. Firstly, a form of workplace democracy in which workers have a controlling say over their labour process is justified not only for the relations of domination it averts, but also intrinsically; it affirms and recognizes workers' equality as agents and is constitutive of their effective capacity for freedom. Secondly, however, I argue that work cannot be democratized by focusing only on the level of the workplace, even if this is a crucial component. This does not address the coercion of wage-labour and excludes the interests of other constituents affected by a firm's decisions. As such, I explore post-work proposals for a Universal Basic Income (UBI) and collective working-time reduction (WTR) on the one hand, and models of democratic economic planning on the other. I argue that from the perspective of democracy as a social ideal post-work proposals are crucial, but not sufficient for the democratization of work. That is, while proposals for freedom *from* work provide vital material conditions for individual freedom, I argue that it is more vital to reorganize production in a way that enables citizens to have a democratic voice in their workplace and the purpose of the economic environment in which the latter is embedded.

Abstract

This project explores and defends a seemingly simple proposition: if democracy is to be radical, the democratization of work should be a priority. Two contrasting observations motivate this exploration. The first is that a logic of work has extended into more and more areas of life while the place of formal employment has become increasingly precarious. Low pay, long hours and insecure working arrangements are now hallmarks of otherwise wealthy societies. The second is that despite this development, and despite resurging interest in some quarters of democratic theory, work is relatively neglected as a concern within much contemporary democratic theory. As such, this project explores 1) the conceptual resources contemporary democratic theory offers for a normative understanding of relationships of power connected to contemporary forms of work, and 2) its potential for envisioning a more emancipated organization of work. The methodological approach is one of 'grounded normative theory', with a commitment to tie in political theorizing with existing social critiques. As such, throughout the thesis I draw on original qualitative research carried out in the form of in-depth interviews with members of the grassroots union the Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB) who work as on-demand couriers in the platform economy.

This thesis advances three specific contributions. The first is a methodological critique that ties in with the approach just outlined. Namely, that the most common approaches to democratic theorizing (agonist and deliberative) suffer from a 'socially weightless' style of thought that, in different ways, has informed a neglect to think about work and the economy as important sites to be democratized. Secondly, and more positively, this thesis contributes to contemporary democratic theory by bringing the latter's insights on freedom, equality, and agency in conversation with issues such as trade union organizing and resistance, conceptions of workplace democracy, post-work proposals for freedom *from* work, and models of a democratic economy. Lastly, a central argument that the thesis advances is that to democratize work implies democratizing the economy. For work to be democratic, it needs to be decommodified, serve deliberatively constituted social interests, while retaining worker autonomy at the level of the workplace.

Acknowledgements

There are many people who have made this project possible, who nurtured it and made it grow along the way. I would like to begin by thanking my parents, Jan Keulen and Annemarie Heyn-Papousek, for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout the project. In many ways, this project wouldn't have been possible without your support. I also thank my brother, Douwe Keulen. While our disagreements are plenty, our long discussions have been an antidote against complacency.

This project would not have been the same without my supervisors Mihaela Mihai and Jonathan Hearn. Their dedication to and passion for careful, curious, and meaningful research has shaped the kind of project this has become and the kind of researcher I am now. I want to especially thank Mihaela for her intellectual generosity, commitment, and endless encouragement. It has given me the courage to start this project and the faith to see it through.

A big thanks to the IWGB's couriers and logistics branch, to all the couriers, trade union organizers and activists who spoke to me about their work, their lives, and their hopes for the future. I want to thank Laura Wormington in particular, who facilitated my participation in the life of the branch and whose help getting me in touch with its members was invaluable.

I've been very lucky to have found myself writing within a wonderful community of researchers and political theorists in Edinburgh who have made me feel at home. The events organized by CRITIQUE, the Center for Ethics and Critical Thought, the political theory reading group and the Political Theory Research Group seminars have been vital sources of inspiration and intellectual community. I'm especially grateful for the critical discussion and careful feedback given on parts of this project that I presented at the research group seminars.

Thanks also to Dan Flattery, Topi Kangas, Richie Pulido, and Liam Dempsey for all the music we've made throughout the past years and for the innumerable discussions on topics near and far to this project. I would like to think their creativity, in music and in life, has bled into the following pages too.

I am more grateful than I know how to say for my friends and loved ones, who are all tangled up in this text in infinitesimal ways. I want to especially thank my dear friend Larissa Nenning for her companionship, laughter, and excitement about ideas. These have made the project, and me, feel full of life. I also want to give special thanks to Sasha Mesarovich, Max Rozenburg, and Aerin Lai, whose friendship, wit, and willingness to discuss just about anything have been a steady source of levity, inspiration, and support. Finally, I am deeply grateful to Katharina Hunfeld for her love, devotion, and faith in me, which have shaped this project, and myself, in ways beyond count. My gratitude further goes out to Carlos Hernan, Grace Garland, Aistė Pagirenaite, Sinan Jabban, Cat Wayland, Lukas Slothuus, Hollie Reid, Jill Poeggel, Helge Petersen, Tatiana Cary, Robin Goudsmit, Bálint Horvath, Mark de Hoop, Liv Aabye, Gydo Keijzer, Vincent van Delden, Jacob Cain, Joseph Conrad, Giorgia Kerr and Jenny Zhang.

Contents

Introduction: Work and the Double Life of Democracy

Democracy's politics is the creation of those who must work, who cannot hire proxies to promote their interests, and for whom participation, as distinguished from voting, is necessarily a sacrifice.
(Wolin, 2004, p. 602)

In 1970 Theodor Adorno, cofounder of the Frankfurt School of critical theory wrote a short essay called 'Free Time' in which he questioned the extent to which workers are truly free and autonomous outside of work. With his trademark critical pessimism Adorno argued that the category of free time is in fact 'shackled to its opposite', waged labour. The full-time worker, working shifts of eight hours a day, five days a week, experiences his free time as series of pockets, which are meant for recuperation and offer only limited scope for any more substantial self-chosen activities other than either escapist consumption or compensatory hobbies. The point Adorno is trying to make is not that these activities are in themselves deplorable, but that the worker has been deprived of the time and energy to choose otherwise.

Adorno's essay was most certainly a product of its time. However, his point about free time as a continuation of work seems to only have grown in pertinence in the world of today. As the place of formal employment has become increasingly precarious over the past decades, a logic of work has seeped into ever more regions of 'free time'. To the worry of spending one's free time merely recuperating from work is added the pressure of turning that time into a side hustle in order to make ends meet. The anticipation of such recuperation has been turned into an uncertain future, and the use of one's own time for whatever one wants has become shot through with feelings of guilt or anxiety about not doing something 'productive'. In other words, the neoliberal transformation of working life that took place after Adorno penned his essay has rendered life for many more precarious through the casualization of employment relations, attrition of social protection, loss of power of organized labour, and effective cuts to real wages (Benanav, 2020; Harvey, 2005; Kalleberg, 2018). As such, rather than having arrived at John Maynard Keynes' (2010) predicted future of a fifteen-hour working week, the opposite seems to have taken place: low pay, long hours and insecure working arrangements are now hallmarks of otherwise wealthy societies (Kalleberg, 2018; McCallum, 2020).

The kind of unfreedom inside and outside of work many people face in these conditions strikes a dissonant note in relation to an ethos of democracy embraced, at least nominally, in many of the societies in which such a neoliberal transformation has struck roots. While such an ethos prescribes an equal entitlement of each individual to have their voice heard in collective decision-making, even if mostly through the periodical election of representatives, this ethos does not extend to the workplace. Under capitalism, asset-poor workers are coerced into work by needing to sell their labour-power for a living, while at work they have little to no say concerning decisions that affect them directly. This is an odd contradiction, to say the least, considering the amount of time and energy the average citizen is expected to devote to work;

even more so if one takes into account the time training, preparing, searching, and recuperating from work. Odder still is the relative neglect of questions concerning economic domination or labour relations within some of the most influential strands of the field of knowledge production that has come to be known as democratic theory. Since the mid 80's, around the same time that the structural reach and power of neoliberal capitalism was remorselessly expanding, this field became preoccupied with a set of different concerns. The dominance of deliberative democracy as an ideal of, and approach to democratic theorizing turned scholars' attention to questions of legitimacy, pluralism, and procedures for democratic decision-making (see Floridia, 2017). On the other hand, radical and agonistic democrats that gained prominence in this field turned to a host of questions around division and exclusion in the body politic and the ineliminable character of conflict, which unfolded on an ontological level of theorizing that steered clear of any positive proposals for transforming the workplace or economic relations. As such, despite the inimical relationship between democratic ideals of equality and freedom and the domination many people face at and through their work, these influential strands of democratic theory have engaged very little directly with questions about democratizing work or economic relations.[1]

This thesis revolves around this inimical relationship between democratic ideals and the many forms of domination people face in their working life and through the latter's slide into precarity. I explore the ways in which democratic-theoretic ideals of equality, freedom, and agency can provide not only a critical understanding of what is wrong with such relationships of domination, but also offer a distinct political imaginary that enables the charting of different, more emancipatory ways of organizing work and economic decision-making. Put differently, how might the conceptual resources offered by contemporary democratic theory enable the forging of a critical perspective on the transformation of work within contemporary capitalism, and open up political imaginaries for a more emancipatory transformation? This exploration is guided not only by an analysis of structural trends that shape contemporary work and precarity (chapter one), but in great part by listening to the experiences and critiques of on-demand couriers working in the UK gig-economy. That is, I draw on original qualitative research carried out in the form of in-depth interviews with members of the independent grassroots union the Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB), specifically those of the Couriers and Logistics branch (C&L) who work for platform companies such as UberEATS, Deliveroo, or JustEat. In many ways, the platform-mediated gig-work that these couriers do is symbolic for the way in which work is changing more broadly. It is contingent, piecemeal work with highly variable hours and a lack of employment protection. Just like work in many other sectors, it is work that is often unstable and temporary, and where the appeal to flexibility for workers comes hand-in-hand with low pay and precarity (see also Woodcock & Graham, 2020).

[1] I am here only highlighting the relative neglect of questions of workplace or economic democracy within the most influential strands of democratic theory. There are of course important exceptions. In the deliberative democratic field, Joshua Cohen published an influential article on the economic basis of deliberative democracy (Cohen, 1989) and Jane Mansbridge has taken a labour-managed firm as a central case study in her *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (1989). Radical democrats (which is a broad and contested term, to be sure) such as Jacques Rancière, William E Connolly, Sheldon Wolin, Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau and Alain Badiou all provide critiques of capitalism and its relationship to democracy, but similarly do not centre the democratization of work in their writings (even though Rancière has been occupied with the relationship between democracy, politics and labour throughout his oeuvre). Recently there has been a resurgence of interest around workplace democracy in some quarters of the field: see Herzog (2019) for a good overview.

It is by listening to the IWGB's couriers' accounts and critiques of their experiences at work and bringing these into conversation with normative ideals of equality, freedom, and agency as found in parts of democratic-theoretic literature that I explore the latter's potential and limitations for critically apprehending what is wrong about these experiences and for offering positive proposals that could address these concerns. Taking these workers' experiences as starting points for theorizing is important for many reasons, of which I wish to highlight two at this point. Firstly, I maintain with thinkers such as Robin Celikates and Theodor Adorno that for theory to retain a critical bite, it needs to stay alive to the disclosing element of negative social experiences as told by actors engaged in particular struggles themselves (Adorno, 2004, pp. 17-18; Celikates, 2018). Being attentive to the IWGB's courier's experiences of their work and their efforts to resist its dominating aspects then offers a disclosing form of critique about what is wrong about the way their work is organized that points towards the possibility of change. Secondly, engaging with the IWGB's courier's experiences, critiques and justifications enables the range of insights, issues, and normative concerns to be broadened to go beyond the confines of the theoretical literature. That is, instead of starting from democratic theory as a body of literature to derive a set of normative or conceptual issues regarding work, the themes and issues discussed throughout the project are grounded in an engagement with the IWGB's couriers' experiences.

By tying in democratic-theoretic insights on equality, freedom, and agency with the accounts and critiques of on-demand couriers, this thesis offers an exploration of the ways such a dialogue can articulate perspectives and proposals for more emancipatory forms of organizing work. As this exploration is guided by a dialogical process between the themes that arose through an engagement with the IWGB's couriers and the democratic theories that stood out as relevant given these themes, some comment about what this thesis does *not* do might help to manage expectations. This thesis gives neither a systematic evaluation of different models of democratic theory and their insights into democratizing work, nor does it offer a conception of democratizing work according to one particular model of democratic theory. Rather than having made the decision which democratic theories to draw on before engaging with the interviewed couriers, these were chosen guided by the latter's experiences and critiques. This means that the following chapters tread a more exploratory path than would have otherwise been the case. What the thesis then offers is a critical conversation between the IWGB's couriers' understanding of their own work and struggles, which are embedded within a broader transformation of work, and conceptions of equality, freedom and agency as found in a variety of contemporary democratic theory, with an eye towards possibilities and directions for change.

In doing so this thesis makes three kinds of contributions: methodological, critical, and positive. Methodologically, this thesis contributes to ongoing debates about ways of 'doing' democratic theory that ties in which social actors' accounts and critiques of their own practices. In chapter two, I develop a methodological approach for theorizing with a 'democratic sensibility'. Building on work by Robin Celikates, Patricia Hill-Collins, and Theodor Adorno, such a sensibility incorporates a principle of epistemic equality, a presupposition of and aim towards autonomy, and an attentiveness to existing practices of justification and critique. I thus argue

for a way of doing democratic theory that incorporates principles internal to the idea of democracy itself: equality and autonomy. While the articulation of this approach is concentrated for a great part on the question of the relationship between the interviews I conducted and the theories drawn on, it has broader methodological implications for the way in which to 'do' democratic theory. Adopting a democratic sensibility is not only a matter of drawing a relationship between theory and practice that is consistent with a democratic ethos, but also one of averting a 'socially weightless' kind of theorizing and attuning oneself to pressing issues of democratic concern that are outwith the extant literature, voiced by actors who are engaged in struggles against forms of domination or subjugation.

This points to the first critical argument that emerges throughout the thesis, which is that the most common approaches to democratic theorizing (agonist and deliberative) suffer from a 'socially weightless' (Bourdieu, 2000; McNay, 2014) style of thought that, in different ways, has informed the neglect to think about work and the economy as important sites to be democratized. That is, a style of theorizing that abstracts away from social reality in a manner which organizes certain problems out of the frame. The ontological style of theorizing favoured by agonists such as Chantal Mouffe, and deliberative democrats' exclusive normative focus on issues of legitimacy and communication have generally deterred these strands of thought from thinking about democratizing work in a sustained manner. As I will argue, this is the case despite the relevance that the relations of domination associated with the capitalist workplace and economy hold for these approaches, and the insights they offer for the democratisation of these relations. By paying close attention to the forms of domination on-demand couriers face and the developments of contemporary capitalism these are enmeshed in, this thesis emphasizes the importance of centring work and economic relations in democratic theory, while offering an exemplar of a way of doing democratic theory that is more firmly grounded in an analysis of the social world and existing actors' accounts and critiques of it.

The second critical insight that arises throughout the thesis is that any attempt to democratize work will run up against fundamental questions about democratizing the economy, especially in the context of a persistent trend towards underemployment. That is, the forms of domination faced by couriers in the gig-economy, and by workers more generally, cannot be addressed by democratizing work at the level of the firm only, even though this is a crucial component. Not only does this not sufficiently address more structural forms of domination that are particularly characteristic of precarious work, democratizing work at the level of the firm opens up a democratic dilemma insofar as it excludes the interests of other constituents affected by a firm's decisions. I thus consider two sets of proposals that are particularly relevant in the context of precarious work and considering the desire for a 'flexibility without precarity' consistently brought up by the interviewed couriers, namely post-work proposals for a universal basic income (UBI) and collective working-time reduction (WTR), as well as conceptions of democratic economic planning. I argue that from the perspective of democracy as a social ideal post-work proposals are crucial, but not sufficient for the democratization of work. That is, while proposals for freedom *from* work provide vital material conditions for individual self-governance, these must be accompanied by pathways that enable citizens to have a democratic voice in their workplace and the purpose of the economic environment in which the latter is embedded.

The other side of this critical argument is a positive defence of workplace and economic democracy which rests on the normative conceptions of equality, freedom and agency that gradually emerge throughout the coming chapters. To be sure, these norms should not be taken as a-historical or a priori, essential truths. They are articulated as I engage with the different themes and issues around work and tune my ear to the IWGB's couriers' experiences and critiques. Their validity is wound up with the present historical conjuncture, of which I offer an interpretation in chapter one, and with the extent to which they have the capacity to critically capture the negative social experiences of existing actors. Most importantly, I draw on authors such as Hannah Arendt (1958), Carol Gould (1988), Robin Celikates (2014) and Christian Rostbøll (2015) to defend the importance of a positive conception of freedom which holds an intrinsic relation to democratic participation. Exploring the forms of power and domination on-demand couriers face in the gig-economy, I argue that democratic participation in collective forms of self-rule secures not only the continued non-domination of workers but is also a condition for the establishment of relations of equality as well as for the development and exercise of workers' capacities for effective agency. Put differently, the democratic kind of freedom I articulate requires not only the absence of domination for workers, but also the opportunity to participate in forms of collective self-rule in the economy: to have an equal say over the conditions of one's work and the decisions that one is affected by. This argument stems not only from a concern with paternalism and non-domination but is rooted in an argument about agency and equality gleaned from Carol Gould. Because human beings are characterized by their capacity for agency, and are in this sense equal agents, Gould's argument is that they have not only a *prima facie* right to the equal conditions for the exercise of this agency, but also have an equal right to participate in decision-making processes concerning common activities in which they take part (1988, p. 84). In other words, where activity is social, it is not enough to have the material conditions to do what one likes on an individual level: one should also have an equal opportunity to participate in collective self-rule.

These interrelated norms of freedom, agency and equality, which develop over the following pages, lead me to argue that the democratization of work is an end in itself. Being able to participate in the management of one's own workplace is a recognition and affirmation of one's equality as an agent to one's co-workers, is a key condition for the effective exercise of one's agency at work, as well as for the development for that agency. A form of workplace democracy in which workers have a controlling say is thus justified for these intrinsic reasons, as well as for reasons of non-domination and the breaking up of the classed antagonism of interests that pervade capitalist workplaces. Secondly, this positive conception of freedom lends a critical perspective towards the aforementioned proposals for progressive freedom *from* work. I argue that while these proposals would provide material conditions for democratic social relations and expand individuals' capacity for autonomy, they leave the political unfreedom of workers in their workplace largely unaddressed. Most importantly, they do not by themselves extend democratic powers over production and the latter's purpose, which remains dominated by private interests. From a perspective which sees democratic participation in collective self-rule and freedom as intrinsically related, it is not enough to provide the material conditions for individual self-governance. This must be accompanied by pathways that enable citizens to have

a democratic voice in their workplace and the purpose of the economic environment in which the latter is embedded. Chapter six is then dedicated to exploring models of democratic economic planning, particularly Pat Devine's model of negotiated coordination, as a way of realizing such political freedom in the economy. Finally, I argue that his conceptions of social ownership and negotiated coordination as a deliberative democratic process are particularly salient starting points for thinking through how to extend democratic processes of deliberation and decision-making over the economy as a whole, while retaining the vital autonomy of democratized workplaces.

In the rest of this introduction, I will briefly examine the relationship between work and democracy in order to clarify my usage of the terms and to shed some light on their troubled connection. Lastly, I will give a short overview of the structure of the thesis and the main claims of each chapter.

I) Work, Capitalism, and the Double Life of Democracy

'Work' and 'democracy' are terms that are both familiar and everyday, which nonetheless become extremely capacious in their meaning upon closer inspection. Doing justice to charting both of their nuanced and varied meanings would each require a book of its own.[2] In chapter one I explore the way work has been shaped under contemporary capitalism and invested with a range of meanings, so I will not dwell on giving a clear-cut definition at this point. However, for clarity's sake, whenever I am talking about work, I am referring to *capitalist* work, unless specified otherwise. That is, work as it is shaped by and performed through capitalist relations of production in which workers are removed from the means of production and are dependent on exchanging their labour power for a wage, or dependent on someone who does so. As Andrea Komlosy points out, 'work' under these conditions becomes a generalized term that can encompass any gainful or market-oriented activity while also separating such activity from others necessary for survival and reproduction (Komlosy, 2018, p. 21). Historically and currently, this has led to the valorisation of the former over the latter, and thus to the devaluation of reproductive or care work. When I employ the term 'work' to mean work as it is shaped by and performed under capitalism, I do not mean to affirm the value of 'productive' over 'reproductive' work but rather to highlight the specific kind of dependency on the labour market that capitalism inaugurates, which shapes both 'productive' and reproductive work in contradictory ways.[3]

The term 'democracy' suffers from a similar problem. It has been invoked to go to war, to protect a propertied elite from the advances of working-class movements, and is today appealed

[2] See, for example, Andrea Komlosy's *Work: The Last 1000 Years* (2018), and John Keane's *The Life and Death of Democracy* (2009)

[3] Such an understanding of work is then different from phenomenological or metaphysical accounts and should also alert us to the fact that there are more capacious ways of understanding work than that activity which has become valorised for its capacity to contribute to the accumulation of capital.

to by a radicalised right keen to reshape it along ethnic lines. However, democracy's history also entails that of the Diggers, Chartists, Native American confederacies, Suffragettes and the innumerable actions and events of regular people to gain an equal say over the conditions that shape their lives. Just as there is no common agreement on what democracy exactly is, there is no singular history of democracy, but only a multitude of histories. Indeed, as Isakhan and Stockwell argue against the grain of a pervasive, Western account of democracy that tells a grand story of its birth in the 'civilized' West and spread onto a despotic 'East', it would be ironically un-democratic to insist on a static definition and single history of democracy (Isakhan & Stockwell, 2011, pp. 2-16).

As Michael Saward argues however, most if not all conceptions of democracy rely on some idea of political equality – an equality which is either presumed or argued for in terms of an intrinsic quality or capacity shared by all humans (Saward, 1998). Furthermore, claims to equality are not made in a social vacuum but are usually made to contest relations of domination or subjugation: they are claims to a kind of freedom. How to interpret either of these terms more precisely is something I leave open for now, as these ideas will be explored in the following chapters. Rather than giving a definite interpretation of the idea of democracy, what I shall do instead is explore the relationship between work and democracy, particularly as it is expressed in capitalism. This is important not only to show why it is important to explore ideas for the democratization of work, but also to explain the peculiar relationship between work and democracy under capitalism, a relationship which might not be immediately clear. As such, I will give a partial and provisional account of the constitutive role of work in the idea of democracy, and briefly discuss the historical relationship between labour, capitalism and democracy.

To explore the relationship between work and democracy, we might consider an idea common to an understanding of democracy from ancient up until early modern Western political thought. This is the basic insight that democracy denotes not only a certain kind of political rule (that of the 'many'), but also a political form of power with an irreducible social content. What this means can be illuminated by briefly turning to Aristotle's classical discussion of democracy that has so informed the tradition of Western political thought and in which the working citizen plays a central role. I am not drawing on Aristoteles to suggest that his is the only or most legitimate account of democracy, but to exemplify a particularly influential and relevant take on democratic politics that Aristotle, despite (or rather *because* of) his anti-democratic tendencies could not help but acknowledge, namely: that democracy is a politics of those who must labour for a living.

Aristoteles famously considers a democracy that constitution in which 'government is in the hands of a free-born and poor majority', in contrast to an oligarchy in which the 'rich and high-born' rule, being at the same time a minority (Politics, 1290b). What is striking about this conception is the central role that social criteria play – with poverty and lack of title on the one hand, and wealth and high birth on the other. Even more, these social criteria outweigh the numerical criterion, as Aristoteles argues that 'the true difference between them [democracy

and oligarchy] is poverty and wealth' (1279b). Even if the rich were to be a majority ruling a minority of 'free-born' poor, this would be no democracy.

What might be even more decisive is the further social distinction that Aristotle introduces in his discussion of the ideal polis (Politics, 1328a-1329a). In the polis, he argues, just as with any natural compound, there is a difference between those elements that are integral parts and those that are necessary conditions, with the latter's function being to serve the former. The 'necessary conditions' are those who labour to supply the community's necessities, whether they are free men or slaves, while the 'parts' are the men of property able to pursue virtue. The 'necessary' people, those who must labour for a livelihood, whether engaged in the 'mechanic' arts, trade, or agriculture, cannot be citizens according to Aristotle, as they lack the leisure and 'spirit' to engage in politics. Thus, Aristotle erects a particular, anti-democratic ideal of freedom and virtue that shields politics from the poor and labouring multitude. Democracy, after all, is considered by him a 'perversion' of a polity, in which the poor look out only for their own interest and are unable to tend to the common good (1279b).

However, in arguing for this anti-democratic ideal of freedom, what becomes clear is that for Aristotle, the dividing line between democracy and other forms of government is whether 'necessary' people – those who must labour for a living – are to be included in the citizen body. It was the acknowledgement that democracy meant the inclusion of those who otherwise have no part in government and no 'natural' claim to it (high birth, wealth, property or education) that led Aristotle, as well as other ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Protagoras to either do away with the democratic idea of freedom (*eleutheria*), identifying it with license and social disorder, or to constrict it so that it excluded virtually anyone not male, propertied (thus free from the necessity of labour) and educated (Wood, 2016, 480-1). What inspired such anti-democratic sentiments in the ancient philosophers is the idea that those who lack any specific qualifications for the share in political power are equal to those who do possess them, and would so have an equal say in political and legal matters. Against all the distinctions of birth, wealth, property and education that typically extend into political power, democracy is then the attempt of the many to subvert these 'natural' extensions of power and 'translate social weakness into political power' (Wolin, 2018, p. 552). Having none of these qualifications to ground their claim to government, the labouring poor (or those that have no part) have no other recourse than to invoke an egalitarian and universal principle of freedom to press their demands: to be free *from* domination and free *to* have an equal share in political life (Kalyvas, 2019, p. 544). Aristotle recognized this in his *Politics* when he wrote: 'Few men are well off, whereas all have a share in freedom; and it is upon the grounds of *wealth* and *freedom* respectively that the oligarchical and democratic parties lay claim to power' (Politics, 1280a, my italics).

This basic insight, that democracy politicizes and subverts class relations was commonly recognised up until the 19th century in the Anglo-European world (Kalyvas, 2019, pp. 540-1).[4]

[4] For a compact but illuminating discussion on the transformations and transfiguration of the meaning of democracy and usage of the term in France and the United States, see Francis Dupuis-Déri's 'The Political Power of Words: The Birth of Pro-democratic Discourse in the Nineteenth Century in the United States and France' (2004).

In fact, it was this insight which inspired anti-democratic sentiments in the early moderns just as it did for the ancients, exemplified by the historical route taken by most contemporary democracies through a propertied aristocracy asserting active democratic citizenship against monarchical powers to the exclusion of the labouring multitude, women and racialized others (Wood, 2016, p. 447; Therborn, 1977, p. 33). Furthermore, in acknowledgement of democracy's social and class dimension, bourgeois opinion in the nineteenth century Anglo-European world widely held democracy and capitalism to be incompatible (Therborn, 1977, p. 3). How could capitalism, which upholds the rule of property, be compatible with a political project seeking to subvert this power and affirm the equality of the subordinate classes to the propertied?

This is a far cry from today's common usage of the word democracy, cleared as it is from all social content and connotations of class politicisation. Andreas Kalyvas and Pierre Rosanvallon both trace a large ideological inversion in which democracy went from being regarded as an inferior and corrupted form of government, marked by a politicisation of the poor, to being regarded in its liberal capitalist form as the best form of government, and even as the teleological end of history (Kalyvas, 2019, 540; Rosanvallon, 2009). The meaning of democracy was shifted away from the active exercise of popular power and the power of the subordinate classes to the enjoyments of rights, procedural safeguards and the privacy of the individual citizen, and ideologically re-signified as the height of the Western achievement of progress. To explain what makes this paradoxical situation possible, and to understand the relationship between work and democracy in today's liberal, capitalist societies, I will briefly historicize the welding together of democracy with capitalism in the context of Europe. This is not to contribute to the narrative of democracy being solely a Western product, but rather to historically contextualize the entanglement of liberalism, capitalism and democracy that has become hegemonic globally, which has its roots in Europe's historical developments.

The route toward liberal democracy is too long and labyrinthian to be straightforwardly accredited to the rise of capitalism, or any one factor in particular, without being seriously misleading. However, as Göran Therborn notes in his seminal essay *The Rule of Capital and the Rise of Democracy* (1977), there are some tendencies inherent to capitalism that have had, and continue to have, a bearing on the articulation of democracy today. First and foremost, this is the tendency for capitalism to transform class structure, giving birth to both a new stratum of elites – the bourgeoisie – as well as an exploited working class with capacities for organised opposition far greater than those of any previous one (ibid, p. 34; Huber et. al., 1997, p. 148). The development of capitalist relations of production then at first contributed to the formation of propertied democracies, appearing as a constitutional compromise between the old landowning class and the upcoming bourgeoisie, in which a privileged stratum of male elites gained political rights (Therborn, 1977, p. 33; Wood, 2016, p. 447).

However, nowhere has competitive capitalism *on its own* led to the full extension of suffrage and political rights (Therborn, 1977, p. 34;). It has been the struggle of organized labour for political

rights, in conjunction with better working and living conditions, that has been a catalyst for most countries to carry democracy beyond the boundaries of the ruling class (ibid, p. 32; Collier, 1999; Reuschemeyer et. al., 1992).[5] On the other hand, the attainment of democratic rights by the non-propertied masses was also nowhere achieved without external support, and it was typically only through concessions made by sections of the ruling class after a period of resistance to reform that such change came about (Therborn, 1977, pp. 28-32). As such, while this democratisation occurred as a struggle against hegemonic fractions of the bourgeoisie, it was made possible by way of political means and channels provided by the capitalist state (ibid; Huber et. al., pp. 43-9). Thus, as capitalism introduced a basic contradiction between labour and capital that pushed democracy beyond the boundaries of the ruling class, this dialectic between ruling classes and working-class movements unfolded within the framework of the capitalist state, congealing in the form of 'bourgeois' liberal democracy that we know now (Vázquez-Arroyo, 2008, p. 145). This means that while political and civil rights are extended, property relations and socio-economic inequality and exploitation remain intact as capitalism as a mode of production is politically ringfenced.

This goes some way to explaining how it is possible that democracy went from 'perverse' to best government: the extension and deepening of political and civil rights generally arose as a form of class compromise that included the working-class through a system of electoral, parliamentary representation, while keeping capitalist property and production relations intact (Huber et. al., pp. 145-6; Therborn, 1977, p. 31; Wolin, 2004, p. 597). This also brings us to the specificity of liberal, capitalist democracy. While, as we saw, in Aristotle's ancient conception of democracy political and socio-economic freedom were inseparable, in liberal capitalist democracy formal political rights can co-exist without greatly altering class inequality and exploitation (Wood, 2016, p. 435, 463, 488). Socio-economic position ceases to be a formal pre-requisite to citizenship – this is what is ostensibly democratic about capitalist democracy – though the power of the capitalist to appropriate surplus from workers is left untouched, and importantly, fundamental questions about the *purpose* of the economy are beyond the power of democratic deliberation. While decisions about the distribution of social wealth are possible in this configuration, the basic purpose of the production of this wealth (profit) is already decided. Furthermore, what makes this form of democracy possible at all is a characteristic unique to the capitalist mode of production, famously expounded by Karl Marx. This is the singularly abstract, impersonal mode of capitalist exploitation and domination, in which a structural, impersonal form of power replaces the more personal rule of the aristocracy (Marx, 1999). Thus, while the 'rule of capital' needs a state – for both internal and external support and protection – this state does not have to be managed personally by the bourgeoisie as long as it upholds the realm of capitalist civil society (Therborn, 1977, p. 30). This is why, for example, the rule of capital is compatible with a labour government, whereas a feudal aristocracy cannot be governed by a peasant party.

[5] For an excellent historical reconstruction of the role of the socialist movement and working-class politics in the expansion and attainment of democratic freedoms in Europe (as well as their limitations), please see Geoff Eley's *Forging Democracy* (2002) and Reuschemeyer et al.'s *Capitalist Development and Democracy*. Both accounts are generally consonant with Therborn's.

Democracy at present then survives in a form that is compatible with the interests of capital, in which one part of its promise is fulfilled – the extension of political and civil rights and freedoms – while being severed of the other part – the social and economic equality that serves as the basis for the actualisation of political freedoms. Thus, even though all citizens are granted political rights, work continues to be a sphere of social and political unfreedom that – although subject to legal regulations – propagate and perpetuate socio-economic inequality. Again it is Marx who inaugurated this line of critique, as he argued that in such a 'political state (...) man leads a double life, a heavenly life and an earthly one, not only in thought, but in reality, in life itself' (Marx, 1983, pp. 103). As a political being, one is only recognized in such a state as a citizen enjoying abstract political rights, while as a private individual in civil society one needs to sell his labour-power and so becomes the 'football of alien powers' (ibid, pp. 102-103). The enjoyment of abstract rights of equality in liberal democracy is then sardonically likened by Marx to a religious 'heavenly life' endowed with an 'unreal universality' because it both depends on and disavows the unfreedom that is experienced in the 'earthly', secular realm of work and economic relations. For Marx, as long as political freedom is separated from the freedom to participate in collective decision-making in the workplace and over the purpose and direction of the economy, emancipation will remain limited and partial.

While much has of course changed since Marx penned his critique, as we shall see in chapter one, its basic premise still stands today. Workers do not enjoy a democratic voice within their workplaces and the forty past years of neoliberal attrition of social protections has left workers around the world vulnerable to the ebbs and flows of the demand for labour. Furthermore, the pathology that this double life of democracy has led to today is what some call 'post-democracy': the shaping of politics by the interaction between elected representatives and elites that overwhelmingly represent private business interests, and the hollowing out of democratic will-formation by an increasingly professionalized political spectacle between parties that offer only minimally different political visions.[6] The platform companies that the workers interviewed for this project worked with are a troubling emblem of this pathology. For example, in 2022, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists published a series of articles based on a leak of more than 124.000 confidential documents that showed how platform-company Uber secretly lobbied governments, aggressively expanded its market reach by flouting local laws and regulations, and spent billions of dollars towards changing taxi and labour laws, (Davies et al., 2022). In the US alone, Uber spend more than $11.1bn (£9.4bn) on lobbying at federal level between 2014 and 2020 (Duncan, 2022). The company deployed its lobbyists to engage with more than 1850 individuals in 29 countries, including leaders such as Emanuel Macron, Mark Rutte, George Osborne, and Joe Biden, and has been successful in influencing legislation and avoiding taxes as a result (ibid). Meanwhile, Uber's workers have no democratic voice over their working conditions or the algorithm that manages them, bear most of the risks and responsibilities for their work, and have been subject to harsh pay-cuts over the past decade (Rosenblat, 2018).

[6] The literature on post-politics is vast, but I draw here on the influential formulations offered by Colin Crouch (2004; 2016) and Jacques Rancière (1995, pp. 5-38; 1999).

This thesis focuses on the other half of democracy's double life, namely the promise it holds out for extending its principles of equality and freedom over working life and economic relations. An assumption that underpins this project from the outset is then that the existing governments and systems referred to as democracies are distinct from normative ideals of democracy. As liberal democracy and capitalism as a mode of production have become ever more congealed, it is of ever greater importance not to accommodate those normative ideals of democracy to these existing structures and lose sight of work as a crucial site to be democratized. In order to wrest away the meaning of democracy from its collapse into a narrow, presentist understanding and think its politics in more emancipatory ways, there is a need to historicize this understanding (as just briefly done) and articulate democratic ideals that point beyond it. By listening to the critiques and experiences as told by the IWGB's on-demand couriers and critically deepening and extending them by drawing on normative ideals of democracy, what follows is an exploration of the possibilities for the democratization of work under conditions of precarity, and as such a charting of possibilities for the revitalization and radicalization of democracy.

II) Overview of Chapters

The structure of the thesis runs as follows. The first two chapters set the stage for the thesis by exploring the transformation of work since the neoliberal turn in the early seventies, and by explaining my methodological approach.

Chapter one, 'Working Problems', explains the political-economic tendencies that form the conditions for many issues with work today by exploring two contrasting and complementary accounts. One is a more materialist, structural account given by David Harvey and Aaron Benanav, who explain the precariousness and economic vulnerability many workers face today in terms of deindustrialization, a global decline in the demand for labour, persistent underemployment, and the rise of neoliberalism as a political project restructuring class power. The second account of the transformation of work explores the way in which work has become ideologically construed under these conditions. I draw on Foucault's conceptions of neoliberalism and subjectification and bring them in discussion with authors such as Nicholas Rose, Luc Boltanski, Sarah Jaffe, and Pierre Bourdieu to capture the discursive reconfiguration of work as a path to self-fulfilment and a labour of love. Both these material and discursive aspects are crucial for understanding the sense of contemporary work's precariousness and pervasiveness: not only does work and the search for it tend to occupy much of our time, it occupies our sense of identity as it shapes us as individuals. I then point to two troubling implications of these developments. First, they point to a more pronounced relationship between the more direct forms of domination faced *at* work and the structural domination of the labour market – a relationship which I explore through the autonomist-feminist conception of the Social Factory. Secondly, these developments are tied up with what I conceive of with Bourdieu as social suffering. That is, work under capitalism produces various kinds of suffering because of the relationships of domination workers face in and outside of work, while these are increasingly individualized through the neoliberal re-shaping of work.

These developments and concerns, however, are articulated on a general and 'third person' level. Chapter two outlines my methodological approach and justifies turning to the inclusion of the 'first-person' perspectives and experiences of the IWGB's couriers. As mentioned, I draw on the work of Robin Celikates, Patricia-Hill Collins, and Theodor Adorno to argue for an approach to democratic theorizing that incorporates into its methodology the democratic aims for equality and autonomy. A key part of theorizing with what I call a 'democratic sensibility' consists of tracking practices of critique and justification as articulated by existing social actors engaged in particular struggles and tying in one's theorizing with their self-understanding. This is done by talking with and listening to on-demand couriers who are both subject to power relations brought about by the transformation of work, as well as resistant of them by organizing themselves and their co-workers through the IWGB's couriers' branch, and engaging the themes, normative concerns, issues, justifications and critiques they raise in a critical dialogue with relevant literature in democratic theory that could extend, deepen, or challenge these. This conversation then cuts both ways: on the one hand it reconstructs the relationship between work and questions of democracy in a way that might not be obvious to the agents involved, but which could deepen, extend or re-orient their own critiques in politically salient ways. On the other, it aims to enrich the literature on democratic theory by inquiring into both the merits and limitations of this field of research for understanding and addressing the transformation of work. As such, while theorizing with a democratic sensibility implies a thinking *with* the IWGB's couriers' critiques, it should also think *beyond* them in order to reflect on their limitations and to extend them into territory that flows from their concerns but has not yet been considered.

The ensuing four chapters are then arranged from the most immediate struggles of the IWGB's couriers around their work, to the more speculative questions about democratizing work. Chapter three, 'The Democratic Value of Opposition', explores the limits and potential of Chantal Mouffe's conception of hegemony for conceiving of a democratic politics of work under the fragmentary and individualizing conditions on-demand couriers face. I make two main arguments in this chapter. The first is that Mouffe's conception of agonistic democracy clearly draws out the democratic importance of contestation, while her conception of hegemony as a way of conceiving of collective struggle and social transformation is particularly relevant in the context of on-demand couriers' volatile and precarious working conditions for the way it envisages a multitude of struggles around work to go beyond their particular, fragmented aims and become inscribed within a wider articulation of demands. The second argument is that despite these strengths, Mouffe's theoretical framework leads her to neglect the material conditions in which a politics of work is necessarily anchored, as explored through conversations with the IWGB's couriers. This formal character of her theoretical framework also disallows Mouffe to articulate positive ideals of equality and freedom and to inquire more deeply into the transformation of existing political and economic institutions to realise these ideals. As such, I argue for a *critical extension* of her framework. On the one hand I take on her agonistic insight into the democratic values of contestation and hegemonic struggle, as well as her argument about the necessity to expand and radicalize the political principles of 'liberty and equality for all' (Mouffe, 1992, pp. 1-2). On the other hand, I argue that to be faithful to these objectives requires an attentiveness to the materiality of political identity-formation and a more sustained

inquiry into positive proposals for transforming political-economic institutions according to more substantive ideals of equality and freedom articulated by social actors. This is then what the next three chapters undertake to do.

Chapter four, 'Workplace Democracy against Precarity', then goes beyond Mouffe's social negativity by bringing both neo-republican accounts of freedom as non-domination and participatory democratic conceptions of freedom as self-development in conversation with the IWGB's couriers' critiques of the relations of power and domination they face at work, as well as the ambiguities that emerged from their accounts around the kind of agency they had at their disposal. Through this conversation, I defend a justification for workplace democracy based on a positive conception of freedom which establishes an intrinsic relationship between democratic participation and equal freedom. I argue that treating workplace democracy as only instrumental to the neo-republican ideal of freedom as non-domination deflates the democratic ideal of self-rule. Instead, I draw on Carol Gould's principle of 'equal positive freedom' (1988; 2019) to defend a form of workplace democracy where workers have a controlling say in the management of the firm and are not merely beneficiaries of others' power. Lastly, an important insight that emerged in this same chapter is that the structural forms of domination that on-demand couriers are subject to, namely the economic vulnerability and precarity that coerces them to work, are not fully addressed by democratizing work at the level of the firm only. I thus argue that while workplace democracy constitutes an important step towards an economy that is in the social interest of all citizens rather than the private interests of shareholders and business-owners, it is limited without transforming the structural context in which it operates.

In chapter five and six I then address these limitations by considering post-work theorists' proposals for a Universal Basic Income (UBI) and collective working-time reduction (WTR) (Weeks, 2011; Srnicek & Williams, 2016; Bastani, 2019; Stronge & Lewis, 2021), as well as Pat Devine's model of democratic economic planning (Devine, 1988). Both these chapters are framed around the hope and desire expressed by the IWGB's couriers for 'flexibility without precarity' at work. That is, a desire for more autonomy and self-determination inside and outside of work. In chapter five I tease out the emancipatory potential of post-work proposals of UBI and WTR, while drawing on debates around the distinction between private and political freedom to point out some of their limitations. I argue that on the one hand these post-work proposals for decommodifying work have the emancipatory potential to serve as material conditions for democratic social relations and expand individuals' capacity for autonomy inside and outside of work. On the other hand, by focussing on the potential of decommodifying work and redistributing resources, these authors gloss over the relationship between participation and democracy that I argued with Carol Gould to be crucial for democratizing work and the economy. That is, the ability of ordinary citizens to participate in decision-making processes at their place of work and regarding the economic environment they are part of. I extend Gould's insight and highlight the importance of such a democratic voice in the economy over the freedom *from* work emphasized by post-work authors by drawing a distinction between political and private freedom with thinkers such as Hannah Arendt (1958), Christian Rosbøll (2015), and Robin Celikates (2014).

Chapter six then explores models of democratic economic planning, particularly Pat Devine's model of negotiated coordination, as a viable way to extend democratic processes of deliberation and decision-making over the economy as a whole. I argue that his conceptions of social ownership and democratic economic planning as a deliberative process of 'negotiated coordination' offer particularly salient starting points for thinking about the relationship between democratically-run workplaces and a democratic economy that addresses the structural constraints noted in chapter four. Furthermore, Devine's model offers a particularly sophisticated way of thinking through a host of democratic dilemmas that come up in this effort, while providing new pathways for thinking about democratizing platform work such as that of on-demand couriers. Lastly, drawing again on the ideal of political freedom previously articulated, I argue that whereas post-work proposals extend citizens' capacity for individual autonomy, Devine's conceptions of social ownership and negotiated coordination are more salient proposals from the perspective of democracy as a social ideal. While the freedom *from* work that post-work proposals promise is a crucial condition for social relations of equality, they are not sufficient for exercising and maintaining such equality without pathways for participation in economic, collective self-governance – what I call political freedom at work and in the economy.

It is this latter freedom that would most fundamentally transform the structural position of workers today, in which they have no democratic voice or determining say over the key conditions of their work or its aims and objectives, and even less so over the impersonal market forces that they are subject to. Being able to have a democratic voice in one's workplace and participate in its decision-making processes, and having institutions for the democratic negotiation and deliberation on the direction and purpose of the economy will not magically do away with all forms of suffering or coercion related to work or make all work meaningful. However, these proposals would fundamentally transform those arbitrary relations of authority at work into democratically legitimated ones, would give people a democratic voice over the conditions of their own work, and enable worker-citizens to deliberate and co-decide on the purposes that their economy serves – including those of the expansion of leisure-time and ecological sustainability emphasized by post-work theorists. The relations of interdependency that arise through work in capitalist societies today are organized around principles of inequality and coercion, which are felt more sharply and desperately due to decades of neoliberal attacks on social welfare and a steady slide towards more precarious forms of working and living. The ideas of democracy at work and in the economy discussed throughout this thesis are attempts to imagine what work would look like if this interdependency were to be organized along democratic principles of equality and freedom, and to so imagine a more emancipated future of work.

1

Working Problems: Theorising Work in Contemporary Capitalism

For capitalism begins not with the offer of work, but with the imperative to earn a living (Denning, 2010, p. 80).

Introduction

The churning of the global economy and the concomitant transformation of work has prompted a whole range of discourses eager to capture these changes. There are those wanting to capture them wholesale as a new kind of capitalism, suggesting we might think of them of having thrust us into 'informational capitalism' (Castells, 2011), 'cognitive capitalism' (Moulier-Boutang, 2011), 'communicative capitalism' (Dean, 2009), 'rentier capitalism' (Christophers, 2022), or rather as regressing into a form of 'techno-feudalism' (Durand, 2020).[7] This thicket of terminology is by no means exhaustive and only touches upon some of the most familiar accounts in what is an often bewildering sea of interpretations. What it serves to illustrate, however, is that apparently existing vocabularies are inadequate to describe changes happening in contemporary capitalism: we are lost for words. Or rather, as Ursula Huws points out, we are *again* looking for words in the wake of another period of restructuring and transformation that has disrupted familiar societal structures and our places in it, 'the educational curricula and the qualifications they confer, the ways we communicate, the skills we need to survive, the occupational structures that position us in the labour market, the satisfaction we get from our work, the security of employment we can expect and the rewards that await us' (2019, p. 7).

This chapter is an attempt to search for those right words. Or rather, to offer an explanation and interpretation of the problem sketched in the introduction, which is that the place of formal employment has become more precarious even as work seems to hold a firmer grip over many people's lives. In what follows I will thus not try to account for the way in which this or that form of work has changed over time, but rather to explore and explain the developments that have shaped work in its contemporary form and underpin the problem just stated. To this end, I will review two contrasting and complementary theoretical accounts of political-economic changes since the early seventies and how these developments have changed work: the first giving a more materialist account, the second rather emphasizing the legitimating and constitutive role of discourse. This is not to suggest a stiff division between these realms but rather to illuminate different dimensions of the transformation of work. Secondly, building on the aforementioned explanations, I will offer a tentative diagnosis of what is problematic about these developments. In both of these explanatory and diagnostic questions around work, Pierre Bourdieu plays a crucial role. When it comes to the materialist and discursive accounts of the

[7] See also Durand (2022) for a reply to critics of his techno-feudalism hypothesis.

transformation of work, I argue that his conception of *habitus* enables us to think these two dimensions together in a way that acknowledges their importance in understanding how people are shaped and shape themselves through work (or its absence), while avoiding the pitfalls of both determinism and voluntarism that can come with such accounts. Secondly, in terms of a general, normative diagnosis of these developments, Bourdieu's conception of social suffering helps capture the manifold negative experiences associated with these developments, and how such negative experience, fraught as it is, points towards the potential for social change.

The chapter then proceeds as follows. The first two sections are dedicated to exploring different explanations of the political-economic developments since the early seventies that have shaped work. Section one gives a rather 'classical' Marxist understanding of these changes through David Harvey's seminal accounts of post-Fordism and neoliberalism (1990; 2005). This discussion will be further enriched through Aaron Benanav's more recent diagnosis (2020), which extends Harvey's analysis by arguing that capitalism's tendency towards overaccumulation has resulted in a globally stagnating demand for labour and persistent underemployment. Going off these objective conditions, section two goes on to explore the way work is ideologically construed under these conditions and the relationship this ideology holds to workers' self-understanding. To understand the relatively novel role work plays (or is at least ideologically intended to play) in the constitution of the self, I draw on the influential work of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005), as well as that of Nicholas Rose (1999), and bring these in conversation with Michel Foucault's seminal conceptions of neoliberalism and subjectification. I then turn to Pierre Bourdieu's conception of *habitus* (1990) to capture the relationship between these shifts in material and discursive conditions, and the agents who shape themselves in and through them in socially differentiated ways.

The third and last section offers a tentative diagnosis of what is troubling about the developments traced and explained in the previous sections. These are 1) the increasingly pronounced relationship between domination *in* work and *outside* of work, and 2) the individualization of social suffering in relation to the organization of work and the economy in the private interest of capital accumulation rather than social interests. I theorize the relationship between domination in and outside of work (as wage-labour) by turning to the concept of the 'Social Factory' as articulated by feminists associated with the *Wages for Housework* movement in the seventies, arguing that their analysis of the interdependency of waged and non-waged work, and the latter's gendered and often racialized character, is particularly relevant in light of the increasingly precarious character of work. I will lastly turn once more to Bourdieu and his conception of social suffering to capture the manifold negative experiences that accompany these relationships of power (such as exhaustion, overwork, worries about money, anxiety, etc.), and the way these are legitimated by their framing as individual failures or achievements.

I) Post-Fordism, Neoliberalism, and the 'Long Downturn': David Harvey and Aaron Benanav

When telling the story of the transformation of work from the post-war period onward, many authors narrate it as a transition from a 'Fordist' era of production, to a post-Fordist one. Fordism, a term coined after the practices of production in Henry Ford's car-factories, is used as a metonym for a particular kind of factory work, as well as the decades of post-war prosperity spurred by mass standardised production until the early 1970's. Fordism also represented a wager for workers: in exchange for eight hours a day, five days a week, (predominantly male) workers would receive a 'family wage' that would also enable them to buy the mass-produced consumer-goods they spent their days making (Adkins, 2016, p. 2; Horgan, p. 50). The transformation of work that started in the late seventies is then often understood through the conceptual lenses of post-Fordism and neoliberalism. Against the restrictiveness and repetitiveness of Fordist work, and the gendered division of labour it upheld, new forms of work and organization promised to be flexible, inclusive, non-hierarchical, full of variety, and a way of developing one's potential rather than dulling it (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Gilbert, 2008; Heelas, 2002). As these traits of contemporary work thus emerged out of a confrontation with the Fordist period they are often grouped together by the term post-Fordism, although they are just as commonly associated with the neoliberal era that coincided with this transition. To get a clearer idea of these terms and the changes they designate, I will explore the concepts of post-Fordism and neoliberalism through David Harvey's influential interpretation of them, focussing particularly on 1) post-Fordism as a regime of accumulation and reassertion of labour control; 2) neoliberalism as a disembedding of the economy from society and re-commodification of labour. Lastly, I will further extend Harvey's historical materialist analysis through Aaron Benanav's more recent interpretation of the crisis of work in terms of a globally stagnating demand for labour.

In *The Condition of Postmodernity* Harvey succinctly spells out his conception of historical-geographical materialism as an 'open-ended and dialectical mode of enquiry rather than a closed and fixed body of understandings', striving to 'come to terms with the historical and geographical truths that characterize capitalism *both in general as well as in its present phase*' (1990, p. 355, my emphasis). This tension between the general laws (or 'truths') of capitalism and the latter's particular historical manifestation is key for Harvey. He describes capitalism as a process which, governed by certain laws which mark capitalism *as* capitalism throughout its various mutations, nonetheless is capable of 'generating a seemingly infinite range of outcomes out of the slightest variation in initial conditions or of human activity and imagination' (ibid, p. 343). What this means is that capitalism cannot be completely identified with any of its particular historical configurations, while to refer to various configurations as forms of capitalism implies that they share some dynamic that marks them *as* capitalism.

On this basis, Harvey interprets the transition to post-Fordism that he, with many others, locates as taking place since the early seventies, as a particular strand of a complex dynamic of constraint, continuity and change rather than a new epoch. There are then three core elements

of capitalism underlying all 'surface froth and evanescence' of change: capitalism is growth-oriented, based on the exploitation of living labour in production, and necessarily technologically and organizationally dynamic (ibid, p. 180). These elements are inherently unstable and contradictory, which leads capitalist development to be characterized by a crisis-ridden tendency towards overaccumulation, defined as a condition in which surpluses of capital and labour exist side by side with no apparent way to bring these together. Overaccumulation and its management is a never-ending problem for capitalism, and it is on this basis that Harvey characterises post-Fordism as an attempt to absorb, contain and manage the crisis of overaccumulation that precipitated after the recession of 1973 (ibid, p. 140).

The transition towards post-Fordism is then presented as a shift in the '*regime of accumulation* and its associated *mode of social and political regulation*' (ibid, p. 121). He borrows this language and conceptual framework from a school of thought commonly known as the 'regulation school' pioneered by Michel Aglietta (2000) and advanced by others such as Lipietz and Boyer. They conceive of a regime of accumulation as the stabilization over a long period of the allocation between production and consumption, which implies some kind of correspondence between the conditions of production and those of the reproduction of wage earners, in addition to a 'mode of regulation' – a form of labour control, set of laws, norms etc. – that keeps the regime of accumulation ticking (Harvey, 1990, pp.121-122).

Post-Fordism is then a regime of accumulation that was borne out of a confrontation with the rigidities of the Fordist regime that came to define the post-war era - the rigidities of production, labour markets, contracts and allocations, as well as the rigidity of entrenched working-class power in many industrialized countries. These rigidities, which came to a boil in the late sixties and early seventies in many Westerns countries, were undermined and bypassed through a shift towards what Harvey calls 'flexible accumulation' (ibid, p. 147). This was achieved, on the one hand, by deindustrialisation[8], the promotion of flexible, casual and part-time jobs, and a shift towards services and 'knowledge-based' economies in many Western economies.[9] On the other hand, industrial manufacturing shifted towards low-wage countries with less labour protection (Harvey, 1990, p. 186). Or in other words, post-Fordist service economies in the core capitalist countries combined with 'peripheral Fordism' in developing countries (Harvey, 1990, p. 155).[10]

While this 'peripheral Fordism' is understood as a fix of overaccumulation through *spatial* displacement, the flexibilized labour markets, growth of service sector, proliferation of new industries revolving around information and symbolic production as well as innovations in organisation and technologies in production are understood as fixes through *temporal*

[8] To be sure, deindustrialization is here understood as a decline in the share of manufacturing in total employment (also understood as 'labour deindustrialization').

[9] The growth of the service sector and 'knowledge-based jobs' is a worldwide trend not limited to Western economies, though most concentrated in these regions (ILO, 2018, p. 1).

[10] This does not mean, however, that workers in developing countries enjoy full-time, stable labour contracts as opposed to those in deindustrialized countries. On the contrary, informal and vulnerable employment is particularly strong in emerging economies. A recent report from the International Labour Organisation reports that while vulnerable employment is on the rise globally, it remains particularly high in developing and emerging economies; at above 76 and 46 per cent respectively (ILO, 2018, p. 1).

displacement (ibid, p.182). All these elements contributed to a bypassing of Fordist rigidities through the acceleration of turnover time. The more flexible forms of production and contracting (part-time, temporary, self-employed, sub-contracted, etc.) provided such an acceleration, as did the shift towards services. As Harvey puts it: 'If there are limits to the accumulation and turnover of physical goods (...), then it makes sense for capitalists to turn to the provision of very ephemeral services (...)' (ibid, p. 285). This temporal displacement has led on the one hand to an accelerated destruction and reconstruction of worker's skills; on the other hand, it has widened the reach of capitalist social relations over cultural and social life in the shift towards the service sector (ibid, 1990, p. 230, 285). Thus, for Harvey, the pervasiveness of production in ever more spheres of life is understood as part of the inherent crisis-tendencies of capitalism which set off rounds of time-space compression that, in unforeseeable ways, shift and expand capitalist social relations over more areas of cultural and social life (ibid, pp. 344-355).

Post-Fordism is thus presented as a flexible regime of accumulation which reasserts labour control through temporal and spatial displacements. What then is neoliberalism according to Harvey, and what is its relationship to post-Fordism? Harvey interprets neoliberalism in line with his general Marxist framework outlined above. He characterizes it as a 'theoretical utopianism' that proposes human well-being is best advanced by 'liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade' (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). However, this theoretical utopianism is at best secondary to, and at worst simply an ideological justification for the restoration of class power of economic elites (ibid, p. 19). Neoliberalism is first and foremost a political project aimed at re-establishing and reconfiguring conditions for capital accumulation, and most importantly a reconfiguration of class power benefiting a new economic elite, to the detriment of labour (ibid, pp. 19, 76, 156, 203). While post-Fordism and neoliberalism then overlap in the phenomena they point towards, Harvey understands post-Fordism mostly in terms of production and accumulation, whereas neoliberalism is understood as geared not exclusively towards the accumulation of capital but more broadly as a political project restructuring class power (ibid, pp. 154-159). The post-Fordist flexible regime of accumulation is thus very much compatible with the wider political project of neoliberalism, but not identical to it. For our purposes, we shall here focus on the way Harvey conceptualizes labour under conditions of neoliberalism, which is mostly in Polanyian terms: neoliberalism disembeds the economy and labour market from their social body, and in doing so, labour under neoliberalism is re-commodified.

First, Harvey presents the neoliberal approach to the economy and labour market as one that seeks to dis-embed capital from social and political constraints (ibid, p. 75). Harvey relies here, as throughout his work, on the distinction that Karl Polanyi makes between society and economy, which capitalism tends to dis-embed from one-another (Polanyi, 2001). With this is meant that the economy becomes disembedded, or autonomous from, the wider social relations from which it nevertheless stems, only to follow its own logic over and against this social fabric. Polanyi famously traced a 'double movement', where disembedded liberal capitalism is followed by a push-back 'designed to check the action of the market relative to labor, land, and money'; i.e., to re-embed the economy within wider ethical, moral and social concerns (ibid, p. 76).

Neoliberalism would then be another attempt to dis-embed the economy from society through flexibilizing labour markets, privatising welfare provision and public institutions and breaking down barriers for financial capital flows, a stripping away of 'the protective coverings that embedded liberalism allowed and occasionally nurtured' (ibid, p. 168). In line with this framework, this disembedding comes with a re-commodification of labour. Here Harvey again draws from Polanyi in asserting that neoliberal capitalism treats labour as a mere commodity, which he sees as a fictitious abstraction that fails to acknowledge the social reality that lies behind this designation (Harvey, 2005, p. 167). Neoliberalism has transformed the environment of workers into one of flexible, short-term contracts, 'chronic job insecurities, lost social protections (...), amongst the wreckage of collective institutions that once gave them a modicum of dignity and support' (ibid, p. 170), and in doing so re-asserted that labour-power is a commodity like any other.

This Polanyian framework is in many ways a useful way of understanding what has happened to people's experience of work and labour: much more than before one's living conditions are made dependent on one's ability to sell one's labour. Stagnant real wages, declining labour shares of income, insecure working contracts, and overwork are characterising traits of most economies where the neoliberal project has struck roots (see Kalleberg, 2018). However, in explaining these phenomena, Harvey's accounts of post-Fordism and neoliberalism can be helpfully supplemented by Aaron Benanav's explanation of them in terms of a persistent, global decline in the demand for labour. To be sure, Benanav's analysis is largely in line with Harvey's focus on capitalism's tendency towards overaccumulation, crisis, and inventive reassertion of labour control through novel regimes of accumulation. However, his evaluation, more than Harvey's, emphasizes the ways in which this had led to persistent underemployment and a steady growth of what Marx called 'surplus population': those superfluous to the requirements of capital (Marx, 1990, Ch. 25, 3).

In a nutshell, Benanav argues that decades of globally stagnating manufacturing-output growth have resulted in a decline in demand for labour that is expressed in a variety of forms of underemployment (Benanav, 2020, p. 46).[11] The globalization of industrial manufacturing led to a rapid expansion of the latter's capacity and intensified international competition in increasingly crowded markets from the early sixties onwards. This in turn depressed prices, lowered output-growth rates and prompted firms to raise productivity levels as best as they could to stay competitive – often through labour-saving technologies (ibid, p. 27). It is this situation of overcapacity in world markets for manufactured goods that has issued in a 'long downturn' in manufacturing-growth rates, resulting in successive waves of labour deindustrialization globally (see also Rodrik, 2016). To use Harvey's words, in terms of industrial growth, no spatial fix would do anymore. As the growth engine of industrialization sputters, however, it has found no good replacement in service sector, which generally suffers from much lower productivity rates and little dynamic patterns of expansion (Benanav, 2020, pp. 57-59). In fact, one of the few

[11] Benanav's analysis is heavily indebted to economist Robert Brenner's work, particularly his seminal work *The Economics of Global Turbulence, The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005* (Brenner, 2006).

ways to keep services profitable in the face of these issues is to put downward pressure on workers' wages by simply paying them less or suppressing the growth of their wages.

The result of this 'long downturn' is a situation that was described with Harvey as overaccumulation: with nowhere more profitable in the real economy for capital to invest itself, large quantities of capital have flowed into financial assets, while the demand for labour has steadily declined. It is these conditions that enable platform companies such as Uber or Deliveroo to exist, as these float on bubbles of financial capital while relying on pools of underemployed labour for their workforce (Srnicek, 2017, p. 91). Most importantly for now, the way in which this low demand for labour has been expressed is consonant with Harvey's account of post-Fordism and neoliberalism. That is, Benanav argues this low demand has come to be expressed as a 'variety of forms of chronic *under*employment' (Benanav, 2020, p. 46; see also OECD, 2019, pp. 100-104). Labour flexibilization became a leading strategy by the late eighties of economists of the Organization for Economic Co-ordination and Development (OECD) as a way to bring down unemployment rates (OECD, 1987). Inequality has increased as labour shares of income have steadily declined and have become increasingly bifurcated between well-paid occupations in the professional and high-tech sector, and low-paid, low-status jobs in retail, hospitality, and caring (Autor & Dorn, 2013; Goos et al., 2014; OECD, 2019, pp. 105-111). This is due not only to workers facing more job insecurity and so being forced to accept stagnant wages, but also to the neoliberal political project that has been hostile towards workers' rights and unions.[12] With trade unions on the defence, workers' protections stripped down, and faced with a low demand for labour, more workers are thrown into conditions of underemployment and economic insecurity.[13]

If post-Fordism can be understood with Harvey as a way of reasserting labour control and neoliberalism as a political project for the restoration of class power, Benanav's analysis of the long downturn and diagnosis of persistent underemployment help us make sense of the broad macro-economic developments that are their conditions, and to explain the precariousness and economic vulnerability many workers face today. Together, these accounts also go a long way to explain work's contemporary pervasiveness. As Amelia Horgan neatly puts it, with the possibilities for secure, long-term and well-paid work decreasing, 'work creeps in several ways. We work harder at work. We work longer hours. At work, we are expected to use our emotions and personalities for the benefit of our employers. Outside of our official working hours, we are called upon to excavate more of our social lives, turning hobbies into side gigs so that we can survive on our current jobs' meagre salaries and scrape enough social and cultural capital or resources to get another job in the future' (Horgan, 2021, p. 81). However, the allusion in this

[12] Trade union density in the UK fell from 52% in 1980 to 23% in 2019. Across the entire OECD union density fell from 36% to 16% over the same time period (OECD, 2022).

[13] To be sure, only 39% of the global workforce had formal employment of any kind as of 2019, leaving 61% to work for informally, without a contract but for an employer, or else on their own account (ILO, World Employment and Social Outlook, 2020, p. 19). Only a minority of workers around the world are thus in formal employment, and these are mostly concentrated in high-income countries. As such, the term 'non-standard employment' to refer to those not in formal, permanent work is a misnomer and most workers around the world are quite vulnerable to the ebbs and flows of the demand for labour (see also Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018, p. 13; Neilson & Rossiter, 2008).

quotation to the expectation of using our emotions and personalities at work brings us to a dimension of the transformation of work that is not captured by the above account. That is, not only does formal employment take on a much more precarious status, the shift towards services also means that work mobilizes different aspects of human subjectivity, including emotions, language, and personality-traits. This is further not only due to the nature of the work but also to a 'new spirit of capitalism' which has ideologically recast work as a site of personal expression and self-fulfilment (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Heelas, 2002). It is this neoliberal recasting of the worker that will be explored below and conceptualized with Foucault as a particular regime of subjectification.

II) A Labour of Love? Neoliberalism as Governmentality and Work as a Site of Subjectification

The structural and material changes shaping work sketched above are inextricably intertwined with a different set of demands on workers to become subjects of value to the labour market, and a particular discourse needed to justify the new realities of work and invest the latter with a sense of excitement and possibility. As French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello argue, as capitalism develops, so must its accompanying regime of justification, or 'spirit' (2005). The spirit of capitalism, they continue, must in each age be able to answer three main questions: how will people secure a living for themselves and their families? How do they find enthusiasm for the process of accumulation, even if they share unequally in the profits? And how can workers justify the system and defend it against accusations of injustice? (ibid, p. 16) These questions need some answer because people do challenge capitalism and the kinds of work it produces, whether explicitly in discussions in and outside the workplace, or more indirectly through the many acts of slacking off (Horgan, 2021, Ch. 7). According to Boltanski and Chiapello, the more sustained and persistent forms of resistance, rebellion, and critique provoke a transformation in the organization of work as well as the kind of answers provided to the three aforementioned questions. Focussing on the context of France from 1968 until 1995, they argue that the current spirit of capitalism was forged through a confrontation with the anti-capitalist critiques and demands made in 1968 by workers, students, and feminists. Apart from a social critique targeted at economic injustice and exploitation, workers in France in the late seventies also articulated an 'artistic critique' against the repetitive and 'boring' character of Fordist work and the 'male breadwinner' gendered division of labour (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, Ch. 3; Fraser, 2017, p. 31). Boltanski and Chiapello propose that while both the social and artistic criticisms were important and played a role in the crisis of 1968, it was the artistic criticism around which the post-Fordist reconfiguration of work came to revolve.

With the industrial work ethic's promise of social mobility and security ideologically shaky and materially undermined, the post-industrial 'spirit' of capitalism incorporated parts of the artistic critique. As such, against the Fordist trade-off between rigidity and security, work was recast as a series of exciting and flexible projects (ibid, p. 169). Against the construal of work as an unpleasant necessity that enables fulfilment in the home or private sphere, work was

rearticulated as a path to self-fulfilment and co-workers as family-members (Hochschild, 1997; Weeks, 2011, Ch. 1). Against the conception of the self-as-worker was pitted a conception of the 'self-as-enterprise' (McNay, 2009; Kelly, 2009). Against work as alienating drudgery was put forward a now all-to-familiar ideal of work as a 'labour of love' (Jaffe, 2021, p. 13). This regime of justification is not however to be thought of as detached from the structural shifts previously described. After all, the kinds of jobs that rose with the shift towards the service economy are much more susceptible to a labour-of-love ethic than the kinds of work found in industrial production and manufacturing (Jaffe, 2021, p.16; McDowell, 2011). Furthermore, the flexibilization of work was a response not only to pressure from social movements but, as we saw, was rooted in a crisis of capital and a worsening overcapacity of global manufacturing. However, the difference between the demands articulated by the movements of the seventies and their capitalist expression turned out to be substantial. The demand for more flexibility and less work came to be experienced as an increased exposure to job insecurity and precarity (Kalleberg, 2018). The discourse of work-as-self-fulfilment and a labour of love came, all too often, to be a way of legitimating low-pay, long hours, and the shifting of risks and responsibilities onto workers (Faruggia, 2019; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018, p. 23). The move away from the family wage model became a move towards a market for reproductive services for those able to afford it, or, for many more women, a move towards the 'second shift' in which the expectation of paid work was matched with the expectation of unpaid reproductive labour (Hochschild 1989; McDowell, 2011, p. 5; Pugh, 2015).

It is tempting to understand these discourses as mere ideology, employed to plaster over the reality of inequality, precarity, and lack of voice in the workplace. However, firstly, classical conceptions of ideology are problematic from the perspective of democracy. This issue will be taken up in the next chapter, where I explain the democratic *praxis* of my methodology and recast the question of ideology with Robin Celikates as a 'second-order pathology' (2018, p. 124). Secondly, such a reading would miss the way agents actively constitute themselves through the above discourses and the material realities to which they are attached. After all, as Kathi Weeks puts it, 'individuals must not only work but become workers' (Weeks, 2011, p. 8). Setting aside the problem of ideology for now, we can understand this neoliberal constellation of discourses around work and their materiality as conditions through which agents come to understand and constitute themselves; through which class, gender and racial identities and relations are made and remade. In other words, we can understand work as a site and process of what Michel Foucault calls 'subjectification': a process in which agents actively constitute themselves through the practical appropriation of discourses (or regimes of justification, to put it in Boltanski's parlance) (Foucault, 1984). I will thus briefly explore Foucault's conceptualization of work as a site of subjectification, before offering an important corrective for his 'social weightlessness' with Pierre Bourdieu.

To start, it is helpful to explain how Foucault understands the neoliberal reconceptualization of 'the worker'.[14] For Foucault and others taking cue from his thought, neoliberalism should not

[14] I am bracketing this phrase here to indicate that this is a conceptual construction that Foucault traces, rather than an empirical claim. Outside of discourse there is no such thing as 'the worker'.

be understood per se as a political project aimed at the restoration of class power, as explored in section one, but rather as a particular 'governmentality' borne out of a sustained engagement with the limitations and problems of classical liberalism that had become apparent during the social and economic instability of the early 20th century (Cahill & Konings, 2018, p. 14; Foucault, 2008, p. 70).[15] Foucault uses the concept of governmentality to designate the structural entanglement between the government of the state, political economy and techniques for self-governance in modern Western societies (Foucault, 2007, p. 108). Neoliberalism, then, is not simply a different approach to the economy but a distinct manner in which the individual's capacity for self-governance comes to be entangled with political rule and economic exploitation that departs in important ways from liberal governmentality (Foucault, 2008, p. 22; Lemke, 2001, p. 52). One important departure Foucault stresses in his reading is that of the assumed natural character of the market. Whereas classical liberalism maintained that the economic realm is a natural one that would produce the most social and economic good if left alone, neoliberal thinkers such as Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises argued that this naturalness could not be assumed: the economic and political beneficial effects of competition that would arise through market mechanisms are not due to a pre-existing nature but due to a formal privilege (Foucault, 2008, p. 120; Hayek, 1945). As such, the role of government is to develop and construct the framework in which market principles of competition can be installed and upheld, in as many domains as possible (Foucault, 2008, p. 132). In a sense, then, neoliberalism is rooted in an appreciation of what Polanyi argued to be the impossibility of the liberal utopia of endless market disembedding, prescribing a vigorous market constructivism against the perceived ailments of either embedded state capitalism or the fragility and potential destructiveness of disembedded *laissez faire* markets.

Foucault goes on to explore the particular techniques of self-governance this neoliberal governmentality promotes by reconceptualizing the worker as an 'entrepreneur of the self', comprised out of 'human capital' (Foucault, 2008, p. 219). In line with their cure-all principle of competition, neoliberals propose the worker to be a competitive 'entrepreneur of the self', 'being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings' (ibid, p. 226). In doing so, Foucault argues neoliberals make an epistemological shift from treating the labourer as an inert object of analysis, to treating the labourer as a subject, from the worker's point of view (ibid, p. 222-223). From this workers' point of view, they are themselves their own capital - human capital – which can comprise virtually anything and everything (ibid, p. 227 – 229).

This discursive reconfiguration of the worker as their own human capital sits within a wider ideological shift towards aligning the worker's wellbeing, identity, and pleasure with productivity. Nicholas Rose has shown in considerable detail and in typical Foucauldian fashion how over the course of at least the 19th and 20th century the subjectivity of the worker 'has emerged as a complex territory to be understood, explored and regulated' (Rose, 1999, p. 56). Already in the 1920's, the link between worker well-being and productivity was being reimagined both in the UK and the US. Rather than a kind of psycho-physiological machine

[15] For example, in no particular order, Mitchell Dean (2010), Jamie Peck (2010) and Wendy Brown (2015).

that needs to be cajoled in working, the worker was to be understood as a social individual with a particular psychological make-up, with wishes and desires that can and should be gratified through their work (ibid, pp. 67-69). In the UK the National Institute for Industrial Psychology was set up in 1921 under the direction of C.S. Meyers, in which the link between worker well-being and productivity was understood through 'human factor psychology'. During the same time-period, a similar though distinct link between the subjectivity of the worker and the demands of production was made by Elton Mayo and his notion of 'human relations' (Rose, 1999, pp. 67-72, Illouz, 2013, Ch. 1.) At least since the early 20th century then, workers' subjectivity turned from an obstacle to an ally; from something generally discounted to a vital component for the maintenance of labour control, productivity, and political power.

During the seventies and eighties, Rose argues in a similar fashion to Boltanski and Chiapello, work was being revamped by a whole host of forces and actors in Europe and the US as a project of individual self-fulfilment and self-actualization. On the one hand, there was a genuine preoccupation with the alienating effects of industrial work by a 'Quality of Working Life' movement composed of diverse actors, and a whole host of scientific disciplines – from psychiatry to the social sciences – attached themselves to the goals and language of this movement (Rose, 1999, pp. 104-108). On the other hand, much of this knowledge was reabsorbed into managerial technologies in an attempt to again marry workers' wants and needs with the adaptability, innovation and flexibility of production demanded by the newly emergent post-Fordist economy (ibid, p. 104). Thus, in line with doctrines of the self-actualizing worker who finds meaning, responsibility and a sense of personal achievement in their work, organisations and corporations were to be shaped in order to release the psychological strivings of its members, so that their adaptability, innovation, responsibility and commitment could be channelled into organisational success (ibid, p. 113). This trend of opening up new terrains of subjectivity to managerial concerns is by no means slowing: one only has to think of the managerial discourse of self-development that has entered even the most menial jobs, or – and this must surely constitute some limit – the spiritualization of the working self in New Age managerial discourse (Heelas, 2002).

In short, with the shift towards a neoliberal governmentality, the construction of work as path to self-fulfilment and social obligation makes it a particular site of subjectification connected both to economic and political ends. With subjectification is meant by Foucault a form of power that, as Judith Butler puts it 'not only *acts on* a subject but, in a transitive sense, *enacts* the subject into being' (Butler, 1997, p. 13). In other words, the neoliberal discourses around work and the latter's shifting material realities do not constitute agents in a deterministic or mechanistic manner but are practices and forms of knowledge which agents actively call on to understand and govern themselves. For example, as David Farrugia has argued in his research on youth transitioning into work, the ethic of self-fulfilment and ideal of work as a labour of love has become a way in which young workers make sense of and navigate labour market uncertainties (Farrugia, 2019). However, Farrugia's research, among others, also reveals how the manner of appropriating neoliberal tenets and work ethics depends on dimensions of class and personal biography. He notes how young people from middle-class backgrounds typically cultivated themselves as labouring subjects in line with neoliberal tenets: for them work was framed in line

with self-development, situated not as a specific realm of competence or qualification but as an expression of a passionate, authentic self (Farrugia, 2019, p. 714).[16] These participants generally distanced their engagement with work from its material rewards, which marked their distinction from participants with working-class backgrounds, and so drew upon the social, affective and emotional styles accrued throughout their lives (ibid, p. 717; 2018, p. 8). Contrastingly, for participants from working-class backgrounds the stakes were a lot higher, as their success on the labour-market was more intertwined with aspirations for material comfort, social mobility, and self-realization (Farrugia, 2019, p. 717). While for all participants the cultivation of the self as a subject of value to the labour market intertwined with a narrative of self-fulfilment, working-class participants could often not draw on their environment or leisurely pursuits for this cultivation: these were not attuned to the labour market available to them, which appeared for many as an alien environment of which the rules were opaque. As such, these participants focussed more on getting qualifications and on 'getting it right' rather than 'being real'; learning relational styles and ways of presenting themselves that were foreign to them but specific to their positioning themselves as a worker (Farrugia, 2018, p. 12).

As this brief example shows, the process of subjectification through which these young people constituted themselves as workers depended on their position in the social field. Here we then stumble on a limitation of the way in which 'subjectification' is often employed in connection to neoliberalism, as governmentality studies often establish an extremely homogeneous model in which the discourse of self-activation seems to spread throughout the entire society without hindrance or inflection (Rehman, 2016, p. 152). There is then little accounting for how neoliberal governmentality reworks social divisions in different ways for different people (Masquelier, 2019). To remedy this shortcoming, I will briefly expand on Pierre Bourdieu's conception of *habitus* to propose a more embodied and socially differentiated account of work as a site of subjectification. Bourdieu's conception of *habitus* further allows for the two dimensions of change traced, material and discursive, to be thought together convincingly in relation to the way people shape themselves through them.

Bourdieu's thought rests on the philosophical assumption of the embodied character of thought and action: thinking and acting are never completely abstractable from the particular body that thinks and acts, and the body is always already inscribed in social and political processes (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 135). From this presupposition, he develops the concept of *habitus*, which is intended to enable a dynamic conception of the agent that avoids two 'complementary fallacies' originating from a certain disembodied, scholastic vision. These are, 1) 'mechanism', i.e. the view that action is merely the effect of the constraint of external causes (history, power structures, language, natural laws, etc.), and 2) 'voluntarism', the view of agents as freely and consciously acting subjects (such as some forms of rational action theory or utilitarianism) (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 138). *Habitus* dispels these notions by taking note of the recalcitrance and historicity of embodied existence. The concept designates the agents' incorporation of the social world not by way of mechanical determination or lucid consciousness, but through the practical

[16] While Farrugia's sample was drawn from a diverse range of young people in terms of gender and class background, it must be noted that all participants are white, which the author admits is a limitation of the study (Farrugia, 2018, p. 5).

knowledge and sense arising through their embeddedness in a social field whose objective conditions – possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, prohibitions and opportunities – give rise to systems of 'durable, transposable dispositions, (...) which generate and organize practices and representations' attuned to these objective conditions (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 52-53). By incorporating the structures and tendencies of the world in which we find ourselves, our *habitus* allows us to act in a manner immediately adjusted to this world, without these practices being either the product of obedience to an order or direct imperative (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 143). As such, practices are neither just 'reactive' nor purely conscious actions; not simply the product of objective structures or of the 'reflexive freedom of frictionless subjects' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56). Rather, the logic of practice entailed in the notion of *habitus* is one of 'regulated improvisation', of an interplay between the objectification of history in both bodies and in institutions (ibid, p. 57).

As such, how work acts as a site of subjectification is not the simple product of the structural conditions explored in section one, or the undifferentiated and conscious application of novel managerial discourses by workers. Rather, it is a result of an encounter between such structures and *habitus*, between these novel objective and symbolic conditions and their reflexive, practical appropriation by agents with particular embodied histories acting within a particular field. The scene on young workers explored above is a good example of this, as the degree and way these young people's selves and subjectivities were mobilized depended on their position in the social field, the dispositions that made up their *habitus,* and their reflexive engagement with both. This is true also of the way that precarity is constructed and experienced for couriers in the UK gig-economy, as we shall see in the coming chapters. Lastly, the current 'labour-of-love' ethic that has entered the world of formal employment itself has a much longer history in gendered and racialized divisions of labour in which certain forms of work, such as caring and domestic labour, are attributed as belonging to groups of people by dint of their purported 'natural' qualities in relation to the work.[17] These histories are too rich to fully account for here, but the point here is that the way work acts as a site of subjectification cannot be conceived of as simply the application of entrepreneurial discourse. The historicity of agents, the way they have been interpellated by others, their *habitus*, and their reflexive agency all come into play when it comes to the formative role of work. Neoliberalism is then what Bourdieu calls a 'strong discourse', in the sense that it has all the power relations behind it which help make it a reality, and which shapes and destabilizes agents' existing *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 95).

To sum, work has certainly changed as a site of subjectification in terms of the demands placed on people to become subjects of value to the labour market, as well as through the labour process itself. Through the incitement to form one's personal identity in alignment with one's work and the requirements of the labour market, a whole host of practices, experiences, and capacities become potential sites of valorisation in a way that was previously only privy to the 'professional-managerial class' (Ehrenreich, 1979). At work, cognitive, communicative, and affective

[17] According to the ILO, as of 2018, women are globally responsible for 75% of all unpaid domestic labour, which includes housework such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and elderly (ILO, 2018). On the racial division of reproductive labour in historical perspective, written mostly in the US context, see Evelyn Nakano Glenn's *From Servitude to Service Work* (1992) and Mignon Duffy's *Doing the Dirty Work* (2007).

capacities have become more central to the process of accumulation (McDowell, 2011, Ch. 3).[18] In the context of the structural tendency towards underemployment, the discursive reconfiguration of work as a path to self-fulfilment and a labour of love is a key part of understanding the sense of contemporary work's pervasiveness: not only does work tend to occupy much of our time, it occupies our sense of identity as it shapes us as individuals. However, as argued above, this does not mean we should understand work as a homogeneous site of subjectification: the social world is far messier than that. Instead, building on Bourdieu, the new material realities of work and its contemporary 'spirit' interact with embodied and reflexive agents who constitute themselves in a multiplicity of ways by appropriating (or criticizing) these discourses and practically negotiating the vicissitudes of work and the labour market.

III) Work to What End? Domination in and outside of Work, and Social Suffering

Until now I have explored two different perspectives on the developments and tendencies concerning contemporary work that point in the direction of the its pronounced pervasiveness: on the one hand the objective expansionary tendencies inherent to the contradictory logic of capitalism which has issued in a 'long downturn', and on the other hand a neoliberal governmentality and spirit of capitalism which attempts to reformulate work as a labour of love and so align people's identities with their work. However, while these developments are intuitively troubling, I have refrained from giving any explicit normative reasoning about what exactly the trouble is. What is more, to give any such account about what is wrong with work under these developments is bound to be fiendishly complex, as they do not affect people in an unequivocable way. Much of this normative work will therefore happen in a more grounded manner throughout the ensuing chapters, in conversation with couriers organizing through the grassroots union the IWGB. Yet, it is possible and also important to give a general account of what makes these developments concerning, particularly from the perspective of democracy as a social ideal. In what follows I will make these general concerns explicit, which then reappear and are fleshed out in more detail in the coming chapters. Of all the issues and problems that arise from the above political-economic developments, I then wish to highlight two that seem particularly important in relation to the above diagnosis, namely: 1) the increasingly pronounced relationship between domination *in* work and *outside* of work, and 2) the individualization of social suffering in relation to the organization of work and the economy in the private interest of capital accumulation rather than social interests. I should immediately add, however, that these issues play out in a context that seems the most obvious democratic concern, namely the exacerbated inequality wrought by decades of neoliberalism and overaccumulation. As workers' bargaining power has diminished, labour shares of income have fallen worldwide, and any wage growth has become increasingly skewed towards the highest

[18] This has been influentially captured by the concept of 'immaterial labour' developed by Maurizio Lazzarato (1996) and taken up by autonomist-Marxists such as Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, and Paulo Virno. See: (Hardt, 1999; Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 290-93; Virno, 2004, Ch. 2).

earners, such as managers and CEO's (Benanav, 2020, pp. 9-10; Buller & Lawrence, 2022, p. 107).[19] This should be kept in mind throughout what follows, even though my direct focus is on the unequal relations of power that underpin this inequality of wealth.

In what follows I will theorize the relationship between domination in and outside of work by turning to the concept of the 'Social Factory' as articulated by feminists associated with the *Wages for Housework* movement in the seventies, arguing that it is what Michael Denning calls 'wageless life', not just wage labour, that should be the starting point for understanding such structural power (Denning, 2010). I will then turn to Bourdieu's conception of social suffering to capture the manifold negative experiences that accompany these relationships of power (such as exhaustion, overwork, worries about money, anxiety, etc.), and the way these are legitimated by their framing as individual failures or achievements. Understanding the effects of the current organisation of work in terms of social suffering helps focus attention both on the way work shapes citizens over time, as well as the question of whose ends work is currently organized to serve. Let us then first turn to the relationship between intra and extra-work domination.

Domination in and outside of Work: The Social Factory as Perspective

That domination occurs within the workplace is hardly surprising, even if this might not be the term many people would use for their experiences at work, and even if it might appear as such a normal and routine fact of life as to be hardly worth noting. This latter observation, too, is hardly surprising: after all, one might wonder, what alternative does one have but to submit to the arbitrary and inequal relations of the capitalist workplace when there are scarcely any other options for making a living? Such 'workplace realism' is undoubtedly a part of what Mark Fisher famously termed 'capitalist realism': the idea that there is no alternative to the capitalist organisation of social and economic life (Fisher, 2010). However, as philosopher Elizabeth Anderson argues, if workers were to judge the government of their workplace the same way they judge their government of state, they would likely find the former's authoritarian character difficult to accept (Anderson, 2019, p. 39).[20] The surveillance, pervasive control, and arbitrary power held by unelected superiors in most workplaces implies that for most, work is a sphere of subjection and unfreedom. This line of argument will be more fully explored in chapter four.

However, the developments charted in the previous sections point to a different form of power than that exercised strictly within capitalist firms. That is, the forms of precarity associated with persistent underemployment have less to do with being subjected to managerial relations, and more to do with continued dependency on the labour market. Such dependency is what Marx famously argued an 'impersonal' form of domination specific to capitalism (Marx, 1999, Ch. 6).[21] Through a historical process of dispossession, enclosure, and the development of a regime

[19] See also Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2017) for a comprehensive study on the long-term developments towards economic inequality.
[20] See also Dahl (1985) and more recently Landemore & Ferreras (2016) for more comprehensive arguments about the state-firm analogy.
[21] For an influential Marxist exposition of the thesis that subjection in capitalism depends less on a relation of domination between individuals but on the constraint exerted through impersonal mechanisms, see Moishe Postone's *Time, Labour, and Social Domination* (1995).

of private property, workers have become 'free' to sell their labour to any employer they like, but are unfree in their dependence on capitalists as a class for their livelihood (ibid, Ch. 26-33). This relationship of power is then not secured through personal relations of dependency and domination, but rather through the objective constraints posed by the organization of labour and the economy (Renault, 2014, p. 183). Furthermore, this form of domination is carried out in the framework of relatively stable social structures, such as property regimes, (un)employment laws and regulations, and the dominance of capitalist firms. As such, we can understand this impersonal power as a structural form of domination that depends less on any particular agents' consciousness or convictions, and more on the objective constraints imposed by the capitalist organization of work and the economy.

This account of structural domination does much to illuminate the kind of power that is involved with economic vulnerability and precarity. However, as Michael Denning argues, such an approach also centres waged employment, and in doing so designates what falls outside of this sphere as a situation of exclusion or lack (Denning, 2010, p. 80). Presenting waged, or formal, employment as the norm is not only factually incorrect when one looks at the global division of labour, as mentioned in section one, this perspective also has been criticized by feminists as glossing over the structural dependency of capitalist production on spheres of activity 'outside' of waged labour, particularly the work of social reproduction (Arruzza, 2016; Fraser, 2017 p. 24; Jarrett, 2016, Ch. 2). As the quote by Denning at the start of chapter alludes to, it is 'wageless life', not wage labour, that should be the starting point for understanding the structural domination of the capitalist economy (Denning, 2010, p. 81). Rather than taking the capitalist workplace as our conceptual point of departure, we should thus start from the household, which acts as a 'wageless base of subsistence labour' in the midst of precarity (ibid). This is a perspective offered by the feminist-autonomist conception of the Social Factory, which I will now briefly explore.

The feminist conception of the Social Factory was articulated through the *Wages for Housework* movement of the seventies and built on the Italian Marxist tradition of *operaismo*.[22] Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, key protagonists of *Wages for Housework*, argued that despite what Marx did and did not argue, domestic and caring labour is essential to the production of surplus value (Dalla Costa & James, 1975, pp. 32-33; see also Federici, 2012, pp. 15-22). Rather than being a 'labour of love' belonging naturally to women and unrelated to production, this labour is argued to have a 'precise and vital place in the capitalist division of labor, *in pursuit of productivity at the social level*' (ibid, p. 33; italics in original). In other words, Dalla Costa and James were making the now-familiar argument that unwaged social reproductive work is necessary to the existence of waged work, and that this reproductive work is carried out mostly by women in the household and through the wider social relations of the community. Thus, they argue, 'The community is (...) not an area of freedom and leisure auxiliary to the factory (...). The community is the other half of capitalist organisation, the other area of hidden capitalist exploitation, *the other, hidden, source of surplus labor*' (ibid, p. 11; italics in original). This other half of capitalist

[22] See Steve Wright's excellent historical work on this heterogeneous tradition (2008) and David Palazzo's historical reconstruction of the concept of the Social Factory up until the late 1970's (2014). Mario Tronti's *Workers and Capital*, recently republished in 2019, is a key text in the formation of this tradition of thought.

organisation, the reproduction of social life which is both depended on by capital and disavowed, is what they called the Social Factory (ibid, p. 32).

Dalla Costa and James employ the concept of the Social Factory in a limited way to think about the interdependencies between two spheres of social cooperation: the household and the waged labour economy. The family then sits as a crucial hinge between these two spheres, serving as a distributive mechanism through which wages can be imagined 'to extend to the nonwaged, underwaged, not-yet-waged, and no-longer-waged' (ibid, pp. 27-32). The family and its gendered division of labour is thus argued to serve as a privatized provider of social reproduction and as an ideological legitimation for relieving the state and capital for much of the cost of this reproduction (ibid, p. 34). The wage earned in the formal sphere of production thus obscures all the unwaged labour contributing to the process of valorisation, as well as the real length of the working day and the sites of value-extraction. Dalla Costa and James' articulation and employment of the Social Factory as a concept was thus aimed at demystifying this obscuring effect of the wage by showing that while capital only valorises waged labour, it relies on a whole system of unremunerated labour that also clearly produces value for capital in the form of labour-power itself.

The above analysis is exemplary of the Fordist context in which Dalla Costa and James were writing, with the iconic figures of the wage-labourer and the housewife standing in for the separate spheres of reproduction in the family, and capitalist production in the factory. However, under conditions of post-Fordism and neoliberalism, these sites of production and reproduction are increasingly complex. As Nancy Fraser puts it, social reproduction has become 'commodified for those who can pay for it and privatized for those who cannot, as some in the second category provide care work in return for (low) wages for those in the first' (Fraser, 2017, p. 32).[23] Despite these changes, the perspective that the Social Factory affords is just as relevant today. Firstly, this perspective shows and insists that the organization of the capitalist economy around waged labour relies on a relationship of dispossession and dependency that is structural rather than incidental. At the height of the Fordist period when Dalla Costa and James were writing, this dispossession and dependency on the labour market was expressed through the splitting of 'productive' and reproductive work into distinct, gendered spheres, of which the latter was discounted and not seen as 'work'. Today, as noted above, this dependency is expressed in a different, though no less gendered and racialized configuration. As such, the Social Factory presses on the interdependency of capitalist work and what is excluded from the latter's conception of work as gainful employment. Secondly, from this perspective it is clear that intra-work and extra-work domination are inextricably linked under capitalism. As Kathi Weeks puts it, 'The wages for housework perspective sought to challenge dominant understandings about who is disciplined by the wage and who is involved in struggles over wages' (Weeks, 2011, p. 122). Those reliant on their working partners, those without a job, those 'working poor', and those outside the formal economy are thus 'disciplined' in various ways

[23] A vivid illustration of this is made in the film *Parasite* (2019) by Bong Joon-ho, in which a poor, working-class family in Seoul slowly replace all of the servants working in the household of a wealthy family. See also the volume of essays in *The Post-Fordist Sexual Contract* (Adkins & Dever, 2016) for an exploration of the changing configuration of gender dynamics and inequalities within the post-Fordist economy.

through the organization of the capitalist economy around wage labour, alongside those in work.

Lastly, the Social Factory as perspective emphasizes the dependency of capitalist work on a whole host of unremunerated activities that are nonetheless shaped by the imperative to make a living. In the context of a low demand for labour and the persistence of dependency on the wage for a living, this insight is increasingly pertinent. Whether it is unpaid care or domestic labour (Jaffe, 2021, Ch. 1 & 2), the work of curating oneself as a subject of value for the labour market (Pfannebecker & Smith, 2020, Ch. 3), or the effort of looking for work, these are constituted by a fundamental relationship of dependency in the capitalist economy. As such, the structural power of the labour market, which brings into being all kinds of figures 'marginal' to the wage, is inextricably linked to the domination workers face in the workplace. For this reason, and under these conditions, the question of democratizing work cannot be limited to the democratization of the workplace alone, as some authors suggest (Dahl, 1985). This limitation of workplace democracy at the 'point of production' (as well as its emancipatory potential) will be discussed in more detail in chapter four, while the relationship between democratizing the workplace and democratizing work more broadly will be explored in chapter five and six. At this point, however, the autonomist-feminist conception of the Social Factory offers a perspective on capitalist work that starts from a recognition of the interdependency of waged work and wageless life, and that the radical dependency on the labour market for one's basic needs that forms the condition for both.

Social Suffering in and beyond Work

In the summer of 2019, Fellowes, a company producing workplace products, commissioned a study on the effects of British office workers' working habits on their health, which led them to produce a life-sized model of a woman working for 20 years in a 'standard' office, which they called Emma. The result is a shocking image of a middle-aged woman with sallow skin, bloodshot eyes, varicose veins, and a permanently bent back (Fellowes, 2019).[24] The report notes that increased working time and workload pressures, 'financial volatility', too much screentime, and sedentary working has a negative impact on mental health, sleeping patterns, and learning and memory, while increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease and musculoskeletal disorders (ibid, p. 10). The figure of Emma is then intended to represent how these working habits affect the very physiology of the modern worker, with the shocking result just described.[25]

As this brief example indicates, work has extensive effects on the bodies and minds of workers. Work and the lack of it in capitalist economies is associated with a wide variety of forms of suffering, from exhaustion to stress, anxiety, shame, isolation and humiliation (see Dejours et al., 2018, Ch. 1 & 2; McCallum, 2020; Malesic, 2022). Many of these forms of suffering are strongly connected to the direct and indirect forms of domination faced in the workplace, as

[24] https://www.fellowes.com/gb/en/resources/fellowes-introduces/work-colleague-of-the-future.aspx
[25] It must be kept in mind that such a shocking result is also in the interest of Fellowes to exploit as a way of selling their products as 'solutions' to these issues.

most workers do not have control over their working conditions and labour process, as well as the structural domination of the labour market. Furthermore, many of these forms of suffering do not just happen overnight, and the stories that are behind them are most often not ones of great drama or catastrophe. Rather, they are often the result of an accumulation of many diffuse experiences of harm over long stretches of time. What is more, the neoliberal transformation of work and the 'labour of love' ethic explored above promotes an experience of such work-related suffering as being one's own responsibility, which itself can engender feelings of shame, despair, or cynicism, as the gap between the conditions of work and societal ideals for work widens (Horgan, 2021, p. 79; Malesic, 2022, Ch. 4 & 5). Pierre Bourdieu's conception of social suffering is intended to capture precisely these diffuse forms of suffering that are engendered by a dominating form of social organization, as well as the dissemination of this domination through the obscuring of the latter's social roots. As such, I will briefly explore his conception of social suffering as a way to understand, on a general level, the harmful effects of the transformation of work traced in section one and two.

Bourdieu's notion of social suffering is most fully illustrated in his famous work *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (Bourdieu et al., 1999). In it, he and a group of nineteen sociologists trace the lives of a cast of socially marginalized people, mostly in France: from an unemployed young couple facing destitution to a 50-year-old assembly-line worker in an automobile factory facing the transformation of working life at the plant. While much of *The Weight of the World* consists of vignettes and interviews presented with little theorization, there are several aspects of Bourdieu's conception of social suffering that present themselves that are relevant for our purposes. Firstly, social suffering is suffering that is the result of social relationships of domination (see also Schubert, 2012). Social suffering in relation to contemporary work then captures the experiences of harm that are the result of the socio-political organization of work, which is shaped primarily by the private interests of owners and shareholders, and in which workers generally lack control over their economic lives. Distinguishing social suffering from suffering *simpliciter* in relation to work is important as the relationship between work and suffering is complex and seems intuitively compelling. Hannah Arendt, for example, argues that drudgery, toil, and suffering are intrinsic to labouring for the satisfaction of human needs, and that such suffering lends human life a vitality and meaning that cannot be found in a 'life of ease' (Arendt, 1958, p. 120).[26] This idea of suffering as a condition for meaning and its relationship to labour as both burden and redemption is also deeply rooted in Judeaeo-Christian culture more broadly (Komlosy, 2018, pp. 10-11; Weber, 2013). However, in capitalist societies, work is socialized to an extent that basic human needs can only be met by working for another for a wage and work itself is shaped and organized in accordance with the production of surplus value (McLellan, 1980, p. 152). Whatever intrinsic relationship some activities maintain with toil and suffering, these should be distinguished from the social suffering resulting from the socio-political organization of work. The distinguishing

[26] To be sure, Arendt distinguishes 'labour' from 'work', where the former designates activities bound to the cyclical task of meeting the necessary conditions to sustain human life, and the latter designates activities which fabricate a durable world of things (Arendt, 1958, p. 7). As such, for Arendt, work is distinct from labour in that it has a definite beginning and a definite end, whereas labour 'has neither beginning nor end' (ibid, p. 144). Such a distinction between work and labour is traceable to ancient Greece (from which Arendt surely draws) and can be found in many European languages (Komlosy, 2018, p. 24).

feature is that the latter kind of suffering results from the arbitrary forms of power that are maintained over workers and is thus avoidable.[27]

As mentioned, social suffering not only denotes forms of harm stemming from relations of domination, but also the way in which these shape agents over long periods of time. Or, to stick to Bourdieu's parlance, the ways in which relations of domination are incorporated into agents' dispositions and become a key part of their *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 125). This is particularly salient when trying to understand forms of suffering related to work and the lack of it, as the way work shapes and potentially harms agents is not reducible to this or that particular experience of injustice. For example, in their book on workers in post-industrial Teesside UK whose main experience of working life was one of shuttling between insecure work, and 'subsistence level benefits', Tracy Shildrick and Robert MacDonald describe the demeaning and exploitative conditions these workers had to accept on account of their economic vulnerability, and the lack of social esteem and dignity most participants felt when out of work (Shildrick & MacDonald, 2012, pp. 169-177). This sense of indignity (as well as pride of managing in the face of adversity) was fostered not because these workers were forced to take a low-paid, temporary job for a while, but because this pattern of low pay and employment instability was constituent of most their working lives (ibid, p. 18). These experiences shaped these workers' ideas around the importance and value of work, passed on also from an older generation of working-class parents, even though the opportunities for 'decent work' were continuously undermined (ibid, p. 87). As this example shows, work and the social suffering associated with it is deeply constitutive of agents as the relations of domination that shape work become internalized and, to some extent, naturalized. Lastly, the dispositions incorporated in one's *habitus* also mark one's social position. Take, for example, the protagonist of the semi-autobiographical novel *The End of Eddy* by Édouard Louis (2018). Growing up in a poor working-class household in rural France, marginalized for his homosexuality both by his family and community, Eddy is faced with a sense of shame when entering university and a lingering sense of anxiety about his class status. University for Eddy represents both a way out of his painful youth as well as a confrontation with his conservative, working-class background. Social suffering is thus positional as well as temporal (Bourdieu et al., 1999, p. 4).[28]

A final dimension of Bourdieu's conception of social suffering pertains to the severing of this suffering from its social roots, and the role this plays in reproducing relations of domination. As Emanuel Renault points out: 'on the one hand suffering at work is part of what seems pathological in these new working conditions; on the other hand, it is also producing individualization and guilt complexes that are obstacles to any practical dynamic of social transformation' (Renault, 2010, p. 224). One example of such individualization can be found in the study on workers on low-paid, insecure work mentioned above. The destruction of organized labour in this community, the lack of practical alternatives, and a 'shirkers vs strivers'

[27] Social suffering should thus also be distinguished from existential suffering, that is, suffering that is intrinsic to the human condition of being a finite being who must risk the loss of any this-worldly attachment. Striving to overcome avoidable, social suffering, is thus different from striving to overcome suffering that is intrinsic to and constitutive of human existence.

[28] See also Richard Sennett's and Jonathan Cobb's *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972).

discourse that presents unemployment and poverty as a result of personal attitude and failing meant that most if not all of these workers navigated their hardships in an individualized manner (Shildrik & MacDonald, 2012, p. 31; see also Pfannebecker & Smith, 2020, p. 46). Another example can be found in the discursive and political reconstruction of workers as 'entrepreneurs of the self' explored in section two, who ideally cultivate an investor stance towards their own skills, ambitions and attributes to become, or remain, employable. This demand shifts responsibility and culpability for the structural outcomes of the labour market onto the worker as individual, for whom they become attributes of their personal failures or successes (Farrugia, 2013; 2018; 2019). This severance of suffering from its social roots is further complicated by the structural form of power the labour market exerts on workers, which unlike relations of domination made and unmade through personal interaction, takes on an objective character, as if beyond individual power, and subsists without agents having to deliberately recreate them (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 130).

However, such relationships of domination at work and through the labour market are not simply an immutable fact of life to be accepted as one would the weather; they are the product of an organization of work and the economy which is, by and large, guided by private interests. Bourdieu's conception of social suffering, and his closely associated concept of *habitus,* then has two key implications for our purposes. The first is that, as the past is found embodied in present agents, the social world is more resistant to transformation than we might think if we take, for example, a rationalistic view of social agents. Any thoroughgoing transformation will inevitably run into the current dispositions, internalized norms and ways of thinking that are at least in part the product of relationships of domination. Transforming these dispositions, and agents' own participation in their self-transformation, is an important part of confronting relationships of domination – a theme that will be more fully explored in chapter three. The second implication is that by stressing the social roots of work-related suffering, Bourdieu not only points towards the recalcitrance of relations of inequality and domination, but also towards the potential for these relations to be remade and transformed along more egalitarian lines. This then leads us towards the question that will occupy the rest of this thesis, namely: how can democratizing work counter relationships of domination within and outside work that are so pronounced in advanced industrialized economies? And how might we re-imagine work so that it serves democratically constituted ends rather than private ones?

Conclusion

As we have explored, the place of formal employment has become increasingly precarious over the last five decades, and so have the lives of a growing number of people who have to navigate a flexibilized labour market. At the same time, work has been ideologically recast as a path to individual self-fulfilment and workers are prompted to take an entrepreneurial attitude towards their skills and attributes so that they might keep afloat in these choppy waters. On the one hand this looks like a perverse state of affairs, where agents are encouraged to invest the whole of their lives in their work in order to become a viable economic subject, while the conditions for work to satisfy what William Morris once noted as three fundamental hopes of work – 'hope of rest, hope of product, hope of pleasure in the work itself' – are continuously undermined

(Morris, 2008, p. 2).[29] On the other hand, with the attrition of organized labour, this situation is one that for many seems immutable, and where the practical agency workers are left with is to form and attune themselves, in one way or another, to the requirements of the labour market.

I have argued that these developments have two troubling implications. First, they point to a more pronounced relationship between the more direct forms of domination faced *at* work and the structural domination of the labour market. As explored through the autonomist-feminist conception of the Social Factory, this relationship is intrinsic to capitalism as a mode of production but has been reconfigured and become more prominent with the political-economic tendencies noted in section one. Secondly, these developments are tied up with what I have conceptualized with Bourdieu as social suffering. That is, work under capitalism produces various kinds of suffering because of the relationships of domination workers face in and outside of work, while these are increasingly individualized through the neoliberal re-shaping of work.

This diagnosis of normative concerns with the transformation of work is posited, however, on a rather general and abstract level – even if we have considered some more specific examples. While these general concerns and the structural tendencies that underpin them frame the rest of this thesis, the coming chapters will explore the question of democratizing work in dialogue with the concerns, critiques, and insights from the IWGB's couriers, grounding this exploration in a particular experience of work and precarity. Nonetheless, the more general normative concerns around domination, social suffering and individualization reappear throughout the chapters ahead of us. Chapter three explores the theme of individualization in relation to the problems on-demand couriers face trying to organize for better conditions. Chapter four considers the domination couriers face at work and the potential of models of workplace democracy to transform couriers' work along more egalitarian lines. Picking up on some of the limitations of democratizing work at the level of the firm, chapters five and six consider post-work proposals and models for democratic economic planning respectively as ways of democratizing the structural economic context in which work takes place. First, however, I shall turn to the methodological question of why and how I ground my theorizing about democratizing work in conversations with the IWGB's couriers.

[29] This point is made more fully by Lauren Berlant in her book *Cruel Optimism*. There she explores how work under conditions of post-Fordism acts as a site of 'cruel optimism': an object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility and attachment to the present, which turns cruel when it is actually is an obstacle to one's flourishing (Berlant, 2011, p. 2).

2

Democratic Theory and Theorizing with a Democratic Sensibility

Democracy is nothing less than defined by critique (Adorno, 2005, p. 281).

Politically mature [mündig] is the person who speaks for himself, because he has thought for himself and is not merely repeating someone else; he stands free of any guardian. This is demonstrated in the power to resist established opinions and, one and the same, also to resist existing institutions, to resist everything that is merely posited, that justifies itself with its existence (Adorno, 2005, p. 282).

Introduction

In the previous chapter I made a diagnosis of general tendencies of contemporary work, both material and discursive, that are troubling for the relationships of domination and social suffering they engender. While these structural conditions are crucial for understanding and explaining experiences of domination, injustice and suffering that many people have in relation to their work, taking them as a starting point to theorise about democratizing work would be akin to putting the cart before the horse. That is, as a theorist committed to the egalitarian ethos of democracy and the ambition of critical theory to understand social life with an eye towards emancipation, relying solely on philosophical abstractions or second-order sociological explanations to the exclusion of the more direct experiences of those theorized about runs the risk of contradicting that very ethos and ambition. Rather, it is with these negative experiences themselves and people's own accounts and critiques of them that we should start the difficult work of theorizing. This is at least what I will explain and argue in what follows. How can this democratic ethos and critical ambition be incorporated into the process and method of theorizing itself? Why is this important, and what problems do we run into when attempting such an approach? In other words, I will explain how and why I adopt a democratic *praxis* in 'doing' democratic theory in this thesis.

The question of how to incorporate aims and principles integral to the idea of democracy itself into one's methodological approach takes on a particular relevance in the context of theorising about work. As Jacques Rancière argues in his book *The Philosopher and his Poor*, Western philosophy has repeatedly sought to maintain its status as true discourse through a constitutive exclusion of subjects it designates as unable to participate properly in the production of knowledge (workers, proletarians, plebs, subalterns, etc.) (Rancière, 2004).[30] These are ultimately treated as objects of knowledge rather than subjects who can think and speak for themselves. They are deemed not 'politically mature' [mündig] in the Enlightenment sense alluded to by Adorno in the opening quote: as people who can think, judge, speak and act for

[30] Rancière focuses on workers in particular, but this argument has been made also with regard to other subjects of constitutive exclusion, such as racialized non-white people, women, and queer people.

themselves, and who do not need a guardian to do this in their stead.[31] This paternalistic distrust of 'ordinary agents'' reflexive capacities is a key characteristic not only of much social theory but also of, perhaps surprisingly, democratic theory. From Aristotle to Schumpeter, the working class was thought incapable of reflecting properly on their own interests, thus needing to be taken in under the wings of those who supposedly knew better. While contemporary democratic theory has rid itself of such explicitly paternalistic convictions, a curious tendency does persist in relegating social actors' own critiques and experiences as secondary to normative ideals developed in separation of them. This tendency will be briefly explored below, as well as throughout this thesis' engagement with the democratic thought it draws on.

To remedy such a demotion of existing social critiques and to ground the ensuing reflections on democratizing work in the context of the conditions outlined in the previous chapter, I aim to take a more dialogical approach by engaging with workers' practices of justification and critique throughout the coming chapters. More specifically, I engage with the critiques, justifications and experiences as told by couriers working for platforms such as JustEATS and Deliveroo who are organizing through the IWGB (the Independent Workers of Great Britain), a grassroots union in the UK. From January 2021 until August of that same year, I conducted online interviews with a group of couriers who were engaged with the IWGB's Couriers' and Logistics (C&L) branch. At the same time, I was working as a caseworker for the branch and observed a variety of meetings such as branch meetings, strike organizing meetings, and meetings around particular issues couriers were facing. As will be explained in what follows, the stories of these workers gleaned from my conversations with them, my experiences as a case-worker for the branch, and my observations of the latter's organizational practices form the backbone of the thesis' reflections on the democratization of work: both in terms of grounding these reflections in a particular place and time, as well as in terms of the themes, issues, and normative concerns that are addressed.

This chapter is then organized in two main parts. In section one I explore and explain how, and why, this project incorporates methodologically principles and aims fundamental to the idea of democracy – equality and autonomy – in approaching the question of how democratic theory can contribute to a critical understanding of important dimensions of the transformation of work. While drawing links to democratic theorists with similar approaches and a revived debate in political theory more broadly about the importance of incorporating voices of social actors, I flesh out my approach by building mainly on Robin Celikates' understanding of critique as a social practice (2018). Section two then details my method in more depth. I justify my focus on the IWGB's couriers' branch, explain how I conducted my interviews and engaged in participatory observation, and address some limitations. Lastly, I explore the question of how the stories, experiences, and critiques of the workers I engage with relate to the theory drawn on, the methodological role they play, and the way they shape the rest of thesis. While much of this chapter is then about justifying the role that the conducted interviews play in the thesis, the

[31] Adorno draws on the definition of 'political maturity' (Mündigkeit) from Kant's essay 'What is Enlightenment' (1784), drawing implications from the formulation itself: *mündig* means no longer requiring a guardian (Vormund), who makes decisions for one (bevormunden).

broader argument of this chapter is about the importance of adopting a democratic *praxis,* or a 'democratic sensibility', when doing democratic theory.

I) Against Guardianship: Critique as a Social Practice and Theorizing with a Democratic Sensibility

In what ways might reflectively listening to couriers working for on-demand platforms who are members of a grassroots, independent union in the UK help us think about questions of democracy pertaining to the transformation of work? While a meta-theoretical reflection on the epistemological relationship between scholar and 'ordinary person' might seem to take us on a detour to answer this question, this relationship is at the heart of any coherent answer. How scholars conceive of the role of those they are theorizing about in the production of knowledge shapes the knowledge that is produced, but also reveals something about the goals that the scholar is committed to. To 'do' democratic theory without a commitment to some idea of equality and agency would be incoherent, and taking these principles seriously has important implications for the role the people theorized about play in democratic theorizing. As Robin Celikates and Pierre Bourdieu argue, one way to conceive of the relationship between the scholar and their subject that has been characteristic of much social science has been to introduce an *epistemological break* between theory and practice. As Bourdieu puts it with regards to the 'objectivism' he traces in structuralism, anthropology and sociology: 'Objectivism, which sets out to establish objective regularities (structures, laws, systems of relationships, etc.) independent of individual consciousnesses and wills, introduces a radical discontinuity between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 26). In other words, objectivism introduces an epistemological break between researcher and participant which is necessary in order to analyse the deeper causes of social behaviour lost on ordinary consciousness. Such an approach not only seems to sever the connection between critical theory and practice, but also undermines the aim for emancipation that is the aim of establishing such a connection in the first place. This is not because it affirms the actuality of epistemic inequalities – there is no doubt about the existence of these – but because it makes this epistemic inequality a methodological necessity, in the end denying the equal *capacity* for critical reflection and judgment. Such a radical epistemological break is assumed here to be insufficient. As Celikates argues, for the potential for emancipation (and I would add, democratic equality), to remain a possibility for a theory that has both as its aim, such a theory 'cannot declare its addressees incompetent as part of its methodological procedure – however indirectly – without undermining its own ambition' (Celikates, 2018, p. 163).

Some form of epistemic equality between scholar and agent then seems to flow from a democratic commitment to equality as well as a critical ambition towards emancipatory change. Before exploring a way of understanding this relationship in more depth, however, we might do well to take a step back and briefly train our eye a bit more on the connection between the principle of equality that is fundamental to most, if not all ideas of democracy, and the postulation of an axiom of epistemic equality. This will bring into sharper focus the deeper

congruency between the aims of this project and the methodological principle of epistemic symmetry.

As Michael Saward and Michael Levin point out, most, if not all genuine anti-democratic arguments are at base arguments from superior knowledge (Saward, 1998, p. 23; Levin, 1992, Ch. 2). Not any kind of superior knowledge, however, but non-contingent superior knowledge of the ends and interests of social and political life. The claim to exclusive rule of a political community, or the exclusion of groups of people from any claim to political and social power, are at heart legitimated by a claim to access to superior knowledge, not just of appropriate means to an end (as in specialized knowledge in certain specific and limited areas of practice), but of the ends of political society itself (Saward, 1998, p. 27). This epistemic privilege has historically been a ground for excluding groups on the basis of property, race, caste, gender and religion. There is thus an intrinsic connection between claims to epistemic privilege in accessing truths about political and social life of the kind that purely external critiques reserve for themselves, and the anti-democratic argument for the need of 'guardianship' by the epistemically privileged of those who are necessarily mistaken about their own interests. Or, to put it differently, the epistemic privilege of ascertaining non-contingent truths about the social and political contradicts the democratic principle of political equality. This is what we can interpret a thinker such as Hannah Arendt to mean when she argues that 'every claim in the sphere of human affairs to an absolute truth, whose validity needs no support from the side of opinion, strikes at the very roots of all politics and governments' (Arendt, 2000, p. 550). If we had indisputable knowledge of how to arrange social life, ascertained through philosophical or scientific reflection, there would be no need for politics at all, and certainly not democracy. The problem with this for Arendt is not only the impossibility of ascertaining such knowledge, but that it is fundamentally a-political: it can only be ascertained by 'man in the singular', and any claim to rule from it is a fundamentally exclusionary claim that contradicts the human condition of plurality (and we might add here, the democratic principle of equality) (ibid, p. 551).[32]

The kind of equality that democracy makes a claim to is established precisely by relinquishing the 'noble lie' of a knowledge or truth that legitimizes exclusive rule.[33] If there is no non-contingent knowledge of political interest or truth, then no one has an a-priori claim to ruling over others. The idea of democracy and the principle of political equality that underpins it thus relies on a principle of epistemic equality, meaning that when it comes to political judgement, no one can claim to have superior knowledge a-priori. This principle of epistemic equality, in turn, relies on the assumption that people have the capacity for critical reflection (i.e., second-order reflection), and thus for judgment as well. This does not mean that these capacities are *de facto* equal, or that they are unhindered in their development and exercise, as we will be discussing below. What this does mean is that a theory that has democratic equality as its aim needs to incorporate methodologically this axiom, or principle, of epistemic equality by taking

[32] This point is made by Arendt throughout her work but is made especially strong in her essay on Lessing (Arendt, 1968, pp. 3-31).

[33] 'Noble lie' refers to Plato's open admission for the necessity of a myth of nature to establish both the autonomy of philosophical discourse as well as a social order guided by principles of transcendent truth. See Arendt (2000, p. 475) and Rancière (2003, pp. 52-53) for two different but complementary expositions.

seriously agents' capacity for reflection, judgment and critique. The question then becomes, first of all, about how me might viably think of such a 'methodological egalitarianism'? What are reasons for adopting such a principle other than its congruence with democratic aims? What might its limitations be? And lastly, what role is critical theory still able to play in such a constellation?

One thinker who has formulated a particularly sophisticated answer to these questions is Robin Celikates. Situated in the Frankfurt School tradition of Critical Theory, though drawing extensively on debates in French social theory, Celikates develops a conception of critique as a social practice that is available to, and actualized by, ordinary agents. What makes his conception of critique as a social practice especially relevant to our discussion here is his acute insight into the perplexities that arise when aiming for a critical theory that takes epistemic symmetry as its starting principle, while trying to retain the critical ambition of theory. I will follow this two-pronged logic in the structure of what follows below by discussing, first, the manner in which Celikates, following the sociology of critique, 'endogenizes' reflexivity. Secondly, I will turn to his conception of critical theory that builds on this 'methodological egalitarianism' but retains the ambition of critique.

Endogenous Reflexivity and Critique as a Social Practice

The 'logic of competence' that Celikates unravels is one articulated by ethnomethodology, in particular that of Harold Garfinkel, and the sociology of critique as articulated by Luc Boltanski. Both these approaches, in different ways, posit a fundamental epistemological symmetry between the perspectives of 'experts' and 'lay-people', theoretical and practical knowledges. It is not possible for me to do justice to the complexities of these literatures, and neither is it for our purposes necessary to discuss them in great depth. Rather, as Celikates' own approach builds much more extensively on the sociology of critique, I will focus primarily how the latter proceeds from a principle of epistemic equality by way of 'endogenizing reflexivity'. What does it mean to say that reflexivity is endogenous? And to what is it endogenous? In short, for the sociology of critique (as well as ethnomethodology) reflexivity is claimed to be endogenous to the self-understanding of agents and constitutive of the social world in a manner that renders access to this world equally available to agents themselves, in principle, as it is to the social scientist. In other words, 'reflexivity should not just be attributed to the theoretical or scientific perspective, but must be understood as a phenomenon that can be found at different levels and that can be reconstructed in the context of a pragmatics of reflection' (Celikates, 2018, p. 83). This does not mean that agents are constantly reflecting on the conditions of their agency in a fully transparent manner; there are in a sense always non-reflected, 'deep' dimensions of action that do not immediately come to the fore, or only temporarily. However, what is at stake is the rejection that a certain kind of reality fundamentally cannot be reflected upon by agents and is only accessible to the social scientist. I shall now turn to the way in which the sociology of critique makes this theoretical move of endogenizing reflexivity.

The sociology of critique, developed by Luc Boltanski and other members of the *Group de Sociologie Politique et Morale*, posits a fundamental symmetry between the explanatory principles

used in the social sciences and the interpretative principles brought to bear by the actors whom the social sciences take as their object (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, p. 11). Put simply: 'If it is true that individuals behave 'like philosophers,' we can reverse the lens and observe that the philosopher's categories are not so far removed from those used by individuals' (Dubet, 2016, p. 16). Agents are on this account understood as 'justificatory beings': we are all constantly subject to demands to justify ourselves in our everyday practice, and the reflexive practices of abstraction, detachment and generalization to accomplish this are not radically different than the reflexive practices of the social scientist (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, p. 12; Celikates, 2018, p. 96). However, these practices of justification and critique, which have generalization and detachment as their basis, do not exist in a social vacuum. In order to justify themselves, agents draw on general principles and normative frameworks that are socially and culturally mediated. These 'justificatory regimes' are generally shared throughout society, and as such precede individuals and are independent of them, thus forming the conditions of possibility for individuals to condemn injustice or justify their actions (Dubet, 2016, p. 4). While academics have resources at their command not available to 'ordinary' agents (both conceptual or theoretical, and in terms of time), in terms of reflexive capabilities and practices 'there is neither a radical break nor a seamless continuity between commonplace and theoretical judgements' (Dubet, 2016, p. 4).[34]

Thus, rather than critique being only possible from a position of radical exteriority, critique is here understood as a *social practice*: a practice that is undertaken in various forms and manners by 'ordinary' agents as much as by social scientists, in ways which are structurally similar (Celikates, 2018, p. 106). As a consequence of the above argument, it then follows that agents engaged in practices of justification and critique themselves have relevant knowledge of the social world, and that these agents' experiences and justificatory practices should be taken as the starting point of inquiry (Celikates, 2018, p. 96; Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, p. 12). What is more, people's experiences of subordination and domination are what often catalyses them to analyse, explain and critique the relations of power that produce these experiences. As Patricia-Hill Collins argues, 'people who are harmed by racism, heteropatriarchy, and colonialism have a vested interest in better understanding these systems of power. But they also have a vested interest in developing critical social theories that foster resistance projects of antiracism, feminism, and decolonization' (Hill-Collins, 2019, p. 117). In other words, those subject to relations of domination have vital knowledge about the situation they are in that is relevant to the critical theorist not only for understanding and explaining certain systems of power, but also to grasp the change that these actors themselves wish to see. In the context of this thesis, treating workers as theorists of their own fraught situations in their own right thus establishes a dialogical relationship between scholar and actor that is premised on an assumption of intellectual equality

[34] In more philosophical terms, an apt image is that employed by Merleau-Ponty (and after him Deleuze) of consciousness and reflexivity as a 'fold' within reality, and reflexive practices as 'threading' and 'weaving', all of which suggest neither radical discontinuity (such as transcendence), nor radical continuity (i.e., immanence) (Merleau-Ponty, 2013).

and recognizes them as agents in what Hill-Collins calls a 'resistant knowledge project' (ibid, p. 88).[35]

It is until here that Celikates, and I with him, follow the sociology of critique in their moves to endogenize reflexivity and proceed from a principle of epistemic equality. As the sociology of critique is in large a descriptive enterprise aimed at modelling the practices of critique and justification of the agents, Celikates argues that it tends to lose sight of the social conditions of their exercise (Celikates, 2018, p. 108). At worst they might, as Bourdieu suggests, end up offering a rather depoliticized inventory of forms of self-understanding that happen to exist (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 74). Celikates thus proposes another 'critical turn', one that takes the axiom of symmetry as articulated by the sociology of critique as a starting point, but that also has the critical aim of inquiring into the structurally deficient conditions of practices of justification that can exist. It is to Celikates' understanding of such 'structural reflexivity deficits' and the implications for critical theory that we shall now turn.

Second-Order 'Pathologies' as Structural Reflexivity Deficits, and Critical Theory as Reconstructive Critique

Against the more descriptive enterprise of the sociology of critique Celikates has one main objection, which is that it has trouble scrutinizing the structural *restrictions* that regimes of justification potentially pose on reflexive capacities and practices of self-understanding (Celikates, 2018, p. 123). These restrictions might be 'objective', such as the possibility for agents to draw on a plurality of regimes of justification (which might be impaired due to hegemonic social arrangements and regimes of justification that limit the socially available opportunities of critique), as well as 'subjective' (the unequal distribution and structural impairment of the development of critical capacities) (ibid, p. 107). As Mathew Longo and Bernardo Zacka put it,

> More often than not, the harms and wrongs we find in the world are not the result of confusion about the grounding of our morals, but a consequence of the obstructions and occlusions that are generated by how we frame problems, how vested interests and power structures shape our gaze (...) (Zacka et al., 2020, p. 12)

On these power structures, there has been much important work done in particular by feminist and decolonial scholars around the complex ways in which bodies of ignorance (racial, gendered and sexual in particular) contribute to the reproduction of structures of oppression from which they also spring (Alcoff, 2007; Medina, 2013). Another good example that builds on this work is Mihaela Mihai's argument on 'ecologies of social ignorance', in which agents' cognitive, affective and material investments in certain mystified, epistemically 'lazy' representations of the social world end up reproducing exclusionary imaginaries of community, despite there being ample other justificatory regimes 'on offer' (Mihai, 2021). And of course, the neoliberal organization of labour that is the topic of this thesis is routinely accused of hindering agents' capacity to critically apprehend their problematic situation and act accordingly.

[35] In this sense, the approach I outline is somewhat similar to the different traditions of 'worker's inquiry', which seek to understand workers' experiences from the vantage point of workers' themselves and in their own forms of expression (Woodcock, 2014).

Undoubtedly, then, there are conditions that thwart, or obstruct agents from critically apprehending their own situation and that of others. As long as we live in societies that are structurally unequal, in which there are dominant normative interpretations that are heavily interest-laden and in which information relevant to the definition of 'problematic' situations is distorted by such interests, these conditions will need scrutinizing. Drawing in main from Axel Honneth, Celikates calls these obstructive social conditions *second-order 'pathologies'*, which 'manifest themselves in *structural reflexivity deficits* on part of the agents' (Celikates, 2018, p. 124). Second-order 'pathologies' are understood as circumstances in which agents' capacity to reflect on and criticise problematic situations, opinions, dispositions, preferences and practices of a first order is prevented or complicated, making it difficult for injustices to be criticized, changed or even recognized (ibid). Such conditions then pose *structural* restrictions on the reflexivity of agents, as they go beyond the concrete context of the agent's action and undermine the very conditions of possibility for justification and critique (ibid). Still, while these capacities can be hindered in their exercise (by dint of hegemonic regimes of justification), or in their formation (by way of socialization), damage to these capacities can never be total or complete.[36] As we saw in chapter one, we can find such second-order 'pathologies' at work in the 'labour-of-love' ethic that has become hegemonic in many Western European countries, and the individualized negotiation of flexibilized labour-markets.

Are we then back at square-one, where we need to distinguish once more between subjective and objective interests, and the arduous task of spelling out how agents 'really' ought to criticise certain phenomena? The short answer is 'no'. Firstly, against any more substantive conceptions of capacities that would then constitute an external, 'objective' interest from which to carry out critique, Celikates' adopts a formal understanding of capacities and their actualisation. What capacities are hindered in their development or exercise depends on the agents' social conditions and can vary in character and degree (Celikates, 2018, p. 126). Thus, rather than ascertaining what capacities are lacking on the basis of an 'objectivist' or 'subjectivist' determination, what matters are the 'reflexive capacities agents need in order to ask and answer the question as to the objectionability of their situation *themselves*' (ibid, p. 125). It follows that any diagnosis of a 'structural reflexivity deficit' can only be achieved in dialogue with the agents in question themselves, and their own understanding of their situation. Underpinning such a dialogue is the assumption of a *methodological* egalitarianism: acknowledging that there are in fact structural

[36] Perhaps an extreme, but therefore telling example, is the character Ikonnikov-Morzh in Vasily Grossman's novel *Life and Fate*. A former Tolstoian in a German concentration camp and called a 'holy fool' by his inmates for his peculiar ideas on good and evil, Ikonnikov is the only one of his camp to refuse building the gas-chamber in which he knows he and his inmates will be executed. In a moving conversation with a former priest who tries to convince him God will forgive him for building the chamber, Ikonnikov says: "(...) I'm not asking for absolution of sins. I don't want to be told that it's the people with power over us who are guilty, that we're innocent slaves, that we're not guilty because we're not free. I *am* free! I'm building a *Vernichtungslager*; I have to answer to the people who'll be gassed there. I can say "No". There's nothing can stop me – as long as I can find the strength to face my destruction. I *will* say 'No!' *Je dirai non, mio padre, je dirai non!*" (Grossman, 2006, pp. 288-289). Even in this most extreme of situations, stuck in a concentration camp during a war between two totalitarian regimes, facing a decision from which follows no redemption and will result in the same certain consequence, this 'holy fool' still recognizes that there *is* a decision to make; he has not lost his capacity to judge, to recognize the situation as deeply wrong, or downright evil, and acts in accordance with what he holds to be true.

inequalities and asymmetries, these can never be so total as to deny agents a say in what their interests are (ibid, p. 134).

The resulting form of critique is a meta-critique, or second-order critique, since it strives to strengthen the conditions that enable and foster everyday critical practices. It is in effect a 'critique of a (first-order) critique' (ibid, p. 135). Thus, on Celikates' account, critique is neither content with reconstructing actual instances of self-understanding, nor does it wish, or need to adopt an external standpoint to transcend these. Rejecting the choice between either of these poles as a false one, Celikates goes on to develop what he calls 'reconstructive critique'. Reconstructive critique is reconstructive in the sense that the normative ideals guiding critique are not derived outside of, and prior to engagement with, socially and historically specific practices, institutions and interpretive frameworks. It is a reconstruction of concrete 'pathologies' in a dialogical manner with agents' own practices of justification and critique, while being attentive to, and critical of, the potentially obstructive conditions of this self-understanding (ibid, p. 142).

Furthermore, reconstructive critique, as hinted at above, does not separate the construction of the grounds or principles that are supposed to make critique possible, from the practice of critique. Such a separation takes place in, for example the later Habermas's formal-pragmatic approach, in which the 'quasi-transcendental' construction of communicative action is detached from the critique of concrete 'pathologies' which such a construction is supposed to make possible (ibid, 140; Habermas, 1984). The construction of the grounds that make critique possible is thus insulated from existing practices of social critique to a large extent. Contrastingly, 'reconstructive critique reverses Habermas's separation of reconstruction and critique, understanding these instead as inextricably intertwined' (Celikates, 2018, p. 142). Concretely this means that critical theory needs to track existing, concrete social practices of justification and tie in its theoretical practice with these. As Celikates' puts it, 'it [critical theory] must tie in with the suffering of its addressees, or less pathos-laden: with their awareness (however diffuse and weakly developed) that there is a problem' (ibid, p. 148). This too is very close to Patricia-Hill Collins' take on resistant knowledge projects as perspectives, experiences, practices and forms of knowledge forged through struggles against various relations of power, and the necessity for the critical theorist to engage with the perspectives of those whose struggles they are theorising about (Hill-Collins, 2019, p. 116). Without such dialogical engagement, critical democratic theory would risk neglecting pressing first-order issues and perspectives, as well as insulating its ideals and proposals from social practices and critiques. As I will explain later in this chapter, this does not mean that theorists cannot make use of ideas and concepts that are not initially used by the agents engaged with themselves. This is in fact indispensable in the face of social conditions of justification and critique which obstruct, or otherwise hinder agents' development or exercise of their justificatory and critical capacities. However, the ideas and concepts employed by the theorist need to refer back to norms and principles recognized by the relevant social actors, however implicit these might be.

The practices of couriers organizing at the IWGB can then be understood with Hill-Collins as such a 'resistant knowledge project', in the sense that the active members of the couriers'

branch are actively involved in analysing and theorizing the power relations they are subject to with an eye to resisting them. The stories that workers exchange at the various meetings within the branch, the deliberation about strategies to resist issues couriers are facing, the conversations members have with co-riders on the streets and in their communities – these practices are all part of the co-creation of these workers' understanding of their own situations not only for the sake of understanding, but for the sake of change (ibid, p. 88). And with Celikates we can then understand critical theorising as an endeavour that recognizes social actors as theorists in their own right who need to be thought *with* and *against,* in the sense of critically scrutinizing the conditions of their critique and recursively extending reflection on the avenues for possible change these actors suggest.

Democratic Theory and Theorizing with a Democratic Sensibility

Before I justify the choice of conducting interviews with members of the Couriers and Logistics branch of the IWGB union, as well as how these interviews will relate to and inform the democratic theory I will draw on, I want to first defend the approach I am taking to democratic theorizing in a bit more detail. I am aware that the approach I am taking, building on Celikates' understanding of critique as a social practice, is not very common in democratic theory. While I have already touched upon the deep consonance Celikates' approach has with the principle of equality that is at the heart of most, if not all democratic theories in one way or another, I argue that his approach is not only complementary to democratic theory in its aims but has distinct methodological strengths and benefits that it brings to democratic theorizing. Situating this approach within the discipline of democratic theory and drawing on adjacent debates in political theory on methodology, I argue that Celikates' approach invites us to theorize with a 'democratic sensibility', in the sense that it not only proceeds from a principle of epistemic equality, but also in the sense that it presupposes a fundamentally equal capacity for agency which it attempts to promote through critical, dialogical engagement with actors' existing social critiques.

If in Celikates' framework there is a tension at work between thinking *with* agents' practices of critique and justification, while also thinking, in a limited sense, *against* them by drawing on theoretical frameworks and vocabularies they are not initially familiar with, this tension is held undissolved in service of the underlying aim of critical theory. Celikates argues that this aim is best captured by the intimately linked concepts of autonomy and 'Mündigkeit' ('maturity'), in the sense of the ability to speak and think for oneself, without any 'guardian' (ibid, p. 145). Both autonomy and 'maturity' are to be understood procedurally rather than substantively; it is not any end in particular that is presupposed good or right to pursue but rather a capacity to reflexively confront one's wishes, opinions and modes of behaviour where these are intertwined with first-order injustices that is to be fostered and translated into concrete practices geared towards the transformation of these injustices. And neither does being autonomous mean being entirely free from external or unconscious internal influences; it means, at a minimum, establishing a reflective relation to these forces, being able to take up second-order perspectives towards them, and translating these into practice (ibid, p. 146). Critique, in this sense, is not meant to be a 'guardianship' of the agent who is structurally unable to reflect on their own

practices, by the scholar who has access to knowledge about the objective forces that determine the agent's practices behind his back. Rather, the aim of critique is to enable agents to 'stand free of any guardian'; to foster a reflexive relation towards problematic situations of a first order, which is part of any transformative praxis.

In my interpretation, 'standing free of any guardian' takes on a particular meaning in both Celikates' reading of critique as a social practice, as well as the idea of democracy. The relationship between the two can be exemplified by the quote by Adorno on critique and political maturity that opened this chapter. Political maturity (which here is synonymous with standing free of any guardian) means, as Adorno writes, having the power to 'resist everything that is merely posited, that justifies itself with its existence' (2005, p. 282). And such resistance, 'as the ability to distinguish between what is known and what is accepted merely by convention or under the constraint of authority', is inextricably linked with critique, 'whose concept indeed comes from the Greek *krino,* 'to decide.'' (ibid). In Celikates' vocabulary, Adorno is here referring to structural reflexive deficits which obstruct or complicate agent's capacity to problematize their situation.[37] The role of critique is then to 'stir into action' again agents' obstructed critical self-understanding by problematizing the social conditions that hinder their first-order critiques. As I will expand on further in the next section, I also take the role of critique to be one that goes beyond and extends social actors' first-order critiques through the articulation of ideas and concepts aimed at transforming those social conditions deemed problematic by these actors. While Celikates then does not mention the inner affinity of this aim to the idea of democracy, Adorno makes a minor allusion to it: 'Critique and the prerequisite of democracy, political maturity, belong together' (ibid, p. 281). Adorno does not expand on this much, but with the help of a few interlocutors I will briefly make this largely implicit relationship explicit.

The need for guardianship of the masses by those who are more qualified to rule, by dint of their superior knowledge and virtue, has been invoked time and time again, as Robert Dahl reminds us (Dahl, 1989, p. 52). As already discussed, this guardianship is vehemently rejected by the idea of democracy. This relinquishing of guardianship then also means relinquishing the organization of social and political life according to principles or virtues derived from transcendent reason or truth. Democracy, as Claude Lefort famously put it, 'is instituted by the dissolutions of the markers of certainty. It inaugurates a history in which people experience a fundamental indeterminacy as to the basis of power, law and knowledge, and as to the relations between self and other at every level of social life' (Lefort, 1988, p. 19). In other words, the idea of democracy and the relinquishing of guardianship throws citizens back on themselves, to think and judge for themselves; to be able to resist 'everything that is merely posited, that justifies itself with its existence' (Adorno, 2005, p. 282). While a discussion on what 'thinking for oneself' means is beyond our remit here, I should note that I do not conceive of this as partaking in a dialogue with pure reason, or the solipsistic reflections of a radical sceptic. As Arendt puts it, independent thinking for oneself is 'by no means an activity pertaining to a closed, integrated,

[37] Celikates draws on the same quote by Adorno to draw the connection between autonomy and maturity that I am trying to extend here (Celikates, 2018, p. 145).

organically grown and cultivated individual (...)' (Arendt, 1968, p. 8). Rather, independent thinking is, paradoxically, always thinking in 'anticipated dialogue' with those *outside* oneself, and, we might add, those external forces one has internalized (ibid, p. 9; Celikates, 2018, p. 146). Such a specifically political way of thinking is then also part of what José Medina calls the 'imperative of epistemic interaction' that is integral to a democratic sensibility: the development of communicative and reactive habits that make us responsive to diverse and multiple others (Medina, 2013, p. 9).

Thus, while the idea of democracy demands citizens to 'think for themselves' and cultivate critical epistemic practices, actual conditions of inequalities, oppression and inescapable power-asymmetries shape and inform such thinking and acting in ways that limit or obstruct them, whether in 'actually-existing' democracies or other forms of society. This is what, for Celikates, necessitates critical theory in the first place. I then take the aims of his understanding of critique and democratic theory to be deeply consonant: to foster the conditions that make possible the actualization of the promise of equality democracy holds out. For this it is imperative to assume not the actuality of equal agency, but to presuppose a fundamental equal *capacity* for agency (or autonomy), that critical democratic theory then aims to enact and work towards. A democratic sensibility then runs through Celikates' approach that I wish to adopt here. This sensibility comprises, firstly, the methodological incorporation of the principle of epistemic equality, as discussed in part two. Secondly, the aim for agents' autonomy and 'maturity' and the contribution of critique to these aims, as just discussed. And thirdly, tracking and tying in with existing practices of critique and justification, which means both being attentive to existing power relations and injustices, as well as ensuring agents have a say in the (re)construction of their interests.

To be sure, the methodological approach outlined above is not alone in its commitment to engaging with existing social critiques and forms of lived experience. For example, there has been a resurgence of debate in the wider field of political theory about theorizing with an 'ethnographic sensibility' that similarly highlights the importance of engaging with existing social critiques and experiences rather than textual analysis alone (Herzog & Zacka, 2019; Zacka et al., 2020). This debate itself further builds on the efforts of feminist, decolonial and critical race theorists to think alongside those engaged in what Hill-Collins calls resistant knowledge projects, and who in doing so have criticized forms of political theorizing that tend to insulate their norms and principles from experience, history and power (Hill-Collins, 2019). While these thinkers come from very different theoretical traditions, Ackerly et al. argue that their commitment to empirically engaged political theory can be understood as forms of 'grounded normative theory' – which is what my own approach here can also be understood as. That is, theorizing that is methodologically committed to epistemological inclusivity and accountability, as well as recursiveness (revising and refining normative claims through engagement with actors' own practices of justification) (Ackerly et al., 2021).[38] Lastly, and most

[38] The 'democratic sensibility' I articulate with Celikates also resonates strongly with James Tully's 'public philosophy in a new key', which 'seeks to establish an on-going mutual relation with the concrete struggles, negotiations and implementations of citizens who experiment with modifying the practices of governance on the

close to this project's topic, Paul Apostolidis draws on Paulo Freire's conception of popular education to theorize with, and about, migrant day labourers and their experiences of precarity (Apostolidis, 2018). Similar to the democratic sensibility just outlined above, Apostolodis' methodological orientation also presupposes an intellectual equality among participants and researcher that the process of the research further aims to enact (ibid, p. 48). There is also a similar commitment to holding workers' commentaries in tension with existing theory relevant to these commentaries, without dissolving the one into the other (ibid, p. 59).

This project thus shares a commitment with the above-mentioned scholars to critically engaging with existing social critiques of actors entangled in particular relations of power and domination – a commitment that I have argued should flow from principles of equality and autonomy that are intrinsic to the idea of democracy, however otherwise understood. This can be briefly contrasted to some work in the academic field of democratic theory which has tended to take a 'models' approach to democratic theorizing (see Macpherson, 1977; Held, 2006). That is, an approach which sets out its inquiry from a coherent set of normative principles which make up the relevant model and approaches the social and political world through that normative lens. Hence the proliferation of adjectives that name different models: republican democracy, electoral democracy, agonistic democracy, adversarial democracy, deliberative democracy, etc. As Mark Warren and Hans Asenbaum point out, while ideal models of democracy are useful in clarifying normative presuppositions and enabling critical debate about better or worse forms of democracy, they also risk leading to theoretical dead-ends (Asenbaum, 2021; Warren, 2017). That is, such a 'model' approach encourages centring on an ideal typical feature of democracy and foregrounding a single problem (e.g., inclusion, legitimacy), practice (e.g., voting, deliberation, participation) or norm (e.g., public reason, non-domination) to the exclusion of others (Warren, 2017, p. 38). What we get, Warren goes on to argue, are then not different answers to the same questions, but rather the '*same* answers (e.g., deliberation and elections) to *different problems of democratic organization* (ibid, p. 41, italics in original). The problem, in other words, is a normative monism that, in focussing on an idealized model of how democracy *ought* to be and moving from there to the actual social world, organizes other issues and practices out of the frame while tending to disregard existing actors' social critiques. This is another instance of what I have termed with McNay and Bourdieu as 'socially weightless' thinking. Issues surrounding work and the economy, then, are among the concerns which have been organized out of the frame by some of these models due to their exclusive normative focus on issues such as legitimacy or communication – issues which then often pertain only indirectly to forms of domination encountered at work.

This stands in contrast to the methodological orientation outlined above. Being attentive to actors' own accounts and critiques of their experiences also implies an attentiveness to the plurality of problems faced as well as norms and regimes of justifications invoked, which do not need to be traced back to a single principle that lies outside of history and power. The reconstructive form of critique that I explored with Celikates does not deny the need for critical

ground' (Tully, 2008, p. 17). Tully also emphasizes the iterative and recursive relationship between actors' social critiques and the relevant theory, highlighting the need to think both *with* and *beyond* these critiques (ibid).

engagement with these norms or ideas invoked, or their articulation on a higher level of abstraction than is perhaps already happening, but rather insists that this should consistently tie in with the critiques of the relevant social actors. By taking such a reconstructive approach and not presupposing a homogenous space of normative concerns, democratic theorists more broadly stand to gain an attentiveness to problems, struggles, and normative concerns that would otherwise escape their presuppositions or the confines of the extant literature. As such, while I am interested here in the democratization of work in the context of precarity, the democratic sensibility outlined above has important implications for the way democratic theory is done more broadly. My hope is that this study will provide a stimulating example of a way in which democratic theorists can fletch in their reflections with those of actors or groups in different contexts in order to think through the complexities of working towards the democratic commitment of social relationships of equality.

II) Method, Theme, and Theory

Celikates' reconstructive conception of critique as a social practice and the democratic sensibilities it expounds then informs both the manner in which this project's question is posed, as well as the way it is pursued. Put briefly, to what extent can theories of democracy offer alternative justificatory regimes that enables precarious workers to problematize their situation in politically salient ways? What specifically about the social and political ideals of democracy might help illuminate the situation precarious workers such as on-demand couriers find themselves in, or reorient their self-understanding, in ways that tie in with their existing critiques? How might the conceptual resources found in contemporary democratic theory aid in opening up social and political imaginaries that could extent, deepen or re-frame the latter? But also, in what ways might existing theories of democracy fall short of being able to further agents' critical and justificatory practices? The aim is then to explore the possibilities and limits that contemporary democratic theory offers as a way of understanding and criticizing the transformation of work as explored in chapter one, and possibly aid in furthering the political and social imaginary for responding to this transformation.

This is done by talking with and listening to on-demand couriers who are both subject to power relations brought about by the transformation of work, as well as resistant of them by organizing themselves and their co-workers through the IWGB's couriers' branch, and engaging the themes, normative concerns, issues, justifications and critiques they raise in a critical dialogue with relevant literature in democratic theory that could extend, deepen, or challenge these. This conversation then cuts both ways: on the one hand it reconstructs the relationship between work and questions of democracy in a way that might not be obvious to the agents involved, but which could deepen, extend or re-orient their own critiques in politically salient ways. On the other, it aims to enrich the literature on democratic theory by inquiring into both the merits and limitations of this field of research for understanding and addressing the transformation of work.

In what follows I will justify and explain a number of questions pertaining to how and why I engaged with the IWGB's courier's branch, the relationship between this qualitative research and the theory engaged with, and some limitations of this component of the research. To start, it is good to know more about the IWGB as a union, and I will explain why they are particularly interesting given the diagnosis made in the previous chapter.

Interviews, Solidaristic Participation, and Observation at the Independent Workers of Great Britain's Couriers' and Logistics Branch (IWGB C&L)

The IWGB (Independent Workers of Great Britain) is an independent, worker-led union that organizes UK-wide. Established in 2012 by Latin American cleaners in London, the IWGB started out with the intent to organize, represent and bargain for (and with) a majority of low-paid migrant workers employed mainly in the London area. However, since then they have started to organize and represent workers from a variety of sectors, all of which share various conditions of precarity. They now have eleven branches, spanning from yoga teachers and video game workers, to cleaners and private hire drivers. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic they also opened a 'holding branch', which is there for workers who want to organize their workplace or sector into a branch of the union. The IWGB is one of a small collection of independent unions in the UK that have sprung up to represent and organize workers in conditions of high precarity, who are not rooted in any specific workplace, and who are not represented or organized by traditional unions (Però, 2019). Other such unions include the United Voices of the World (UVW) and the Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union (CAIWU). What characterizes the IWGB, as well as these other unions, is their emphasis on worker-led unionizing and members being active participants in the life of the union, rather than delegating the representation of members to professional negotiators. This includes participation in decision-making, the planning of protests and strikes, working groups and committees, and more. Furthermore, being only dependent on members' contributions has allowed the IWGB to be more agile, creative and 'political' in its actions: an aspect of the union most of the members interviewed regarded very positively (as opposed to many community and civic organisations whose charitable status and sources of funding tie them to non-political roles). As such, the IWGB shares many character traits normally attributed to social movements and community organizations.

The branches of the IWGB represent sectors that are very different from one-another in many respects, but a common element among all of them is their intersection with structural economic changes in the organisation of work: outsourcing, fragmentation, flexibilization, and financialization are all developments that have given rise to these workers' conditions as well as the difficulties existing unions in the UK have had in representing them (Però, 2019; Gall, 2020). The 'lean platforms' such as Uber, Deliveroo and JustEAT which employ many members of the couriers and logistics branch of the IWGB are further situated within the larger economic changes explored in chapter one, particularly the trends towards overaccumulation and underemployment noted by Harvey and Benanav (Srnicek, 2017, p. 81). As Nick Srnicek argues, pools of over-accumulated capital strengthen the pursuit of riskier investments, and technologically 'innovative' companies in the platform economy have been one of the favoured

pursuits of investors (Srnicek, 2017, p. 91). It is in large because of this overaccumulation that a company such as Uber can exist at all: its 'growth before profit' business model depends on generous valuations from venture capital and 'company-friendly' forms of employment law to keep it afloat as it seeks to establish market dominance (Vallas & Schor, 2020, p. 283). 'Lean platforms' are further made possible in this conjecture because of the increasing pools of underemployed labour available to them: something that has only become more apparent with the COVID-19 crisis during which this research was conducted. Furthermore, in the UK, as in other European countries, migrant workers make up a large share of the labour power of on-demand platforms (van Doorn et al, 2020). As Srnicek puts it: 'An increasingly desperate surplus population has therefore provided a considerable supply of workers in low-wage, low-skill work. This group of exploitable workers has intersected with a vast amount of surplus capital set in a low interest rate world' (Srnicek, 2017, p. 91).

It is then these two elements that make unionizing courier workers a particularly relevant and interesting 'way in' to explore the potential and limits for democratic theory to understand politically salient aspects of the transformation of work: on the one hand the embeddedness of courier work within the structural changes of work, and on the other the participatory, worker-led approach to unionizing and organizing that the C&L branch maintains. However, I must lay emphasis here on the phrase 'way in'. The intention of conducting the in-depth interviews was not to provide empirical proof for any particular thesis, or for them to deliver some kind of generalizable truth about the social world. Rather, they were conducted with the intention of studying the dynamic logic of members' contestation of their condition: how do members understand their situation and what critiques and denouncements do they make, what acts are performed to contest this situation? How did they arrive at these practices of critique? What experiences led them to this critical understanding of their situation? What role did the union play here and what role does the union continue to play in members' lives? In other words, I am interested in members' practices of critique, of de-naturalizing and politicizing their experiences of injustice, and of organizing and acting against these in the context of conditions of precarity and a fragmented workforce in constant flux. This because these practices, as mentioned, traverse both constraint and change, the recalcitrance of reproduction and acts aimed at transformation. But also, importantly, because these practices can be understood as attempts, directly or indirectly, to democratize work, and so give insight into pertinent themes, problems, normative concerns and issues. It is then from these themes, problems, issues and normative concerns articulated by members that I start theorizing, and these articulations have been the constant touchstone to judge which themes or problems should be pursued in most depth, and which literature should be drawn on to deepen, extend or at times challenge them.

So how did I engage with the IWGB's courier's branch? And how did I conduct my interviews? From January 2021 until August of that same year, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth, online interviews with eight couriers who were engaged with the IWGB's Couriers' and Logistics (C&L) branch. All interviews were held in a video-call format that were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. The calls were between one and three hours long, and the recordings were then transcribed and coded according to pertinent themes by myself, on which I will expand more shortly. During the same time-period, I was working as a caseworker for the

branch and observed a variety of meetings such as branch meetings, strike organizing meetings, and meetings around particular issues couriers were facing. As a caseworker, I was also part of different WhatsApp groups dedicated to the coordination of cases and for branch members to communicate with one-another. In fact, becoming involved with the couriers' branch as a caseworker was a crucial step not only for 'gaining access' to members of the branch to interview, but for understanding the workings of the branch, the difficulties its members were facing, and the dynamics of working as an on-demand courier in the gig-economy more broadly. This was particularly important given that the interviews conducted had to take place online due to the COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time. While conducting interviews online made it easier to interview members in different locations in the UK, they ran the risk of being rather de-contextualized, and it made it more difficult to establish ongoing relationships with couriers or talk to them in more informal settings.

My efforts as a caseworker were a condition for the couriers' branch to work with me, and for me to recruit participants. A key branch organizer acted as a gatekeeper here, disseminating a call for participants among branch members and asking some members they knew might be interested in participating directly. However, being involved as a caseworker in the branch also provided a vital contextual understanding of the branch's workings and couriers' struggles that would otherwise be missing if I had only conducted interviews online. Talking on the phone with numerous branch members about the issues they faced, often for hours and over the course of weeks, or even months, helped me to develop a sharper sense for the different problems couriers were facing, the emotions that emerged in what were often instances of crisis (such as anger, indignancy, panic, and despondency), and for the difficulties associated both with trying to get justice for the courier and keeping them involved within the union in the case of disappointment. Even though my involvement did not constitute anything close to a fully-fledged ethnography, these conversations and experiences were vital for my understanding of couriers' struggles and unionization efforts. And while I could not draw on these conversations directly for my research, the extensive notes made about these interactions furnished a rich repository on which I could draw when exploring the themes emerging from the interviews.

Furthermore, being a caseworker enabled me to establish a solidaristic and politicized relationship with those I spoke to in that capacity, as well as the couriers I interviewed. This might be seen as the cardinal sin of social scientific objectivity for some, but as should have become clear from the explanation of my approach above, such a value-free objectivity is neither presumed as a possibility, nor is striving for it the point of this qualitative component of the research. What I searched for in the interviews was not the disclosure of an objective truth, but explanations, descriptions, and critiques of experiences which rather disclosed elements pointing towards the possibility of change.[39] As such, the solidaristic character of my involvement with the IWGB's couriers branch in fact was a strength. It first of all helped me gain participants trust, as some of them had become wary of academics rushing in to turn them into a case study. As a caseworker I effectively became part of the branch's day-to-day (online) practices, which meant that many of the participants interviewed were familiar with me through

[39] See also Apostolidis (2018, p. 61) for a similar point.

attending the same meetings. This helped establish a relationship of trust and solidarity, in which couriers recognized me as being 'on their side', rather than a detached academic observer. It is important to emphasize that solidarity here is not understood as similarity: I was, and am, in a different social position to many of the participants I interviewed. I have not myself worked for an on-demand platform, and I am a white, middle-classed aspiring academic working at a prestigious university. Solidarity, however, does imply 'being on the same side' despite differences in social position, which in this case meant taking a critical stance against on-demand platforms and making an effort to improve the conditions of couriers in the gig-economy. This politicized, solidaristic relationship was conducive to the interviews in the sense that it created an environment in which couriers expressed themselves honestly, comfortably, and vernacularly, despite being mediated through an online video-call.

In terms of the make-up of my interviewees, they were all members of the couriers' branch for over three months and were at the time working for an on-demand platform company such as UberEATS, Deliveroo, JustEat, or Stuart. I interviewed five men, one woman, and two couriers who identified as non-binary, all between the ages of 23 and 38 years old. All participants were born in Britain, with three being non-white, and all but two were based in London (the other two were based in Darby and Blackpool). As the branch is member-led, like the union as a whole, all interviewees were actively involved within the branch at the time of the interview or had been in the past. There are several concerns that should be addressed about this group of interviewees at this point. Firstly, the interviews are simply limited in number, which was in great part due to the difficulties recruiting participants in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, because of the online recruitment of participants, there was inevitably a process of self-selection that skewered those agreeing to be interviewed towards being generally active and politicized members of the IWGB's couriers branch. Lastly, an important limit to be aware of is the lack of interviewees that are *not* members of the C&L branch. This was brought to my attention by several interviewees themselves, who pointed out that a great number of the courier workforce consists of migrant workers from different communities who are generally underrepresented within the branch. While I paid attention in selecting interviewees from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as well as gender and sexual orientation, interviewing only union members will likely have resulted in a certain bias in terms of political views and orientations.

One way in which I addressed the latter two biases was to ask interviewees questions about their experiences of working for an on-demand platform before their involvement with the union, as well as about the process of their joining the union. What experiences led them to join the IWGB's couriers' branch? How did their perception of their work change once they did? The second way in which I tried to mitigate all three limitations was to draw on other sociological and ethnographic research on on-demand courier work in the gig-economy in the UK and beyond and tie this in with the themes that emerged from the interviews. I then drew particularly on research which focussed on non-unionized couriers (which in fact makes up most of the research on this topic) as well as on migrant couriers' conditions and experiences to situate the IWGB's couriers' commentary within a broader picture and a wider array of experiences.

Theme and Theory

How then did themes emerge from these interviews, observations, and participation within the IWGB's couriers' and logistics branch? And how do they inform and relate to the democratic theories employed in the rest of this thesis? Firstly, I coded the transcriptions of the interviews building broadly on Kathy Charmaz' practical conception of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, Ch. 3). This meant coding in a two-step process. During the first step of initial coding, I carefully read all the transcripts aiming to be attentive to all the theoretical directions and possibilities they could suggest. While acknowledging the impossibility of approaching the transcripts without a certain interpretative horizon and preconceived ideas and notions, during this initial step I tried to remain close to the texts and open to the different directions they took. What was particularly important during this step was to approach the transcripts without considering whether what couriers were saying fit a particular theme prevalent in the democratic theory I was familiar with: to resist folding the interviews back in with the demands and the confines of the theory (see also Madison, 2005, p. 125). What I did look out for in this stage of interpreting the transcripts, however, were several qualities of what participants were saying.[40]

Firstly, I aimed to be attentive to the *emotional* quality of what interviewees were saying, and the intensity of feeling with which they tried to convey their experiences. To be sure, this attentiveness came not just from interpreting the transcripts as texts, but started with the interviews themselves and taking care to note the manner in which interviewees conveyed their thoughts: their gestures, tone of voice, body language and facial expressions. When transcribing, I made note of these where particularly relevant. The emotional weight of certain experiences, whether conveyed with anger, frustration, indignity, longing or exuberance, bears a particular significance as it is charged both with information about participants' current situation and past experiences, and offers a glimpse of what they might want to see changed in the world. They offer insight into the subjective experiences in which the critiques made by participants were often embedded and point towards the weight and importance of certain critiques made. For example, one courier got visibly angry and exasperated when she described the entirely automated process Deliveroo has in place for reporting sexual harassment, exclaiming: '(…) they love to write everywhere, 'Oh we've improved this service, so you'll never have to call rider support, yay! You can just type a message in the app!' And you're like [in sarcastic voice], 'yeah brilliant, I'll never have to speak to a human being again, perfect!'. The biting sarcasm of the comment and the courier's exasperation when expressing it made this an important statement. Lastly, to refer back to Adorno and the Bourdieusian theme of social suffering, subjective experiences of suffering constitute a form of knowledge about what is 'untrue' in our societies, and thus also point towards the necessity, or potential, for transformation (Adorno, 2004, pp. 17-18). The emotional intensity with which experiences were recounted by participants thus constituted a vital marker for the importance of their words and for thematizing them.

[40] I am here indebted to Charmaz' conception of grounded theorizing (2006), but in great part also to Apostolodis' Freireian method of generating themes (Apostolidis, 2018, p. 51).

Secondly, during my conversations with couriers and in the initial stage of coding I aimed to be attentive to the *expressive quality* of what participants were saying. That is, I looked out for the aesthetic, or 'poetic' quality of what was said: not in any formal sense but rather in the ways in which participants expressions conveyed their perspectives in concentrated and condensed ways. I looked for such expressive qualities not only in particular phrases but also in particular words that kept reappearing and conveyed participants' experiences and perspectives in a concrete but suggestive manner. For example, many couriers at one point or another expressed that they were feeling like 'part of the machine', 'a number', like a 'robot', or 'dehumanized' when working for an on-demand platform. Such words then bear significance for the concentrated ways in which they convey a negative experience and often formed an implicit critique of participants' working experiences. Lastly, and related to the first two points, when reading the transcripts I kept the following question in mind: 'what elements of what the person is saying suggests the possibility for change?'.[41] This too goes back to the Adornian and Bourdieusian understanding of negative experience as indicative of what is 'wrong' in society, and thus also as a basic starting point for thinking about possible transformation. By keeping these three criteria in mind I then initially coded my transcripts in a relatively open-ended manner, making connections and comparisons as I went along, and eventually grouping together certain themes and subthemes.

The second step in the thematization process was more focussed and brought back in the concern with pairing up certain themes, or groups of themes, that emerged as pertinent for the interviewed couriers with themes relevant to contemporary democratic theory. This was a rather non-linear process of matching certain themes with democratic theory that I was already familiar with and recognized as relevant to the theme, as well as exploring literature in democratic theory for writings new to me but relevant to particular themes. This process also led me to raise certain themes on a higher level of abstraction where they could be seen as part of the same problem or normative concern. For example, the themes I coded as 'temporalities of precarity', 'solidarity and responsibility', 'transitivity and dependence', and 'fragmentation and transformation' all became part of the democratic problematic of individualization and collective transformation that I pursue in the next chapter. Chapter four, which deals with the theme of domination and agency and explores ideals of workplace democracy in the context of couriers' precarious work, draws on the themes of 'dehumanization', 'flexibility and autonomy', as well as, again, 'temporalities of precarity'. There is thus often not a clear-cut division between the themes emerging from the transcripts and the way they inform the theoretical problem explored in the different chapters: many of the themes were relevant to the overarching thematic frameworks in the different chapters. The overarching themes pursued in the following chapters then emerged through exploring literature in democratic theory with the coded themes from the transcripts in mind, reflecting on the theoretical direction they suggest and their articulation within this body of literature, as well as reflecting on the different ways the literature enabled a framing of the codes and their relationship to each-other. The three 'meta-themes' that arose through this process were 1) individualization and collective transformation; 2)

[41] This too is gleaned from Apostolidis' approach to generating themes (Apostolidis, 2018, p. 43).

domination and agency; and 3) flexibility without precarity. These will be extensively explored in the pages to come, so I will not rehearse their explanations here.

In other words then, the overarching themes were articulated by reflecting on the ways in which the transcript's themes and democratic theory resonated with one another. It should then be clear that the experiences shared by members, their denouncements, worries, issues and concerns are not treated merely as interesting exemplifications or extensions of democratic theories. Firstly, these figure methodologically speaking as equal to the democratic theories drawn on. Secondly, they guide and inform what democratic theories are engaged with, and theme and theory stand in a relationship of mutual illumination as well as, sometimes, tension. Some questions that guided this process of mutual illumination were then, for example: What theoretical points or insights from the literature are pertinent to the theme as raised by the couriers? How is the theoretical articulation different than that of the couriers? What are the limitations or issues with either the theoretical articulation of a theme or the way in which couriers reflect on it? How does the theoretical articulation of the theme help illuminate, extend, or deepen the insights and critiques offered by couriers? And vice versa, how does the engagement with the couriers' insights illuminate shortcomings, blind spots, or extend the theoretical insights found in the literature on democratic theory? The epistemological status of democratic theories, furthermore, is not one of transcendent works but as (particularly sophisticated) regimes of justification. This opened up the space to draw on a plurality of understandings of democracy without having to adopt any from the outset, or needing to bring them back into the fold of an overarching understanding. Different understandings of democracy do, of course, contradict one-another, but this is again part and parcel of the procedure of this project: working through the themes, problems and normative concerns that members of the C&L branch bring to the table by way of different, sometimes conflicting theories of democracy that pertain to these.

The chapters to come then take on the following structure. I start out with the theoretical articulation of the particular 'meta-theme' that emerged through the process just explained. I then move on to explore the theme as articulated by the interviewed couriers. The third part of the chapter then brings the two strands together in a process of mutual illumination as just described, reflecting on the ways in which the theoretical articulation of the theme deepens, extends, or challenges the critiques offered by my interviewees, and vice-versa. However, the last two chapters take on a slightly different structure because of the theoretical directions suggested by the overarching theme of 'flexibility without precarity'. Firstly, the conclusions reached in chapter four about the insufficiency of workplace democracy for mitigating structural forms of domination associated with precarity suggested further reflection on the embeddedness of democratic workplaces within a more broadly democratized economy. Secondly, the desire expressed by many of the couriers interviewed, which was also expressed in many meetings, of retaining the flexibility of the app-based work while doing away with precarity similarly pointed in the direction of considering different ideas and ideals of a democratic economy which could achieve exactly that. These two chapters, which consider post-work theorists' proposals for a basic income and collective working time reduction on the one hand, and models of democratic economic planning on the other, are then intended as provocations for imagining different,

more democratic futures of work which speak to the couriers' concerns, as well as to those raised in the previous, diagnostic chapter. However, as provocations, these reflections are necessarily more speculative in character and as such are more removed from couriers' more direct experiences. As such, the interviews here recede in their role as 'testing' different theoretical perspectives, even though the themes that emerged from the interviews both frame and motivate the questions pursued in these chapters.

Lastly, app-based courier work is but one particular form of precarious work, and I do not intend to claim that the particular issues these workers are facing and their experiences of precarity are representative of all workers. However, this should also not be taken to mean that the results of this project are only limited to couriers and that nothing claimed will be relevant outside of this context. As argued, courier work is embedded within broader structural tendencies and so many of the concerns and issues couriers face are likely to resonate over and across their particularities. Furthermore, their justificatory practices, as argued, do not exist within a social vacuum: they are often drawn from justificatory regimes that precede them and thus also overshoot their particular context. Putting couriers' commentaries and experiences in conversation with theories of democracy is intended, then, as a particular 'way in,' among many, to thinking about democratizing work in the context of precarity that resonates across different workers' struggles, and as such contributes to a wider conversation on how work could be freer for all.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained and justified my engagement with the IWGB's courier's branch and the methodological role it plays this thesis. A great part of this justification, however, flows from a broader argument about the importance of adopting a democratic *praxis,* or democratic sensibility, in 'doing' democratic theory. While engaging with thinkers such as Patricia Hill-Collins and Theodor Adorno, I glean such a sensibility for the greater part from Robin Celikates' conception of critique as a social practice. This democratic sensibility is comprised, I have argued, firstly, of the methodological incorporation of the principle of epistemic equality. Throughout, I have explored the importance of 'endogenizing reflexivity' that such an epistemic equality entails for both the idea and practice of democracy, including democratic theorizing. Secondly, this axiom of epistemic equality is accompanied by the overall aim that critique is taken to have, which is that of agents' autonomy and 'maturity', which then guides the role that critical theory takes on, of which this project generally sees itself as being part of. This aim and the principle of epistemic equality are mutually constitutive, since a theory 'that aims for autonomy and maturity cannot declare its addressees incompetent as part of its methodological procedure – however indirectly, without undermining its own ambition' (Celikates, 2018, p. 163). Lastly, theorizing with a democratic sensibility also entails tracking and tying in with existing practices of critique of justification, which means both being attentive to existing power relations and injustices, as well as ensuring agents have a say in the (re)construction of their interests. Furthermore, I have argued that while a democratic sensibility thus implies a thinking *with* the IWGB's couriers' critiques, it should also think *beyond* them in order to reflect on their limitations and to extend them into territory that flows from their concerns but has not yet been

considered. Thinking of democracy as an open-ended practice rather than a state of affairs that can be definitely reached calls for such a grounded approach that takes existing struggles and attempts to 'democratize democracy' as its starting point.

This sensibility then informs the way this project's question is both posed and pursued. In what follows I will bring the critiques, experiences, and normative concerns as expressed by the members of the IWGB's courier's branch into conversation with different relevant strands of contemporary democratic theory in order to explore the ways in which they shed light on their respective possibilities and limitations for thinking about more a more emancipated organization of work within the structural conditions and tendencies of precarity and underemployment explained in chapter one. What conceptual resources does contemporary democratic theory have to offer for addressing the concerns and critiques raised by the IWGB's couriers? And most importantly, how might this conversation between contemporary democratic theories and on-demand couriers open up pathways and possibilities for expanding the political and social imaginary of a more emancipatory way of organizing work? The ensuing four chapters are then arranged from the most immediate struggles of the IWGB's couriers around their work, to the more speculative questions about democratizing work. One of the most immediate issues the IWGB's couriers faced was how to politically organize a highly fragmentary and precarious workforce in order to contest their working conditions and struggle for better ones. In the next chapter, I then turn to Chantal Mouffe's conception of hegemony to think through a democratic politics of work under the fragmentary and individualizing conditions on-demand couriers face.

3

The Democratic Value of Contestation

Fragmentation, Individualization, and Chantal Mouffe's Hegemonic Politics of Work

Introduction

It might come, to some readers, as no surprise that one of the stand-out themes to emerge from conversations with couriers in the gig-economy is that of fragmentation. After all, the platform-mediated gig economy is by its very nature a fragmented, fractured kind of work: it is contingent, piecemeal, and workers do not know beforehand how much work they will get and how much they will earn. Being logged on and 'on the job' can mean getting a steady stream of orders for you to complete, but it can also mean, as one courier put it, 'milling around, waiting for orders'. However, mixed in with this sense in which the term fragmentation was employed by couriers was a concern with a different kind of problem. That is, 'fragmentation' was used by different couriers to convey a problem with the political disunification of couriers working in the gig-economy, namely, a lack of power to contest and potentially transform their working conditions. This is of course a familiar problematic in Marxist and socialist theorizing, which finds itself confronted with fragmented social conditions that form an obstacle to the political unity of the working class more broadly and their struggle for emancipation. However, it has been Chantal Mouffe who took on this problem and attempted to reframe it in terms of a 'radicalization of democracy' (Mouffe, 1993, p. 139). Mouffe's initial writings, particularly the widely influential *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2014 [1985]) co-authored with Laclau, were concerned with giving an account of collective action under conditions of pluralism and social fragmentation that avoided what they saw as fatal pitfalls of Marxist and socialist theorizing. Building on the analysis in this early work, Mouffe has gone on to develop a sophisticated theory of agonistic democracy that has emerged as a significant alternative, among other agonistic theories, to deliberative, representative, and other ideas of democracy.

In this chapter I will then bring Mouffe's theoretical understanding of the political problem of fragmentation in conversation with the themes of fragmentation and individualization as they emerged from conversations with the IWGB's couriers. Throughout I make two main, interrelated arguments. Firstly, Mouffe's agonism and her articulation of 'the political' clearly draws out the democratic value of conflict and the dimension of antagonism that permeates social and political life, and highlights the importance of collective forms of organizing and identification for the development and exercise of political agency of disempowered groups. Relatedly, her formal conception of hegemony as a political relationship is particularly helpful in enabling a way of envisioning a multiplicity of workers' struggles to go beyond their particular, fragmented aims and become inscribed within a wider articulation of demands. Secondly, I argue that the strength of Mouffe's theoretical framework, namely the relative

formality of her conceptions of agonism and hegemony, in turn leads her to neglect the material conditions in which a politics of work is necessarily anchored, as explored through conversations with the IWGB's couriers. This formal character of her theoretical framework also disallows Mouffe to articulate positive ideals of equality and freedom and to inquire more deeply into the transformation of existing political and economic institutions to realise these ideals. As such, I argue for a *critical extension* of her framework. On the one hand I take on her agonistic insight into the democratic values of contestation and hegemonic struggle, as well as her argument about the necessity to expand and radicalize the political principles of 'liberty and equality for all' (Mouffe, 1992, pp. 1-2). On the other hand, I argue that to be faithful to these objectives requires an attentiveness to the materiality of political identity-formation and a more sustained inquiry into positive proposals for transforming political-economic institutions according to more substantive ideals of equality and freedom articulated by social actors.

This chapter will then develop as follows. I first turn to Mouffe's conceptions of hegemony, agonism and radical democracy, focussing particularly on how she conceives of collective political action under fragmentary conditions and why she argues this is of democratic importance. I then turn to the case of app-based couriers organizing through the IWGB, exploring their accounts of their fragmentary working conditions and situating these within the broader literature on the gig economy and the transformation of work. The last section brings Mouffe's conceptual framework in a critical conversation with these workers' accounts, explores its strengths and limitations, and makes the case for a critical extension.

I) Chantal Mouffe and the Democratic Value of Contestation: Hegemonic Transformation and Agonist Pluralism

Chantal Mouffe has elaborated her agonistic conception of democracy in a number of influential works, including *The Return of the Political* (1993), *The Democratic Paradox* (2000) and *On the Political* (2005); a perspective which she has reformulated and expanded in more recent publications such as *Agonistics* (2013). However, it is in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (henceforth *Hegemony*) co-authored with Ernesto Laclau where she most fully articulated her 'anti-essentialist' conception of the social, her conception of 'the political' as antagonism, and most importantly for our purposes here, her democratic conception of hegemony. It is also in this work that she most forcefully elaborates the project of radicalizing democracy, a concern which arguably is shot throughout her work and which she has most recently restated in *For a Left Populism* (2018). It is helpful from the outset to distinguish this project of radicalizing democracy, at least analytically, from the agonistic model of democracy. As Mouffe herself puts it, while the project of radicalizing democracy is a political project that is clearly partisan in character, the agonistic model of democracy is 'an analytical approach, formulated as an alternative to the aggregative and deliberative models' (Mouffe, 2014, p. 154). While the former is concerned with conceiving of deepening and extending democratic principles to a wide array of social relationships, the latter is concerned with the problem of conceiving of a democratic order while accepting the hegemonic character of every such order and the ineradicable dimension of

antagonism (ibid). Although intimately related, these aspects of Mouffe's thought need to be distinguished because, as I will go on to argue shortly, different things are at stake when it comes to the fragmenting forces of contemporary work. In what follows I will reconstruct both these aspects of Mouffe's thought in order to understand these different stakes. I will first turn to her democratic reinterpretation of Gramsci's conception of hegemony and the latter's place in the wider project of radicalizing democracy. I then turn to her more general conception of agonistic democracy, contrasting the different role that contestation and collective identification play here for Mouffe.

Fragmentation and Hegemony

In *Hegemony*, Mouffe and Laclau were primarily concerned with rethinking the possibility of a collective struggle for emancipation under conditions of plurality and fragmentation. Their argument cut on two fronts at the time. On the one hand they criticized what they saw as harmful class essentialisms in then-prevalent Marxist discourses which posited in various ways abstract, a priori principles of unification in the face of class division and fragmentation. On the other hand, they asserted that it was not enough to simply recognize the existence of a diverse range of struggles, but that a 'form of articulation' should be established between them in order to form an emancipatory hegemony (Errejón & Mouffe, 2016, p. 19). In doing so, they intended to shift the problematic of fragmentation/unity on a decidedly democratic ground, with the explicit concern of 'radicalizing democracy' by contesting many different modalities of oppression through a hegemonic front. How, then, does Mouffe imagine the formation of a political subject in the face of heterogeneous social positions, identities and struggles? Her answer to this is intimately tied up with a critique of Marxist 'essentialisms', her consequent anti-essentialist conception of the social, as well as her conception of antagonism. While all of these are by now quite well known it is worth briefly revisiting these.

Mouffe's critique of essentialism in Marxist discourse is concerned with its imposition of an abstract 'unifying principle' which functioned both to safeguard the legitimacy of Marxism as a science and the unity of the working class in a divided present (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 17).[42] Reformulating this principle of unification is precisely the point for Laclau and Mouffe, but in a way in which, as they put it, allows us to 'think this dispersion of elements and points of antagonism, and to conceive their articulation outside any a priori scheme of unification' (ibid, p. 30). It is in this context that they turn to Gramsci's conception of hegemony, with its emphasis on the need for a class politics which sees the working class 'come out of itself' and 'transform its own identity by articulating to it a plurality of struggles and democratic demands' (ibid p. 60). Ultimately, however, Gramsci does not go far enough for Laclau and Mouffe. While political unity in class struggle becomes contingent on practices of articulation, they argue that he retained the essentialist notion that the articulatory role is assigned to the working class due to their position in the economic base (ibid, p. 60). This meant that while the identities of classes do not remain unchanged, the class core of each hegemony remains constant. The problem

[42] To be sure, this interpretation of the whole of the Marxist tradition as reductionist and 'essentialist' has been vigorously criticized by several authors as being reductive in its own right, reducing a rich and diverse tradition to 'a few dogmatic absolutes' (Geras, 1990, p. 73; see also Wood, 1986).

with this being that other struggles and demands – environmental, feminist, decolonial, racial, etc., could only be tangential to the main protagonist on the world-historical stage.

Mouffe's answer to this remaining essentialism is formulated by turning in part to structural linguistics and Lacanian psychoanalysis to expound an 'anti-essentialist', relational account of meaning. She does this in the first instance through a theory of discourse in which things or 'elements', only acquire identity and meaning in the way they are organized in relation to other elements. Because of this relational logic, 'there is no social identity fully protected from a discursive exterior that deforms it and prevents it becoming fully sutured': no identity can be fully constituted as every discourse is a fallible and ultimately partial attempt at fixing meaning (ibid, p. 97). The social realm is accordingly conceived as a generalization of this logic, conditioned by this foundational indeterminacy. It is antagonism, however, that is the 'experience' of this indeterminacy and that functions as a kind of 'negative essence' of the social (ibid, p. 108). Rather than being an 'objective' relationship between two fully constituted identities, antagonism shows up the impossibility of any discourse fully fixing the meaning of the social – of any society to be 'identical to itself' in the sense of being a totality where the whole field of differences is fixed by an underlying principle (ibid, p. 112; Mouffe, 2005, p. 18).

This ineradicable dimension of antagonism, postulated at the level of ontology, is what Mouffe terms 'the political', which she sees as constitutive of any possible society. It is constitutive of society in the sense that any political order is based on an act of exclusion through a successful organization of relations around a 'we/they' distinction (Mouffe, 2005, p. 16). Antagonism is then for Mouffe, somewhat wryly, both the condition for any political order, as well as the impossibility for any social order to be beyond divisions: the act of exclusion that any political order is premised on is also always open to an antagonism which challenges it. In other words, antagonism for Mouffe is an *ontological* dimension constitutive of any form of politics, which is why she refers to it as 'the political'.[43] 'Politics' as such, in this framework, refers to the manifold 'set of practices and institutions through which an order is created' within the deeper context of conflictuality provided by the political (Mouffe, 2005, p. 9). Every political order is then 'hegemonic' in nature in the sense that it is not the necessary product of natural or quasi-natural forces, but the result of a series of practices attempting to create order in a context of contingency (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, 1985; Mouffe, 2013, p. 2).

As might have been surmised from the passage above, there seem to be two senses of hegemony that are easy to conflate. On the one hand hegemony refers to a dominant but ultimately contingent form of order, while on the other it refers to an articulation between different struggles for emancipation into a joint political project (Wenman, 2013, p. 191). To disambiguate, whenever referring to the former, I shall refer to 'hegemonic order', and when

[43] Mouffe's ontological delineation of 'the political' as a relatively autonomous realm with its own distinctive logic that can be isolated from other areas of social life is situated within a wider lineage of theorists who similarly attempt to capture the essence of political being, including Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt. See Agnes Heller's seminal essay on this tradition of thought (1991), as well as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy's influential take (1997). Lois McNay offers a helpful genealogy in her critical monograph on such ontological approaches to politics and democratic theorizing (2014, pp. 1-20). See also Mihai et al. (2017) for different perspectives on the merits and demerits of ontological approaches to political theory.

referring to the latter I shall simply employ 'hegemony' or 'hegemonization'. From her political ontology, Mouffe then outlines the formal characteristics of any political relationship of hegemony.

Firstly, hegemony in Mouffe's sense presupposes a relational constitution of the social, in which there is always a disjuncture between discourses and that which they attempt to capture: the social, as with the self, is never identical to itself. It is only because of this open character of the social that hegemony in Mouffe's democratic sense is possible: 'if the meaning of each moment is absolutely fixed, there is no place whatsoever for a hegemonic practice' (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 120). Accordingly, hegemony becomes a contingent articulation of equivalence between different 'elements' which cannot be presupposed to exist prior to this articulation: 'hegemony is a *type of political relation* and not a topographical concept' (ibid, 128). Secondly, this political relationship is accomplished by discursively articulating a 'chain of equivalences' between a variety of positions and struggles. Again, however, such 'chains of equivalence' can only be drawn because of the difference of these 'elements' from one another: without the hegemonic subject being at least partially exterior to what it articulates there would not be any articulation possible at all, only the affirmation of identity. Thirdly, hegemonic practices in this context are not simply alliances between given or pre-constituted interests. Because of the relational logic underlying Mouffe's conception of hegemony, any practice of articulation can establish a relationship between 'elements' only through a mutual modification or transformation of identities (ibid, p. 93). This follows because without the malleability and incompleteness of identities, there would be no hegemonic relationship possible: only cooperation between identical interests in an otherwise fixed field of differences.

Hegemony, then, is a way for Laclau and Mouffe to conceive of the possibility of a collective political subject that is premised on, rather than negating, the plurality and incompleteness of the social. However, as we saw, to achieve this they offer a strictly formal conception of a political relationship of hegemony that is empty of any particular social analysis. The senses in which they employ the term 'fragmentation' are then similarly located on such a formal plane: they do not refer to any particular social formation.[44] At least three senses of 'fragmentation' are then shot through Mouffe's conception of hegemony which should be disambiguated, all of which refer to a *disunity* that is primary and fundamental: that of subjects, particular struggles, and hegemonic struggles. Firstly, 'the subject' for Mouffe is a fragmented one in the sense that it is always multiple and its identity cannot be traced back to a 'centre of subjectivity' which 'precedes the subject's identification' (Mouffe, 1993, p. 76). Secondly, any particular political movement is 'fragmented' from the outset, in that there is no necessary principle of unification that can be 'discovered' separate from the articulation of a political relationship. Thirdly, this same logic holds for establishing political relationships *between* different struggles, or 'elements' and articulating them within a hegemonic front. In Mouffe's framework then, fragmentation takes on a meaning that does not refer to a unity postulated a priori or as promise. Any such

[44] For example, when writing about the 'growing complexity and fragmentation' of advanced industrial societies, Mouffe and Laclau capture this as a disjuncture between the proliferation of differences and the 'difficulties encountered by any discourse attempting to fix those differences as moments of a stable articulatory practice' (ibid, p. 82). In other words, the problem of fragmentation is here framed on the formal level of discourse.

'unity' of any political subject is radically contingent and dependent on acts of articulation and hegemonization. In terms of a politics of work, this means that the political unity of the working class cannot be assumed as necessary or latent, nor can its interests or central actors be 'discovered' in separation from their actual political articulation. The growing pool of underemployed workers, locally and globally, are then only 'unified' insofar as their various and disparate struggles can be articulated, somehow, together, and there is no guarantee that this will take a progressive form other than the way in which the articulation is organized.

Radicalizing Democracy, Agonism, and the Democratic Value of Contestation

Departing from this indeterminacy, the stakes of Mouffe's conception of hegemony come into view. These can be understood positively and negatively. To start with the positive, Mouffe's conception of hegemony is intimately related to the project of 'radicalizing democracy'. Her main thesis can be summed up as follows: the 'democratic revolution' that was inaugurated by the French revolution introduced democratic principles of liberty and equality as a fundamental point of reference in the Western political imaginary, which provide the discursive conditions to challenge a range of relations of subordination (ibid, p. 139; Mouffe, 2018, p. 42).[45] Once institutionalized in one context, the democratic imaginary can be appropriated and radicalized to challenge relations of subordination and so deepen and extend the democratic principles of liberty and equality[46]. Such extensions, however, do not happen by any single logic or pattern. This is because, Mouffe insists, there is nothing inevitable about resisting relations of power (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 136). In line with her anti-essentialism, she distinguishes relations of *subordination* from relations of *oppression*. Relations of subordination are understood here simply as 'differential positions between agents', legitimated and justified by a discourse (ibid, p. 138). It is only through a re-articulation of such relations of subordination through another discourse which casts them as illegitimate that subordination comes to be construed as oppression and thereby a site of antagonism (ibid, p. 137). In other words, antagonism is not inherent in a relation of subordination for Mouffe but needs to be constituted as such. This clarifies the subversive potential of the democratic imaginary: the democratic discourse of liberty and equality allows for a wide range of relations of subordination to be called into question and contested.

What is then positively at stake for the project of radical democracy is the deepening and extension of democratic social relations through the contestation of any relationship of subordination susceptible to critique from the vantage point of the principles of liberty (or freedom) and equality. However, in line with her delineation of 'the political' from the manifold

[45] Most of Mouffe's analysis is focused on Western Europe, which arguably justifies her choice of the French revolution as an important shift in the Western political imaginary. Yet, because her argument is that this imaginary can, when appropriated, circulated and modified in different contexts, challenge a variety of relations of subordination, there is a universalizing aspect that makes choosing the French revolution as a decisive event seem somewhat arbitrary and perhaps problematic. However, Mouffe's claim is located not at the level of 'politics', i.e., that of history and the concrete level of social formations, but rather that of 'the political'. In other words, the principles of 'liberty and equality' are gleaned from the French revolution for their potential to act as a democratic regime of justification, and the chains of equivalence that could be formed between different democratic traditions.
[46] See Smith (1998, Ch. 1) for an illuminating explanation of this project.

local practices of 'politics', Mouffe does not give any particular interpretation of these principles herself: it is up to agents embroiled in particular struggles themselves to give normative substance to these principles. This does introduce a normative tension which will be further discussed in section three. Contestation of relations of subjugation according to democratic principles of equality and freedom is then necessary to radicalize democratic social relations, which cannot do without collective forms of identification and struggle. The democratization of work and the economy, which Mouffe has only briefly addressed in her writings, is then clearly a crucial dimension of the project of radical democracy conceived as such (Mouffe, 1993, Ch. 6; Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 162). Furthermore, if what is then positively at stake for the project of radical democracy is the deepening and extension of democratic social relations, it clearly follows that the absence of politicization of relations of subordination is a problem. Without the transformation of relations of subordination into relations of oppression, in Mouffe's parlance, this project is simply at a standstill (or worse, deteriorating).

In Mouffe's agonistic writings, however, the democratic value of contestation is shifted onto a slightly different register, as is the issue of depoliticization. In these writings, Mouffe's concern shifts towards that of conceptualizing the possibility of a pluralist democratic order against the backdrop of the ever-present possibility of antagonism and the hegemonic character of politics just discussed. Antagonism, on the one hand, points to the limitations of social objectivity (Mouffe, 2000, p. 11; 2013, p. 3). On the other hand, it is an ever-present possibility borne out of the formation of collective political subjects. Any collective subject, a formation of a 'we', necessarily requires a constitutive outside, a 'they' (Mouffe, 2005, p. 25). This 'we/they' formation always has the potential to become antagonistic in ways that are violent, broadly understood (Mouffe, 2000, p. 13). Moreover, because collective forms of identification and struggle are vital to radicalizing democracy, as just discussed, the other task of democratic politics then becomes about 'defusing the potential antagonism that exists in social relations' (Mouffe, 2005, p. 20). Or as Lois McNay memorably puts it: '(...) to convert social antagonisms into political agonism' (McNay, 2014, p. 74). Agonism is then understood simply as a different manifestation of antagonism, one that does not destroy the democratic association but which in fact is crucial for a vital, plural public sphere.

What is important to highlight, however, is that Mouffe's agonistic public sphere is one in which an adversarial struggle takes place *between* different hegemonic projects which cannot be rationally reconciled, rather than a competition for power *within* a hegemonic order. While clearly adhering to liberal principles of individual liberty and political pluralism, Mouffe is critical of the way in which much of the liberal tradition of thought has, in different ways, attempted to fence off a domain that would not be subject to contestation – be it through the articulation of a theory of justice that is prior to any democratic deliberation, or the Lockean grounding of private property in a conception of natural rights (Mouffe, 2000, p. 91).[47] Political contestation, within such liberal frameworks, is premised on the assumption that certain domains or values should not be touched, of which the example most relevant to our purposes

[47] See C.B. Macpherson's influential interpretation of Locke's conception of private property as a natural right (Macpherson, 1962).

here is the private ownership and control of production and economic enterprise.[48] Mouffe argues, however, that what characterizes a particularly agonistic politics is the confrontation between hegemonic projects which have aims and values that cannot be rationally reconciled on a higher plane, which nevertheless 'recognize the legitimacy of their opponent' and belong to a common political association (Mouffe, 2002, p. 20). Even though Mouffe has been repeatedly criticized for adhering too closely to liberal-democratic institutions in her theoretical preoccupations, her agonistic framework attempts to keep together an adherence to liberal principles of individual freedom and political pluralism, with the possibility (and necessity, from the perspective of the project of radicalizing democracy) of a radical transformation of liberal-democratic institutions.

Within Mouffe's agonistic framework, antagonism should then not be eliminated but transfigured into agonistic forms of contestation between different hegemonic projects. These hegemonic projects are themselves valuable insofar as they enable the contestation, and transformation, of relations of subjugation and so promote democratic relations of equality and freedom.[49] However, what is further at stake with this sublimation of antagonisms for Mouffe is that without ways of being expressed agonistically (i.e., politically), she claims they will tend to express themselves in undemocratic or violent forms (Mouffe, 2005, p. 5). Attempts to evade, erase or overcome the political (understood as antagonism) make its 'return' in anti-democratic guises all the more likely (Mouffe, 1993, p. 6). In other words, the absence of the politicization of social antagonisms in an agonistic way sets the conditions for their politicization in anti-democratic ways. As such, she argues that agents need to have opportunities for collective forms of identification which would enable an adversarial staging of agonistic conflict that would animate, rather than destroy, democratic pluralism. The absence of collective political subjects that would provide such opportunities for identification and political contestation then constitutes a central issue for Mouffe's project of radicalizing democracy, as well as for her agonistic conception of democracy. For the former because it impedes on challenging relations of subordination; for the latter because it exacerbates the potential for antagonistic conflict and so the attrition of an agonistic democratic order. The problematic of fragmentation, in the sense of a lack of coherent discourses or symbolic objects that could establish relations of equivalence between a variety of disparate struggles, is then both about the lack of collective agency to contest relations of subjugation, as well about its potential threat to a pluralistic, democratic order.

However, Mouffe frames the sources of these dual dangers of depoliticization *cum* fragmentation mostly on a discursive level. That is, they are mostly framed as stemming from an inability of contemporary political discourses to effectively articulate a hegemonic frontier out of a multiplicity of differences and so become sources for collective forms of identification – even if she consistently argues that collective identification should not be understood as a rational

[48] In a similar 'agonistic' fashion, the philosophical dimension of this argument is also made forcefully by Bonnie Honig in her seminal work *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (1993).
[49] It is in this sense that Mouffe is closest to Niccolò Machiavelli's valorisation of contestation and class conflict as a condition for the active preservation of the freedom of the 'common people' and the containment of elite power (Machiavelli, 2009; McCormick, 2001).

agreement with this or that project but as a discourse making a purchase on agents' 'passions' (Fossen, 2008; Mouffe, 2005, p. 25). While her conceptions of hegemony and agonistic democracy then illuminate the democratic stakes of a lack of contestation and collective forms of political identification, when it comes to a politics of work in the context of precarity, Mouffe's discursive take on the sources of depoliticization might be found wanting. As such, in what follows I will explore the theme of 'fragmentation' as it emerged through my engagement with the IWGB's couriers. While their use of the term in some ways overlaps with that of Mouffe, namely to point towards the political disunity of couriers working in the gig-economy, they also employed it to designate several obstacles to the forging of a political relationship between couriers that are outwith Mouffe's discursive framing of the issue. I then aim, first of all, to flesh out an understanding of these different obstacles to collective political agency in the context of on-demand courier work, with an eye to critically extending Mouffe's democratic concern with fragmentation and depoliticization. Secondly, in the last section I turn towards exploring the contributions Mouffe's conceptions of hegemony and agonistic democracy can make towards theorizing a democratic, collective politics of work in the face of these obstacles.

II) On Not Exactly Being a Courier: Fragmentation and Individualization in On-Demand Courier Work

As mentioned in the introduction, platform-mediated work in the gig economy is by nature a fragmented kind of work, in that it is piecemeal and contingent on the ebbs and flows of consumer demand. That this emerged as a stand-out theme through my engagement with the IWGB's couriers will then perhaps not come as a great surprise. Perhaps less obvious are the other uses made of the term 'fragmented'. Put briefly, couriers invoked this term to refer to, or describe, at least three different experiences and perceptions: 1) fragmentation of working time; 2) fragmentation of employment; and 3) fragmentation (social and political) of the workforce. In what follows, all three of these senses of fragmentation will be explored and discussed with an eye to the question as to what the interviewees found problematic about them and why. Intimately connected to this theme of fragmentation is that of 'individualization'. With individualization is meant not only the experiences and perceptions of isolation, atomization or disconnect (from other couriers or the company) that kept being mentioned in interviews. Indeed, words such as 'isolation' were used much more frequently than 'individualization', a term much more prominent in academic discourse than vernacular. However, throughout talks with the IWGB's couriers, it became clear how the sense of fragmentation evoked initially led couriers to form more individualized dispositions around their work: that is, many initially resorted to ways of negotiating issues around their work *as individuals* rather than politically. The term 'individualization', while not frequently used by couriers themselves, then bundles these experiences and perceptions, and is intimately connected to the theme of fragmentation. In what follows, I will thus explore these themes of fragmentation and individualization as they emerged from conversations with the IWGB's couriers in order, firstly, to understand the obstacles to collective political agency these workers face. Secondly, I will bring these insights in conversation with Mouffe's conceptions of hegemony and agonism to flesh out what is at

stake democratically with the success or failure of a politics of work in the context of precarity, and to press on some of the limitations of her theoretical framework.

Before diving in, it is important to clarify the different levels of social analysis on which Mouffe's conception of hegemony operates and that on which this section operates. Whereas the former is in great part about how to forge alliances between different political collectives that are already somewhat organized, here I will be looking at the difficulties faced by individuals trying to organize into a shared, political collective within the IWGB as a union. While parallel problems on different scales, they are intimately related insofar as any hegemonic front depends on the success of collective organizing around different issues and identities. Furthermore, we saw that these political collectives themselves are of democratic importance for Mouffe insofar as they enable people to contest relationships of subjugation and domination in an agonistic manner. The problem with the proliferation of casualized, precarious work such as that of on-demand couriers is however exactly the relative lack of political organization in the first place. Apart from being important in their own right for understanding the dynamics of precarious work, the obstacles to collective agency that couriers face are thus highly relevant in light of Mouffe's conceptions of hegemony, radical democracy, and agonism, through which I will interpret the democratic stakes of this absence in the final section.

Three Senses of Fragmentation for On-Demand Couriers

Let us then turn to the first sense in which 'fragmentation' was invoked, which is that of the work itself. As mentioned, the fragmented character of courier work is part and parcel of the way it is organized: it is piecemeal work for which couriers get paid a fee set by the company per delivery. Couriers working for Deliveroo, as for most other delivery platforms, are classified as being 'self-employed' or an 'independent contractor', which means they do not have a contract with Deliveroo. This means that even as companies such as Deliveroo or Foodora allocate shifts to couriers, they are only paid per delivery completed (Davies, 2020, p. 252). From the company's point of view, this is supposed to ensure that a certain number of couriers are available at any time to fulfil customer demand. From the courier's perspective, this means needing to work a certain percentage of 'peak hours' – for food delivery usually Friday, Saturday and Sunday-evenings – if they want to get priority access to shift booking (Woodcock & Graham, 2020, p. 71).

Most importantly for our present discussion, peak hours are further in high demand by couriers because these are parts of the day in which there is likely to be work, and thus income. For Allison, a student in London in her mid-twenties, Deliveroo was mostly a way to make an extra income around her studies and other occasional work, although she admitted having relied on it for income 'from time to time'. She was drawn to the flexibility of the work arrangement, particularly the choice *not* to work when needed. Yet, as she was quick to mention:

> There's no guarantee of anything, you know. So yes, it's flexible. Yes, I can log on at 8 AM on a Monday morning if I want to. But that doesn't mean I'm going to get paid; that doesn't mean I'm going to get any orders, you know.

Allison then went on to describe this unpredictability of getting orders as she spoke about delivering throughout the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020:

> There were just so many times, when I was like, you know, waiting and waiting for orders, nothing coming through. Earning sometimes... [hesitates] like, less than three pounds in an hour. Sometimes nothing in an hour, you know. And there are good moments and bad moments with it. Like, you can do all right but yeah, it's just so sort of hard to depend on or... Yeah, to sort of plan around, you know?

'Lean' platforms such as Deliveroo, Uber, or JustEats deliberately recruit as many workers as possible to create an oversupply of workers on demand to those who need them (Woodcock & Graham, 2020, p. 4). Furthermore, as barriers of entry into platform-based delivery work are low, many who found themselves in need of work as the UK government's restrictions came into force turned to taking up work in the gig-economy, including delivery-work. The risks and costs of this oversupply of the labour market were endured by the couriers, who, like Allison, faced more unpredictable and longer waiting times for orders, and thus also dwindling earnings. Allison's situation was not exceptional during this period. Research from the Bureau of Investigative Journalism into Deliveroo couriers' earnings, co-led by couriers active in the IWGB's C&L branch, reviewed the pay documentation from almost 12,000 sessions by 318 riders across the UK, covering 34,000 hours in the 2020-21 financial year. They report that 'Half (56%) of the riders who took part earned less than an average of £10 an hour for all the time they were logged in. Some took home far less, with one in six (17%) getting less than £6.45 per hour – the lowest possible minimum wage – and one in three (41%) receiving below £8.72, the legal minimum wage for workers over 25' (Mellino et al., 2021). Considering the Bureau's calculations are based on average earnings per hour within shifts, these figures not only indicate low earnings, but also long waiting times between orders.

While Deliveroo then only pays its riders from the time they accept an order until it is delivered, the temporalities of the job spread far beyond this 'productive' stretch of time: either through unpaid waiting times due to the fragmented nature of the piecemeal work, or through the saturation of time with anxiety about money and the need to work. The experience of time for the on-demand couriers interviewed then seemed similar to those of the day-labourers described by Paul Apostolidis, as both expressed being caught between 'endlessly waiting' for anticipated work, and their fragmented 'activation' as they receive an order and hurry to get on their way (Apostolidis, 2019, p. 109).[50] This is then one way in which work 'creeps' horizontally into 'non-work' time: through the haphazard fragmentation of 'work', in the sense of labour power sold for a particular amount of time, which nonetheless necessitates the worker to devote stretches of 'idle' time in order to be 'activated'.

[50] The analogy between platformed courier work and day-labourers is not per se flippant. As Nick Srnicek notes, the 'lean' platform model approximates the 'traditional' market model of day-labourers, except that the sites for finding such piecemeal work have moved online (Srnicek, 2016, p. 78).

While the fragmentation of time at work for on-demand couriers then widens the gap between the working time that is remunerated and the time that they are ready to deploy their labour-power, the related unpredictability of earnings and the compulsion to work more or very particular hours leads us to consider 'fragmentation' in a second sense, namely: the fragmentation of employment relations. This kind of fragmentation depends both on how dependent riders are for their earnings on the platform, as well as the possibility to make enough earnings on the platform when working. Phil's account of his experiences working for Deliveroo are illuminating in this respect. Having quit his job in hospitality while studying in London, he started riding for Deliveroo in 2018 to supplement his earnings:

> I just sort of started it... that classic, just to earn a bit of money on the side, because it's flexible. And yeah, basically I just ran out of money, and then I was doing it full time, you know, it's sort of difficult to pinpoint exactly when it happened. But to be honest, my experience of it is, I always made quite decent money if you work hard. [...] So, I was like, this is all right, you know, I quite enjoy this, it's flexible. I'd come from hospitality, which was like, shit money. You know, I was earning more than I was before so... [...] So yeah, worked for me, I could just sort of fit in my life a little bit more around my work.

This desire for flexibility is not only a strategy of platforms themselves but is consistently expressed by couriers themselves, as Phil here does. However, as Phil's studies stranded and as he ran out of money, he started to increasingly depend on the app for earnings. With the significant fee cuts Deliveroo introduced, the 'honeymoon period', as he put it, was over. To keep earning enough, Phil started 'multi-apping': riding for multiple on-demand platforms, in his case Deliveroo and UberEATS, and alternating between them when one was slow. While he was keen to stress that through 'hard work' and having cultivated geographical knowledge of inner London and the skills to navigate the app to his favour he was able to make a living, as well as the potential benefits of platform work for workers, Phil added that the work was 'just too precarious at the moment' and that he was 'looking to move on'. The tropes of the virtue of 'hard work' and of escaping the job were echoed and recognized by other couriers, even as they got involved with the union, and are a prominent example of the link between such fragmentation and individualization. The increasingly fragmented and insecure character of the work was initially negotiated individually by Phil: through the cultivation of certain skills, 'working hard', and looking to 'move on'.

Another courier, Jamie, told a similar account of his experience trying to cope with low earnings on Deliveroo, as he too started to work other jobs:

> There are a couple of agency websites that I worked for now [corrects himself] Well, work *with* now. I mean that's also like... [laughs] Yeah, it's almost like a gig thing as well, except, I would say, you know, it's more legitimately self-employed. But yeah, again it's not something that... [...] Basically, the instability of having two forms of income that are both like... You know, I set my own hours and schedule, the whole thing... it's quite rough. You know, eventually, I just want a full-time job again, you know, like most people, I think.

'Lean' platforms often present themselves as just supplementing people's incomes, but often it means that people, like Jamie here, become reliant on multiple forms of gig-work to try and cobble together a living. By being classified as an 'independent contractor' by Deliveroo, the risk of inadequate demand is all borne by earners (Schor, 2020, p. 60). This means that in times of low demand, workers such as Phil and Jamie who depend on the platform for their earnings will start working multiple jobs or will try to 'escape' by finding the economic stability of a full-time job. Furthermore, when reliant on the platform for part, or all of one's earnings, the flexibility that was the initial draw of the work is chipped away at as demand-heavy times start dictating when one should work (Gregory & Sadowski, 2021, p. 7). As Allison, who we met above, put it: '[...] I never *have* to work. But also, if I want to earn money, I have to work the busiest hours of the week, which are like, evenings and weekends'. The formally extended 'freedom' to choose whenever to work here turns into a compulsion to work whenever, and on the platform's terms.

The pervasive insecurity that comes with the outsourcing of risks onto couriers thus promotes a fragmentation of time that is felt 'outside' of the work itself: the time that one spends preparing for, travelling to and from, waiting or looking for, or worrying about work starts to compete with the time actually spent at work, 'creeping' into non-work time. This resonates strongly with other authors' accounts of 'precarious time' as tending on the one hand towards becoming a homogenous and immutable stretch of anxiety and guilt about not earning enough, while on the other hand is interspersed with fragmentary stints of work (Apostolidis, 2019, p. 109; McCallum, 2020, p. 66). What should be noted, however, is that the further the distance from dependency on gig-economy earnings workers are, the more satisfied they are with their job in it (Schor, 2020, pp. 49-57). The problem with fragmentation of employment is then not per se the fragmentation itself but is the precarity that both fuels this fracturing and makes it intolerable. A further problem is that because of this fragmented work experience, the question who exactly the employer is that should be protested against or bargained with is complicated, impacting couriers' capacity to contest their deteriorating conditions (see also van Doorn, 2019).

The last sense in which 'fragmentation' was used throughout interviews with on-demand couriers was to refer to the vastly heterogeneous and transient workforce in which they worked, and how this posed obstacles for political organizing in the union. This is the sense in which 'fragmentation' was invoked that came closest to that of Mouffe's, i.e., as political disunification. As Laura, the courier's branch coordinator, explained:

> [...] The courier industry has such a high turnover. Like, a lot of people join it as a temporary job or they're in between other jobs, so... I'm trying to organize this group of Amazon drivers at the moment and they're all just like... Like, 'I don't think I'm going to stay in this job forever, it's a terrible job - as soon as I can get out of here, I'm getting out, so I don't see why it's worth joining a Union'. You know, rather than being like, I'll fight for this job to be better, so I can stay in it. So that's hard.

This explanation was echoed throughout conversations with other couriers who also emphasized the transient character of the workforce and the disposition towards individual

'exiting' this promoted: either already when signing up, seeing it as a mere stop-gap job, or through the work experience itself.[51] This high turnover is itself explained in various ways. One structural explanation is already touched upon by Laura, which is that many people do on-demand courier work, or other gig-work, to supplement receding income or lost work. Put differently, growing pools of underemployed workers, many of them migrants, serve an infrastructural role for platforms, which soak them up (Srnicek, 2016, p. 82; van Doorn et al., 2020). A second explanation focuses less on underemployment or precarity but rather emphasizes the unique capacity for platforms to attract underemployed labour. As Juliet Schor and her co-authors argue, it is the retreat from direct management of the labour process which allows for this 'soaking up'. This retreat entails low barriers to entry and exit, as well as a relatively high permissiveness towards workers choosing their own schedules and to a certain extent how they work (Schor, 2020, p. 77). In other words, 'platforms don't require a uniform type of worker. They accept nearly all comers' (ibid).

As a result, the workforce that sustains the platform economy is highly heterogeneous in terms of levels of education, socio-economic positions, interests and identities, while also being highly transient. Furthermore, as Laura went on to explain when talking about barriers to organising couriers: '[...] I think an obvious barrier is the fact that there is no workplace. Like, the workforce is so fluid and porous, both in terms of time and in terms of geography. It means it's really hard to build up those connections'. While platformed delivery work is geographically tethered in the sense that the platform mediates an existing form of work that is local in nature (Woodcock & Graham, 2020, p. 51), couriers do not share an immediate relational space with other riders, let alone with those from another city or another country. To take one example, according to Deliveroo's own website, they operate in around 800 towns and cities across twelve countries.[52] And, as we saw before, couriers often ride for more than one app, or juggle several other jobs. The result, then, is a workforce that is fragmented in both time and geography, as Laura just put it, besides being widely heterogeneous.[53]

While the heterogeneity of this workforce is important to stress, it is just as important to point out some commonalities within this diversity. As Ahmed, the Vice-Chair of the Courier's Branch, argued: 'The main difference I see is British born couriers versus migrants'. He immediately added that 'obviously they [migrants] come from different cultures and they're not like, equivalent to each other [...] So in London that's like, South Asians, specifically Bengali but also a lot of Indians, where I live. And then North Africans, Eastern Europeans and Brazilians especially. Brazilians are a big presence in the courier industry'. While the migrant workers doing platformed courier work is then anything but a homogenous group, there is a perception they make up a sizeable portion of the labour force. There is no comprehensive data available on this, but Ahmed's claim seems very plausible for several reasons. Firstly, platform work is particularly prevalent and successful in heavily networked 'global cities', and the kinds

[51] I rely here on the well-known distinction between 'exit', 'voice' and 'loyalty' as responses to a deteriorating organizational unit (a firm, political organization, or nation state) made by Albert Hirschman (1970).
[52] https://uk.deliveroo.news/about/
[53] This is even more so the case with microwork, where there is no relational space at all and workers often do not even know who their employer is or what the task they are doing is for. See Phil Jones' concise *Work Without the Worker* for a critical account of microwork (2021).

of work that are being platformed – delivery, child-care, household cleaning, ride-hailing – have 'historically been dominated by migrants and the racially minoritized' (Gebrial, 2020, p. 39). Secondly, in extensive qualitative research in six such global cities around the world,[54] migrant workers have been found to provide a large share of the labour power behind a range of gig-economy services (van Doorn et al., 2020). Thirdly, Ahmed's perception was shared and echoed by most riders interviewed, especially those active in London.

Lastly, for many migrant workers, gig work can present a provisional step *up* rather than down (ibid, p. 6). The open employment relationship, relative autonomy compared to other jobs available, and the relative formality of aspects of the work relationship make gig-work an attractive option for many migrant workers (ibid, Gebrial, 2020, p. 41). The automated distribution of work is preferable to a racist boss, the relative autonomy and formality of logging on better than informal work in the shadow economy. This does not mean that platform companies should be lauded, but that they create ambiguous situations for low-wage migrant workers who find valuable opportunities within degraded labour conditions. It also means being aware of the way in which the operation of gig platforms is contingent on regimes of immigration policy, employment regulation and the restriction of immigrants' access to welfare services and decent work (van Doorn et al., 2020, p. 7). The struggle for the reclassification of gig-economy workers *as* workers, which is often presented as a legislative fix, might then not be enough without an expanded political horizon that takes into account the ways in which migrant workers have been, and would be, excluded from such a status.

Fragmented Working Conditions and Individualized Dispositions

These three senses of fragmentation – of working time, of employment, and of the workforce – all contribute to an individualized navigation of labour market conditions and the injustices workers face there. The most common attitude that exemplifies this, which was touched on previously by Laura and Phil, is that of exit: wanting to escape the job, to 'move on', to become upwardly mobile. As Ahmed put it:

> For the most part, a lot of part time people are also trying to get out of the job or like, not really intending to do it for very long and not really wanting to like, you know, put roots down and sort of struggle for conditions in the present.

Another courier made a similar argument, highlighting the relation between fragmentation and individualization:

> [...] that's why so many people just do it, you know, temporarily, in periods of unemployment. And you know, that's kind of another reason why it's hard to get union membership, because people don't see this as a career, really. People see this as like, a temporary situation, and, you know, they want to move on to better things.

[54] These are Amsterdam, Bangalore, Berlin, Cape Town, Johannesburg, and New York (van Doorn et al., 2020). This does not include London or any other UK city, but for reasons mentioned above it seems likely that these exhibit similar patterns.

In other words, many couriers continue to navigate the situation in which they find themselves the same way as they entered it: as individual market participants. The attrition of alternative, collective forms of identification with the onset of neoliberalism as well as the fragmented work experience just explored make such a disposition seem like the only option available. Under these conditions, the practical agency that couriers, just as many other groups of precarious workers, seem to have available to them is that of individual self-management: to exit, to become upwardly mobile, to cultivate appropriate skills and traits, to invest in one's employability. With the dearth of collective labour organizing in the gig-economy, alternatives to such individual navigation seemed difficult to imagine as a possibility. Such difficulty registering alternative possibilities to individual action was exemplified in Allison's account of how even though she knew of the IWGB, she did not really register it as a viable option:

> You know, Deliveroo was just something I sort of went out and did by myself, didn't give much thought to, made my money, didn't think much wider than that. And I saw there was a union and I was kind of like, 'Oh... Interesting but weird [laughs]. I wonder what that's about.' And just couldn't really... Didn't really feel like I wanted to pay money to, yeah... 'Cause I hadn't really thought about making changes or needing solidarity. I didn't feel connected to other couriers, or to Deliveroo really.

What these accounts highlight is that the fragmentary character and experience of the work makes for a similarly fragmentary commitment to it, which leads many to fall back on individualized ways of negotiating the conditions they face. Consequentially, doing courier work to plug dwindling earnings, intending 'not to do it for long', to 'move on to better things', not seeing it as a career, these couriers seem to express how they're *not exactly couriers*. In other words, the fragmentary and unstable character of courier work makes couriers' relationship to their work similarly unstable and aloof, which complicated even registering as a possibility any other course of action than those available to one as individual market participant.

From a certain perspective this individualized disposition is unsurprising: what platform workers have in common is not their being thrown together in a single space owned by one employer and characterized by the wage-relation. Rather, their commonality is their marginality to the wage; a marginality and dispensability shared by a growing group of 'not-exactly workers' around the globe (Jones, 2021). Without any form of political organization, the practical options available to this vastly heterogeneous group of people remain limited to trying to get ahead in the labour market. The main problem with this, which is implicit in the above accounts, is that as individual market participants, couriers (and workers in general) have very little power to contest the conditions which they often nonetheless recognize to be exploitative or otherwise harmful. There is a structural power asymmetry between workers (and those outside of the wage) and capitalists that is particularly extreme in the case of couriers and platform companies, and that tends to reproduce itself when workers negotiate these conditions from their position of relative lack of power as individual market participants. The most egregious example of this is the ease with which couriers are 'deactivated' by platform companies for reasons that are often minor or simply not communicated to them, and against which they cannot appeal. As

one courier argued, it is easy to 'kid yourself' when times are good, until your earnings get slashed or you can suddenly no longer access your account.

In sum, the general lack of identification gig-economy couriers have with their work due to its fragmentary conditions encourages them to fall back on themselves and their individual negotiation of often-precarious working conditions. The disposition towards their work encouraged by these fragmentary conditions is that of an individual market participant, even if this is mostly a practical disposition and not a strong, consciously held belief. Nonetheless, as we saw, this individualized disposition can impede on the legibility of platform work as an object 'worthy' of politicization in the first place. Moreover, while the focus here is on the particular conditions of platform-mediated courier work, this relationship between fragmentary, flexibilized conditions of work and individualized dispositions has been argued by different authors to be a trait of advanced capitalist economies more broadly (Beck, 1992; Farrugia, 2013; McDowell, 2011, p. 69). As such, the relationship between fragmentation and individualization and the problem of workers' relative powerlessness that is particular for on-demand couriers is entangled with broader structures which affect workers across economic sectors.

III) Hegemony and Mouffe's Agonistic Politics of Work

It is important to highlight at this point that that the fragmented working conditions which engender on-demand gig-workers' individualized dispositions towards their work are distinct, at least analytically, from Mouffe's discursive understanding of political fragmentation both within and between groups. In what follows I will then explore how these constraining conditions of fragmentation and individualization can supplement Mouffe's insights about the democratic importance of contestation, as well as to what extent her conceptions of hegemony and agonism are apt for conceptualizing a politics of work under these conditions. I will start by exploring the relevance of Mouffe's ideas on collective identification and hegemony in the context of on-demand courier work, and precarious work more generally, to then go on to argue for a critical extension of her theoretical framework that goes beyond her social negativity and is more attentive to the materiality of collective identity-formation.

Collective Identification, Transformation and a Hegemonic Politics of Work

As explained in the first section of this chapter, Mouffe, like all agonists, stresses the constitutive force of democratic politics with regards to shaping interests and identities. In other words, rather than identities and interests being pre-given, they are the result of processes of identification (Mouffe, 2005, p. 18; Wenman, 2013, p. 82). On this view, democratic politics cannot be understood simply as the expression or rearrangement of interests of groups or individuals which are assumed to be determinately knowable and to exist separately from each-other. Rather, democratic politics for Mouffe is about the constitution of collective political subjects and forms of identification which form the prerequisite for agents' development of political agency and through which their identities and interests are shaped and transformed.

Collective identification for Mouffe is then a complex process of discursive practices that resonate on the level of affect and desire (Mouffe, 2018, pp. 74-76). It is through discursive practices that are rooted in this affective dimension that agents acquire a language and a desire to contest the relationships of subordination in which they are embroiled.

This emphasis on the necessity of collective identification for its transformative and agentic roles is particularly relevant considering the case of app-based couriers. Without a form of collective organizing that makes representative claims on behalf of couriers and stages an adversarial politics, their fragmented and individualizing working conditions will allow platform companies' power to go relatively unchallenged. This is of course not a novel point to make but is relevant considering other influential conceptions of social transformation within democratic theory. Deliberative democrats, for example, also conceive of interests and identities as transformable, they tie this transformation closely to a pre-conceived ideal of civil reasoning and as best achieved through dialogue in invited' spaces such as citizens' assemblies, civic lotteries and mini-publics (Asenbaum, 2021, p. 89). For Mouffe however, besides truncating the ends of legitimate subject-transformation, these invited spaces do not constitute lasting avenues for the development of political agency other than those that are deemed legitimate from a set of pre-constituted norms (Mouffe, 2000, p. 95). In the context of app-based couriers, including workers as individuals in a citizen assembly or mini-public to develop an informed solution to issues they are facing at work might lead to a strengthening of their bargaining power as separate market participants, but when the assembly or public is over, they are left in exactly the same position as they entered it: as individual market participants.[55]

How should we then understand a hegemonic politics of work? I will here highlight three aspects that I take to be particularly important given my analysis of app-based couriers' fragmented working conditions. Firstly, a key implication of Mouffe's approach is that struggles around work are not reducible to a single antagonism which can be privileged in an a priori sense over other struggles and neither is there an 'authentic' subject of workers' struggles based on their location in the social. 'Workers' struggles' in Mouffe's framework refers not to a pre-given or determinate object of 'work' with an equally determinate range of legitimate struggles around this activity by legitimate agents. Rather, who counts as a 'worker', what is understood as 'work' and what counts as a struggle is multiple and mutable, dependent on discursive acts. Here we might think of the Wages for Housework movement explored in chapter one, as well as struggles around sex work.[56] The point is that for Mouffe there cannot be a single struggle of work pursued by a determinate subject inextricably linked to this struggle. Rather, her democratic conception of hegemony enables us to conceive of struggles around work as multiple, partial and open to the possibility of being articulated in a range of discourses. The aim for Mouffe would then be to articulate these struggles and demands together in a way that would deepen the democratic principles of 'liberty and equality' for all, however understood by the relevant

[55] The importance of collective identity-formation and of the transformation of workers dispositions towards those that enable them to act in their interests is widely acknowledged in labour mobilization theory as well as social movement studies more generally, resonating with Mouffe's insight (Holgate et al., 2018; McAlevey, 2016; Però, 2020).

[56] See Juno Mac and Molly Smith's *Revolting Prostitutes* for a critical argument about sex work as work and as part of working class struggle (2018).

agents, while negotiating the possibility for new relations of subordination to arise from this effort (Mouffe, 1993, p. 70).

Secondly, Mouffe has attempted to reckon with this potential for new relations of subordination with her idea of agonism as an open-ended practice of contestation that allows power relations inherent in every public sphere or collective formation to be challenged. In the context of a politics of work it is helpful to then distinguish between an agonism within an organization such as the IWGB and its courier's branch, as well as without the union: with other trade unions, social movements and political organizations. Within the union, Mouffe's insight that subjects are always in a plurality of 'subject positions' and can be dominant in one relation while subordinated in another is crucial. For example, as we saw, white British-born couriers might be in positions of precarity and exploitation while they otherwise do not have to deal with the racism or anti-immigration policing that their migrant co-workers are often subject to. Another example concerns the issues that women, queer and non-binary couriers face. Two couriers who are active in the Women and Non-Binary Committee of the IWGB's courier's branch emphasized that the largest threat of harassment comes from their male co-workers, apart from other distinct problems they face. While Mouffe then highlights the importance of collective forms of identification and organization, her agonistic stress on the equal importance of keeping these open to be contested and modified is crucial in the context of the heterogeneity of app-based couriers' subject-positions, as well as for a politics of work more generally.

Thirdly, Mouffe's conception of hegemony not only has bearing on the articulation of a particular struggle within a movement, but importantly also how different struggles for equality and freedom can be articulated together. As we saw, what is at stake for Mouffe is the articulation of chains of equivalence between a multiplicity of struggles for equality, which inscribe them in a common political horizon, becoming a hegemonic front which contests and ultimately transforms established institutions (Mouffe, 2018) Such chains of equivalence are established through the universalization of a particular demand that comes to embody multiple struggles and investing these with a supplementary common meaning that comes from naming an enemy. A common example is the Occupy Wall Street movement and their slogan 'We are the 99%': the division between the 1% and the 99% is not empirical but political and established a chain of equivalence between a multiplicity of demands (Kioupkiolis, 2018, p. 103; Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 160). The allure of such a hegemonic politics, according to its proponents, is its capacity to go beyond scattered, particular and spontaneous forms of resistance and bring about far-reaching and lasting transformation. What is particularly important given the fragmented conditions of the app-based couriers examined above as well as those of the heterogeneous landscape of workers' struggles more broadly, is that such a hegemonic politics is not simply a cooperation between these different struggles. Rather, these different particular workers' struggles, when articulated together, become invested with a broader political meaning that establishes a chain of equivalence between them which necessarily transforms the identity and character of these particular struggles. Couriers' struggles, when articulated with other precarious workers' struggles, for example, would not do away with their particular issues and demands but would imbue them with a meaning that goes beyond these particularities. Not only would such an articulation possibly modify certain demands (the importance of which we

saw in the case of migrant couriers' experiences), but it would also partially change the self-understanding of the actors involved: now not just couriers or cleaners or artists, but 'the working class', 'precariat', 'comrades', or whatever common name comes to take on the role of equivalent.

What Mouffe then deems necessary for far-reaching transformation is a hegemonic signifier that can establish chains of equivalence not only between different struggles around work, but other relationships of subordination as well.[57] A relevant example of this is offered by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, who have argued that their post-work demands for a Universal Basic Income and working-time reduction can provide exactly such a hegemonic horizon, as these would unify a host of struggles for equality and freedom (feminist, environmental, anti-racist) not only through the proposals themselves, but also through the denunciation of the capitalist organization of the economy as a common adversary (Srnicek & Williams, 2016). The saliency of these proposals will be further discussed in chapter five. At this point, however, I want to emphasize two points that flow from the above discussion. First, without any collective action and identification through which couriers can contest their conditions, it is likely that they will continue to navigate and suffer their conditions on an individual basis. Secondly, Mouffe's hegemonic approach to such collective identification seems apt in the context of on-demand courier work explored above, as well as for precarious workers more generally. As we saw, the fragmentary and transient character of couriers' working lives complicates political organizing solely around their identities *as* couriers, while their position as being 'marginal' to the wage (i.e., precarity) affects them not just as workers narrowly construed but in multiple dimensions of their lives. A hegemonic politics of work would situate on-demand couriers' struggles within a common political horizon that goes beyond their occupational identity and focus rather on, for example, the situation of precarity they share with many other workers. This is in fact what the IWGB as a union is trying to contribute to. Whereas the branches are organized by occupation, broadly speaking, the union as a whole is dedicated to organizing workers who share similar conditions of precarity and casualization. As such, it tries to forge relationships of solidarity, or 'equivalence', between very different groups of workers based on the precarious character of their work: from cleaners and couriers to yoga teachers and game workers. Lastly, Mouffe offers the insight that such any particular worker's struggle will remain limited insofar as it does not establish 'chains of equivalence' with those of other workers and other democratic struggles through a hegemonic project.

Mouffe thus offers a compelling account of the possibility of collective political struggle among fragmented, democratic struggles for equality and freedom. In doing so she rightfully stresses the contingency of such political agency: there is no guarantee that workers or other actors will perceive their interests in the 'appropriate' way, or that they will act collectively on them. However, in stressing this contingency and the role of discourse in collective identification, she also risks glossing over what was alluded to by the IWGB's couriers' comments on their fragmentary working conditions, namely the material conditions of their precarious work which obstructed collective identification and action. In other words, the economic structure in which

[57] This is, in a nutshell, her thesis in *For a Left Populism* (2018).

couriers are located make it more attractive for them to resist their domination on an individual basis as opposed to a collective one. In what follows I argue that Mouffe's commitment to a project of radical democracy and hegemonic struggle cannot do without being attentive to these structural constraints, even as they affirm her insights about the contingency of collective action and the crucial role of discourse and representative claims therein.

Beyond Social Negativity: A Critical Extension

As we explored in the first section, while Mouffe points to various dangers associated with a lack of political frontiers or hegemonic projects, the sources of such depoliticization are captured mostly with reference to her discursive framework. That is, within this framework, only the third sense of fragmentation that we explored above that ostensibly matters: the heterogeneity of identities of couriers that are difficult to capture in a coherent discourse. However, the other two dimensions of fragmentation, which refer to the material dimensions of couriers' working conditions, clearly contribute to the difficulties of collective organizing as they inform the dispositions couriers take to their work and the latter's legibility as an object worthy of politicization in the first place. The fragmented working conditions and temporal sense that app-based couriers often experience are not easily separated from the discursive kind of fragmentation that is foregrounded as a problem by Mouffe: they form the circumstances that couriers need to navigate practically, and so shape the way in which the work is perceived. Feeling the pressure to work on peak-times, having no shared workspace, anxiously waiting for a job to come through or fear of being arrested by immigration enforcement are not peripheral when it comes to the issue of politicization – somehow secondary to the issue of inscribing couriers' identities in a coherent discourse. Rather, they form the conditions out of which couriers' collective political agency necessarily needs to emerge, and as such also pose constraints on the achievement of such agency.

These material conditions, in the sense of an economic structure that is relatively independent from agents' discourse on it, and which directs agents' actions and their perceptions of the latter, challenge the way in which Mouffe argues collective identification takes place. As we saw, Mouffe describes this process as one of discursive practices which create a common symbolic object for actors to identify with that is co-constituted by the construction of an 'other' as antagonist, which then destabilizes relations of subjugation by casting them as relations of oppression. These discursive practices do not simply make an appeal to actors' reason but also to their 'passions', which are conceived of by Mouffe as libidinal investments that are crucial for actors' motivation to act politically at all (Mouffe, 2005, p. 25; 2018, p. 76). So far these claims are convincing. However, while Mouffe clearly alludes to an embodied dimension crucial for political subjectification and collective action, she glosses over the constraints on collective action such a dimension can also pose. This has come to the fore in the above engagement with the IWGB's couriers, whose fragmented and precarious working conditions make it more attractive to negotiate the domination they face at work individually – by 'beating the game' or escaping through upward mobility – than to act collectively. While Mouffe is right to point out the crucial role of discourse in collective identification and action, the decidedly non-discursive conditions faced by on-demand couriers foster individualized dispositions towards domination

at work that complicate the ease with which Mouffe at times seems to think re-identification around collective goals and action can happen. This is exemplified by the way she often argues citizens need 'opportunities' and 'channels' for collective identification to defuse the potential for violent antagonism. However, why certain discourses are more attractive to some, while others are not registered as legible – i.e., why some opportunities are taken and some not – is a question that is not properly addressed within Mouffe's framework.

The experience of fragmented and precarious working conditions in the gig economy explored above strongly suggests that more than just opportunities are needed for certain representative claims to 'stick'.[58] In fact, the practices adopted by the IWGB's courier's branch were aimed at creating a collective identity and collective agency both through organizing protests, rallies, and strikes that antagonistically constructed platform companies as an 'other', as well as by fostering a sense of solidarity, equality and mutuality through sustaining durable spaces for democratic participation, deliberation, and learning. For example, branch members organized workshops for members to learn about their employment and welfare rights, as well as training sessions for those wanting to become more active as organizers. Meetings were regularly held on particular issues, such as that of sudden 'terminations' from the app, where couriers could talk about their experiences and deliberate on what actions to take. Members were further encouraged to become more politically engaged by getting involved in the planning of strikes and demonstrations, participating in decision-making, and getting elected for roles within the branch. These practices of mutuality were consistently brought up in the interviews as crucial for moving away from resisting domination at work in the gig-economy as an individual, towards a sense of collective agency. We can think of these more durable spaces and practices with Bourdieu and Nick Crossley as the creation of a 'radical *habitus*': as a set of critical, durable dispositions that are in tension with agents' previously acquired habits of thinking and acting, as well as the affective activities underpinning both (Crossley, 2003).

The importance of creating such a radical habitus for negotiating the material constraints on collective identification and action is too easily neglected by Mouffe's discursive approach. This point is also made by those coming from a 'post-hegemonic' approach, who similarly emphasize horizontal, non-hierarchical, participatory practices of collective self-organizing, intervening at the level of 'the body, habits and affects' (Kioupkiolis, 2018, p. 100; Suß, 2021, p. 4). However, while these practices are indeed crucial, they do not negate Mouffe's insight about the importance of constructing a hegemonic front around a demand that would link together otherwise fragmented and limited struggles for equality and freedom. Rather, they extend and deepen her insights around the democratic importance of collective identification and action. That is, without the durable and sustained practices that create such a radical habitus, precarious workers are unlikely to transform their individualized dispositions into ones geared towards collective action. Without the attempt to inscribe their struggles within a hegemonic front that represents those of other workers and other movements as well, such transformative praxis is likely to remain limited and partial. While the worry of post-hegemonic thinkers is that

[58] Such an argument is made more extensively by Michael Saward, who points to the power dynamics behind why certain representative claims succeed or fail (Saward, 2006).

such a representational logic would negate particularisms and re-enforce hierarchical and forms of power, it should be clear from the discussion in section one that Mouffe's hegemonic logic does not imply a simple subsumption of other struggles or a militaristic 'falling in line'. Rather, it involves an agonistic dimension in the sense of a continual negotiation of differences and particularities while seeking to establish a common discourse and nominal unity through the naming of an antagonist.[59]

The attentiveness paid above to the materiality of collective identity-formation then on the one hand highlights the difficulties of the latter not adequately captured by Mouffe's framework, while on the other hand affirms with Mouffe that the success of forging collective political identities and action around work is highly contingent and fallible. While I then concur with the criticisms of Mouffe's theoretical framework for being unable, on its own, to grant any explanatory role to social and economic structures when thinking about political agency, the above argument should be understood as a critical extension of her conceptions of hegemony and agonism, rather than a complete repudiation (see McNay, 2014, p. 82; Nash, 2002; Townshend, 2014; Geras, 1990, Ch. 3). That is, I take on her insights on the contingency of political agency, the importance of agonistic contestation for a pluralistic democracy, and the necessity of a hegemonic front for a transformative politics of work but propose to go beyond her social negativity. This latter, critical dimension does not leave Mouffe's theoretical framework untouched. First of all, reintroducing an explanatory role for social and economic structures destabilizes the the value Mouffe gives to the distinction between 'social' and 'political' in which the latter is the privileged term (see also Nash, 2002, p. 97). Second of all, such a reintroduction also means weakening Mouffe's casting of interests as being only dependent on discourse. As came to light with the engagement with the IWGB's couriers, their interests in acting individually rather than collectively (before their engagement with the union) were shaped by their fragmented working conditions. On the other hand, they share a relationship of antagonistic interdependence with workers around the world: their livelihood depends on being employed by some capitalist enterprise which has interests that undermine basic conditions of workers' wellbeing. However, this antagonistic interdependence and the material constraints faced by on-demand couriers do not point to the inevitability of collective action, but, on the contrary, to the fragility and contingency of the latter.[60]

Lastly, the critical extension I am proposing means going beyond the formality of the concept of hegemony and its normative emptiness by inquiring into positive proposals for the democratization of work and the economy in the context of the structural tendencies towards underemployment explained in chapter one. This also inevitably implies articulating democratic ideals of equality and freedom that could inform these proposals in a more substantive way than Mouffe's theoretical framework allows her to do. As we saw in section one, there is a tension in her work between the descriptive level at which her theory of discourse and political ontology moves, and first-order normative commitments; between the 'is' of

[59] Others also have similarly pointed out that 'horizontal' and 'vertical' approaches to social transformation are not two pure, mutually exclusive logics but that these are mutually implicated and intertwined (Prentoulis & Thomassen, 2013, p. 181).
[60] My argument is here close to that made by Vivek Chibber in *The Class Matrix* (2022).

antagonism, hegemony and indeterminacy and the 'ought' of radical democracy (Townshend, 2014, p. 285). Mouffe's anti-essentialist approach and the formality of her conception of hegemony lead her to purposefully avoid articulating any substantive ideals of equality and freedom. These ideals are attractive to her precisely because of their relatively formal 'emptiness', which makes it possible for them to be articulated to a multitude of social relations. In other words, Mouffe positions herself on a meta-theoretical level, providing a discourse *on discourse,* which leaves it up to social actors engaged in particular struggles to give substance to the ideals of equality and freedom. This makes it difficult however, for Mouffe to answer the question why she thinks the democratic principles of 'liberty and equality' are worth radicalizing in the first place, without sliding into an infinite regression. This position also leads her away from inquiring into positive proposals for the democratization of work and the economy (see Muldoon, 2018, p. 19).

While Mouffe then rightly points towards the contingency of political agency, the importance of agonistic contestation for a pluralistic democracy, and the necessity of a hegemonic front for far-reaching transformation, the critical extension I am proposing will step down from her meta-theoretical level in order to engage with the critiques of workers contesting their precarious conditions, dialogically flesh out normative principles of equality and freedom, and look more closely at ideas for effectively transforming capitalist relations of production towards democratic aims. After all, any project for radicalizing democracy cannot do without challenging a capitalist organization of work and the economy that produces relations of domination on an unprecedented scale, and which sits at the heart of many different struggles for equality and freedom.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how Mouffe's conceptions of hegemony, agonism and radical democracy can help think through a democratic politics of work under contemporary conditions of complex political fragmentation. I brought Mouffe's insights on the democratic importance of contestation, agonistic pluralism, and hegemonic transformation into conversation with the IWGB's couriers' accounts of political organizing in the face of fragmented working conditions. In this context, Mouffe makes at least three important contributions.

Firstly, Mouffe's conceptions of agonistic democracy and hegemony highlight the importance of collective forms of organizing and identification for democratic politics and capture the necessity of transforming subjects' dispositions for the development and exercise of political agency. This is particularly apt in the case of app-based couriers, as without any forms of collective organizing and identification through which couriers can contest their conditions, it is likely that they will continue to navigate and suffer their conditions as individual market participants. Secondly, Mouffe's anti-essentialism and agonism enables a reckoning with a multiplicity of relationships of domination within a particular struggle as well as between different struggles, which is crucial given the multiplicity of subject-positions within app-based courier work and of workers in contemporary capitalism more generally. Thirdly, Mouffe's

conception of hegemony enables a way of envisioning a multiplicity of workers' struggles (or 'wageless struggles') to go beyond their particular, fragmented aims and become inscribed within a wider articulation of demands. Such a hegemonic approach is particularly relevant in a context of precarious work such as that of the IWGB's couriers, as its emphasis on representation and a co-articulation of struggles through a common demand has the potential to forge a political relationship between people whose only commonality is a marginality to the wage. Furthermore, as will be explored more in chapters five and six, the sources of precarious work are structural in character rather than limited to this or that workplace or industry. To transform them thus requires the capaciousness and scalability that Mouffe's hegemonic politics of work aims for.

However, my engagement with the IWGB's couriers' accounts of their fragmented working conditions revealed how these conditions pose material constraints on political organizing by encouraging individualized dispositions which obfuscate their work as a worthwhile object of politicization in the first place. While the role that representation plays in the hegemonic process of becoming inscribed within a common political horizon is then crucial for negotiating the fragmentations explored – spatial, temporal, of 'subject-positions' and struggles – Mouffe's theoretical framework risks neglecting these material conditions in which the possibility for, but also constraints on, collective action is anchored. An attentiveness to this dimension then not only offers a better understanding of why dis-and-re-identification is a more complex affair than Mouffe can account for, but also emphasizes the importance of efforts to build relations of mutuality and solidarity for directing workers' individual resistances to domination towards collective ones. Furthermore, rather than negating Mouffe's insights into the contingency and fallibility of collective action, the disposition towards individual action that these material conditions promote give these insights weight. As such, I offer a critical extension of Mouffe's conceptions of hegemony and radical democracy. On the one hand I take on her insights on the contingency of political agency, the importance of agonistic contestation for a pluralistic democracy, and the necessity of a hegemonic front for a transformative politics of work. On the other, I propose to go beyond her social negativity by inquiring into positive proposals for the democratization of work and the economy in the context of the structural tendencies towards underemployment explained in chapter one. The ensuing three chapters will then explore such ideals and proposals in conversation with the IWGB's couriers.

4

Workplace Democracy against Precarity

Opposing Domination and Developing Agency in the Gig-Economy

No boss. No shifts. No limits. (Uber)

Feudal and capitalist systems alike ground the private governance of persons in ownership of property and deny the governed a voice in their government (Anderson, 2015).

Introduction

One of the most striking paradoxes of contemporary democracies is the discordance between an ethos of democracy that is espoused, according to which each individual is equally entitled to have their voice heard in collective decisions, and the reality of how people are governed in organisations where they spend most of their waking hours: their workplaces. In their day-to-day lives, workers in capitalist firms have little to no say concerning decisions that affect them directly. This paradox has been at the root of concern amongst socialists, anarcho-syndicalists, communists and liberals of various stripes, who all proposed a form of worker control of the firm or workplace as a key way of extending democracy to the workplace and the economy more broadly (Muldoon, 2018). However, political-economic developments over the past four decades, explored in chapter one, have changed the world of work considerably from the time in which many treatises on workplace democracy were written. These developments have led some theorists today to question the salience of the demand for workplace democracy as an adequate response to contemporary economic forces, and others to reject the project in favour of a combination of state regulation plus universal basic income.[61]

Taking these developments into account, this chapter aims to explore what conceptual resources contemporary debates on workplace democracy might offer in light of the increasingly precarious character of formal employment. Are the ideas and ideals articulated in these democratic-theoretic debates sufficient considering the conditions of many workers, such as on-demand couriers, who do not straightforwardly share a 'workplace', are tenuously employed, or who have more than one job? What challenges do forms of precarious work pose to democratizing work, and what lessons can we draw from these for the institutional implications of the normative ideals workplace democracy is meant to embody? To pursue these questions, I begin by identifying two influential arguments for workplace democracy and exploring their normative justifications. These are those of 'workplace republicans' (section one) and participatory democrats (section two). Workplace republicans (Anderson, 2015; Breen, 2015; González-Ricoy, 2014; Gourevich, 2016; Hsieh, 2005; Muldoon, 2022) base their case for democratic worker voice and/or control on the neo-republican ideal of political freedom as

[61] See John Medearis (2018) for a critical argument in favour of workplace democracy that takes into account these recent developments.

non-domination. However, there is significant disagreement within this strain of thought both about the institutional means to promote freedom as non-domination, as well as about the cogency of the negative ideal of political freedom as the prime political value.[62] Many of these critiques point to a need for a more expansive and positive understanding of political freedom and its negative correlate of domination. For this reason, I will subsequently explore the case that participatory democrats such as Carole Pateman (1970), Bachrach and Botwinich (1992), and Carol Gould (1988) make for workplace democracy. While this literature has been argued to be obsolete or outdated by some, the case for workplace and economic democracy made in particular by Carol Gould, grounded in a positive conception of freedom, offers an insightful perspective on workplace democracy that is attentive both to domination as well as the intrinsic importance of expanding workers' agentic capacities.

I then turn to the IWGB's courier's accounts of the forms of power they face when doing their work, focussing particularly on the ambiguity often highlighted between a form of autonomy in the labour process, and forms of domination faced through their management by an algorithm and the contingency of the work. What this case of platform work highlights, I argue, is on the one hand the close relationship between intra-work and extra-work relations of power and domination, and on the other hand the close relationship between domination and the usurpation of agency. Regarding the former, couriers in the gig-economy are subject both to managerial and market forms of power through platforms' algorithmic management, which depends on the wider economic vulnerability of underemployed workers generated through the capitalist economy. Regarding the latter, couriers are left an individualized and 'subordinated' kind of agency by the platform, which facilitates the latter's domination over its workers and stands in great contrast to the democratic agency highlighted in particular by participatory democrats. In the fourth section, I bring both the republican and participatory justifications for workplace democracy in conversation with these insights gleaned from on-demand courier work, and consider platform co-operatives as a democratic alternative to current platform work. Throughout, I make two main arguments, namely, 1) workplace democracy is a crucial condition for an emancipated economy, and that 2) this potential of workplace democracy stands in an increasing tension with the capitalist structure in which it is embedded, which gives rise to forms of domination that are not immediately addressed by democratising the workplace. Workplace democracy is thus best understood in terms of a pre-figurative project which is intrinsically valuable for promoting social relation of equality, but also points beyond itself towards to necessity for transforming the broader economic structures in which it is embedded.

I) Workplace Republicanism and Non-Domination

'Workplace republicanism' is a term that can be applied to a group of theorists who seek to apply republican political insights – among other insights from both socialist and liberal-

[62] See Breen (2017) for a detailed reconstruction of neo-republican and 'workplace republican' arguments concerning workplace democracy.

egalitarian sources – to the governance of the workplace. They start from the republican ideal of freedom as non-domination, articulated most influentially by thinkers such as Philip Pettit (1997) and Frank Lovett (2010), in order to think about managerial authoritarianism and domination in the workplace. They share both a justification for a form of workplace democracy based on this ideal, as well as a critique of Pettit and Lovett's contention that to counter domination in the workplace it is sufficient that there is an efficient right of exit that grants workers bargaining power in negotiating labour contracts (Breen, 2017, p. 8). To borrow Albert Hirschman's seminal distinction once more, workplace republicans are united in their conviction that in capitalist economies, the option for workers to 'exit' their place of work is not enough to avoid workplace domination, and that a form of worker 'voice' is instead required (Hirschman, 1970). Beyond this shared commonality, however, there are a range of different positions on what kind of worker voice is necessary within the firm. These go from 'weak' forms of worker voice, such as that of *ex post* contestation, to 'strong' forms, such as worker control and ownership. While a full treatment of these positions falls outside the scope of this chapter, the main point is that which form of worker voice is emphasized for democratizing the workplace depends to a great extent on the particular author's interpretation of which measures would be sufficient to promote non-domination. As will become clear throughout the following reconstruction, the exclusive focus on political freedom as non-domination leads to a treatment of democracy as primarily instrumental for limiting arbitrary domination, rather than as an end in itself.

Let us consider first, however, the negative ideal of freedom as non-domination which most workplace republicans take as their starting point for justifying the democratization of work. According to Philip Pettit, the republican ideal of freedom 'consists, not in the presence of self-mastery, and not in the absence of interference by others, but rather in the absence of mastery by others' (Pettit, 1999, p. 165). That is, freedom is the absence of *arbitrary* forms of interference that do not 'track people's common perceived interests' (ibid, p. 167). In contrast to the non-arbitrary interference of a constitutionally constrained system of law, publicly justified and democratically legitimated, domination entails interference which shows no regard for one's interests and over which one has insufficient or no control. It is furthermore the *capacity* to interfere on an arbitrary basis that is crucial for neo-republicans: even if no actual interference takes place, one is still dominated when subject to another's capacity to interfere (ibid, p. 165). One's boss might be kind or one's husband sweet, but to the extent that they have the capacity to interfere without taking one's interests into account (assuming in both cases a relationship of economic dependency), one's liberty is affected, even if they never do interfere. Such a subjection to others, even if existing potentially, constricts one's options and choices, fosters uncertainty and anxiety about one's future, and maintains an asymmetry of power and status between persons that are considered offensive to agents' equal personal worth (Breen & Hirvonen, 2022, p. 135). Minimizing domination is then the main goal of neo-republican democratic theory.

When it comes to work, what is problematic for neo-republicans is the potential unchecked interference in the lives of workers by both employers and managers. Workers have little choice but to enter into a contract with an employer in order to meet basic needs, while within the

workplace they are subjected to the rule of the employer who has organizational discretion and the power to determine virtually all aspects of the labour process (Anderson, 2015, p. 63-64; Breen & Hirvonen, 2022, p. 136). This rule is typically both underpinned and constrained by a system of labour, corporate and employment law.[63] Despite these legal restraints on employers, the extent of their rule over workers is still extensive, affecting workers both within and outside the workplace. What is then of concern for neo-republicans is the mode of governance of the firm, in which workers are subject to the arbitrary will of their employer, and the coercion that accompanies workers' dependency on employment, which forces them to accept this arbitrary will and subject themselves to conditions they have no say in or would otherwise not accept. Importantly, even when employers do not use their discretion in oppressive ways, what matters from the point of view of freedom as non-domination is that they *can.*

The debate on workplace democracy within contemporary republican democratic theory then starts with a group of theorists agreeing with, or building on, this ideal of freedom as non-domination, but disagreeing with neo-republicans such as Pettit and Lovett on the way to counter domination in the workplace. For the latter two thinkers, what is ultimately needed in this regard is to rebalance the unequal bargaining position that workers find themselves in relative to employers by way of an unconditional basic income (sources). This would ensure workers' effective (not merely formal) right of exit to quit their job, and in doing so eliminate the compulsion to take on work for the sake of meeting basic needs as well as the necessity to accept relations of domination at work: workers could simply exit and move on. While advocating different strategies to remedy workplace domination beyond the right to exit, workplace republicans are united in their rejection of such a right, underpinned by a form of basic income, as being sufficient to counter domination at work.[64] Instead, workplace republicans stress the importance of employee voice within the firm, although arriving at different conclusions as to the form and extent of this voice.

The first strategy, articulated most influentially by Nien-hê Hsieh and Elizabeth Anderson, insists on the *limitation* and *contestation* of managerial authority over employees. In order to fend off arbitrary interference, a mode of workplace governance is required which places constraints on managers 'so as to protect workers against arbitrary rule' (Anderson, 2015, p. 67) and which enables workers 'to contest managerial decisions that result in severe forms of interference not only *ex post,* but also as part of the decision-making process internal to economic enterprises (Hsieh, 2005, p. 137). This strategy is characterized by some as 'workplace constitutionalism' (Gonzàlez-Ricoy, 2014, p. 242) or 'contestatory workplace representation' (Breen, 2017, p. 17) as it is mostly concerned with establishing limits to managers' authority over workers and ensuring the latter's voice is *registered* by managers. Significantly, this form of worker voice in the firm intentionally falls short of prevailing conceptions of workplace democracy, which involve a form of worker control. For Hsieh and Anderson, worker control – or even control shared

[63] For a classic discussion on the way law becomes both a constraint on capitalists' power over workers while entrenching and legitimizing capitalist political economy, see Marx's *Capital*, volume 1, chapter 10 on the working day.
[64] For summaries of these criticisms, see: Birnbaum & De Wispelaere, 2016, p. 66; 2021; Breen & Hirvonen, 2022, p. 138.

with managers and capital owners – is rejected rather quickly for reasons of efficiency. Managerial residual decision-making rights are assumed to be required for the efficient running of organizations and both Hsieh and Anderson assume that this is incompatible with worker control.[65] Worker voice is thus understood here as a contestatory means to protection.

This contestatory form of voice is sharply criticized by a group of workplace republicans, who instead insist on significant worker control (Gonzàlez-Ricoy, 2014; Breen, 2015; Breen & Hirvonen, 2022; Gourevitch, 2016). The first criticism concerns the incompatibility Anderson and Hsieh assume of managerial discretion in complex firms and worker control. This position is criticised on grounds of ignoring empirical evidence of labour-managed firms' efficiency, as well as the arbitrariness of restricting managerial authority to representatives of the owners of firms' capital.[66] The second criticism of delineating workers' say in their workplace to a contestatory voice refers to relations of domination that are missed by this strategy. As Breen and Hirvonen argue, without contestation being accompanied by binding sanctions or workers having a binding say in decision-making processes, worker voice would be one that would be registered, but not one that would need to be acted on by managers necessarily (Breen, 2015, p. 482; Breen & Hirvonen, 2022, p. 140). Managers thus have no particular incentive to respect workers' interests without binding sanctions, and these interests can be easily disregarded in periods of heightened conflict. Furthermore, workers' right to contestation suggests that worker voice 'amounts to an internal retrospective right of redress, instead of a prospective right to influence agenda-setting and control the direction of organizational policy' (Breen & Hirvonen, 2022, p. 140). Taken together, this insistence on worker voice as contestation leads to an 'attenuated form of democratic control where the tracking of people's interests is left to institutions […] presided over by professional elites and in which the de facto scope for democratic input is often slight (Breen, 2015, p. 479).

This second criticism also points to a deeper, conceptual objection to the reliance on the ideal of freedom as non-domination as the justification for workplace democracy that this republican debate points towards. This objection starts from the observation made by Breen and Hirvonen that the 'reasonable disagreement between neo-republicans over the necessity of worker voice generally and workplace democracy in particular is due to an equation of political freedom with freedom as non-domination and a treatment of voice as a means towards furthering non-domination' (Breen & Hirvonen, 2022, p. 141). Because worker voice is treated as merely instrumental for the promotion of non-domination, rather than as an 'intrinsic, irreducible aspect of our status as free and equal persons', the non-domination case for such voice and/or workplace democracy remains rather contingent and precarious. Secondly, not only does the insistence on non-domination as the prime political value put worker voice on shaky grounds, it also severely truncates democracy as a social ideal (Breen, 2015, p. 479; Deranty & Renault, 2022, p. 157). For the republican non-domination argument, democracy is not valuable because of any independent attraction or intrinsic relation to freedom, but only matters in relation to

[65] Residual decision-making rights are rights to have a final say over decisions that have not been specified at the outset of the labour contract.
[66] See (Breen & Hirvonen, 2022, p. 140; Dow, 2003; Ferreras & Landemore, 2016) on the first point, and (Breen, 2015, p. 480; Deranty & Renault, 2022, p. 159) on the second.

arbitrary interference (Breen, 2015, p. 479). In other words, democracy, the quality of social relations and the mode of participation in collective life are only *instrumental* to the ideal of freedom as non-domination (Deranty & Renault, 2022, p. 157). By treating democracy as instrumental to freedom as non-domination workplace republicans are accused of severing the egalitarian imperative inherent to the social ideal of democracy from its connection to non-domination (ibid; see also Celikates, 2014). For neo-republicans, equality is not an intrinsic goal separate from freedom as non-domination – equality is at most the result of absence of arbitrary interference.

A growing group of authors within the republican tradition have thus criticized this instrumental view of democracy for deflating the democratic ideal, missing relations of domination, and lending insufficient grounds for democratizing work (Breen, 2015; Breen & Hirvonen, 2022; Gourevitch, 2011; 2016; O'Shea, 2021; Muldoon, 2022). This has led these authors to employ expanded conceptions of freedom and non-domination, and to articulate positive ideas of autonomy and equality on which these conceptions rely. In doing so they make what could be called a 'participatory turn', or a 'social turn', where they share a common concern for developing an adequate account of structural domination and enhancing popular participation in political and economic institutions. These concerns are prefigured, however, in what has been loosely called 'participatory democratic theory', which itself provides an original justification for workplace democracy and democratizing the economy more broadly. Let us then turn to this participatory justification of workplace democracy before exploring relations of power in the contemporary economy through the case of on-demand couriers.

II) Participation, Democratic Agency and Workplace Democracy

That neo-republican theorists turn to thicker conceptions of freedom and so affirm the importance of democratic participation is perhaps unsurprising to some because of the strong association that workplace democracy holds with participatory theories of democracy. Articulated mostly in the seventies and eighties by authors such as Carole Pateman, C.B. Macpherson, Carol Gould, Ronald Mason, Peter Bachrach and Aryeh Botwinick, these thinkers all advocated for the extension of participatory democratic mechanisms to other structures of authority within society, particularly the workplace. The workplace and its democratization are so central to these authors for a variety of reasons: the workplace is a crucial site for ordinary citizens to 'learn' and exercise democracy(Pateman, 1970, p. 42), as well as a 'point of leverage from which a more egalitarian distribution of power can emerge' (Bachrach & Botwinick, 1992, p. 12). Here, I will not treat participatory democracy as a fully-fledged and unified model of democracy, but rather as a particular way of justifying and understanding the democratization of work that includes a set of key 'ingredients' or claims. These are: 1) a positive conception of political freedom, in which agency and equality are closely related; 2) participation is constitutive of such freedom, rather than auxiliary; 3) participation is transformative and constitutive of worker-citizens' interests and desires, rather than instrumental to them; 4) economic domination is structural as well as inter-agentic, which is

better captured through a positive conception of freedom. All these claims lead to a 'thick' justification for workplace democracy that combines concerns with domination, egalitarian social relations, workers' agency, and the relationship between political democracy and democracy within the workplace. There are both instrumental and intrinsic arguments for extending democracy to the workplace on this account, as opposed to the instrumental argument of neo-republicans. Let us turn to this intrinsic argument first.

As mentioned, workplace republicans turn to expanded notions of political freedom to remedy the limitations of the conception freedom as non-domination. They turn to notions of self-determination (Breen, 2015), for example, or collective autonomy (Muldoon, 2022), which in turn leads them to affirm the importance of workers' participation in decision-making rather than being protected against non-domination through others. This line of argumentation is very common in the literature on participatory democratic theory, and one that is particularly thoroughly pursued by Carol Gould, who offers a comprehensive justification for workplace democracy based on a conception of freedom as the equal capacity of social individuals for self-development (Gould, 1988; 2019). I focus here on Gould's account of positive freedom because she most thoroughly and sophisticatedly expounds this notion. Gould makes a case to go beyond negative notions of freedom as absence of external constraints, to a conception of effective, concrete freedom which involves the availability of social and material conditions that enable one to choose, act, and develop (Gould, 1988, pp. 32-46). As such, she establishes a relationship between 'freedom from', as absence of constraints or protection against arbitrary interference, and 'freedom to' as a freedom to develop oneself, for which negative freedom is a necessary condition. A similar notion of freedom-as-self-development is common to most, if not all participatory democratic theory, and deserves a closer look.

Gould argues that freedom is on the one hand a fundamental human capacity to make meaningful choices and act intentionally within a lived situation, and that on the other hand this abstract capacity for freedom becomes effective and concrete through the actual making of choices and taking of actions over time, through which one develops and transforms oneself (ibid, p. 46). As she concisely puts it, 'bare freedom of choice remains abstract without being exercised by means of these [enabling] conditions in forms of self-development or self-transformative activity over time' (Gould, 2019, p. 522). These forms include the development of capacities and the cultivation of relationships, as well as realizing projects or goals. This concrete freedom is what she calls 'freedom as self-development' (Gould, 1988, p. 40). There are a few connotations that this formulation might imply which should be immediately dispelled. Firstly, Gould rejects essentialist and perfectionist takes on self-development (ibid, p. 47). Self-development is rather a non-teleological process of open-ended transformation. Secondly, 'self-development' has an individualistic ring to it that Gould is keen to counter. Self-development does not simply mean self-improvement in the colloquial sense of the word, as it is not necessarily self-directed. It is also deeply social in a twofold sense: the intentions and purposes that individuals form are social in their original, and these intentions and purposes can only be realized through social relations with others and social institutions – political, economic, educational, etc. – that provide enabling conditions and form the backdrop for cooperative action (ibid, pp. 49-50). Thus, while it is always an individual 'who is self-developing or free in

this sense', such individuals are 'not isolated, but rather are social individuals' (ibid, p. 49). Lastly, self-development is existential, processual, and temporal for Gould rather than perfectionist: more than a series of unconnected episodes of isolated choices or actions, self-development is understood as a process of becoming through actions that express one's purposes and needs (ibid, p. 41, 47). In other words, self-development is the effective exercise of any one's abstract capacity for agency.

From this conception of freedom as a relational and socially conditioned capacity for self-development and action, Gould derives an equal right to the conditions of such self-development: all are equally agents in their capacity for freedom, therefore no agent has more of a right to the conditions that their concrete freedom requires than others (ibid, pp. 61-64). This is what she calls the principle of equal positive freedom (ibid, p. 64). Taking this relationship between agency and equality as a starting point, Gould argues that democracy should not be restricted to what is traditionally taken to be the political sphere and should be extended to other sectors of life. As she puts it 'every person who engages in a common activity with others has an equal right to participate in making decisions concerning such activity' (ibid, p. 84). Work and the workplace are then crucial sites of common activity where there is currently no equal access to the conditions of agency, where most workers are dominated or exploited, and where there is essentially no politics in a meaningful sense. From her principle of equal positive freedom then follows that there is an equal 'right to participate in decisions concerning joint activities of production (…)', which is in effect 'the right to workers' self-management or to the democratic sharing of authority in economic production' (ibid, p. 143).

Gould's argument about the close interrelationship between agency, equality and participation is thus an intrinsic justification for democracy and its extension to the workplace and economy, as opposed to the instrumental argument from non-domination. This does not mean the concern for domination is neglected on this account. On the contrary, as has been argued by several authors, the argument from non-domination implicitly relies on a conception of autonomy or agency, one that is here simply made explicit (Breen & Hirvonen, 2022, p. 145; Deranty & Dejours, 2022, p. 157). For authors such as Gould, the denunciation of domination is in fact the counterpart of a more general demand for equality. While still concerned with dominating relations of power, this participatory defence of democratizing work stresses the importance of workers participating in decision-making processes in a way that allows them to be co-authors in the shape and direction of the firm, rather than their participation being contingent on the extent that it protects them against arbitrary interference. Because participation is conceived by Gould and other thinkers as constitutive of freedom rather than instrumental to it, this leads to an intrinsic justification for workers having democratic control over all aspects of the firm, including management rights, in contrast to the contestatory voice described above (Bachrach & Botwinick, 1992, p. 57; Gould, 1988, p. 145). On this account, there is no reason why control rights should reside exclusively with the owners and shareholders of the firm, as whether a firm's capital is owned privately, publicly, or cooperatively (i.e., by the workers themselves), those who participate in the social labour of the firm are entitled to a democratic (read: controlling) voice. Where possible, Gould argues, such a voice should be

through direct participation, and otherwise through representative mechanisms and the election of managers and directors accountable to workers (Gould, 1988, p. 145).

What is more, the concern with agency in Gould's account, which is shared in different ways by participatory democrats and others, leads to an attentiveness to structural forms of domination.[67] While Gould draws on the work of Iris Marion Young, and Bachrach and Botwinick on Marxist insights, they all highlight forms of domination that are irreducible to any particular agent's intention or any direct, interpersonal relationship of subjection (Bachrach & Botwinick, 1992, p. 67; Gould, 1988, p. 42; 2019, pp. 517-519). Structural domination is then not a property belonging to a discrete actor but is rather a power relationship that, while lacking intentionality, is nonetheless reproduced through the behaviour of agents within a social structure. The compulsion of workers within capitalism has provided the paradigmatic case for structural domination since Marx.[68] This compulsion is not the result of any specific employer per se, but of the worker's dependence on wages due to unequal background structure of ownership and control over productive assets. Workers are therefore dependent on *some* employer to sell their labour because of the lack of reasonable alternatives, and the apparently voluntary character of the ensuing labour contract then has the appearance of being concluded free from domination (Gourevitch, 2013, p. 602; Marx, 1999; Ch. 6). Some debate has already revolved around the question whether neo-republican approaches remain too focussed on what Rahman calls 'dyadic domination' - intentional, inter-agentic domination - because of their conception of domination as arbitrary interference (Rahman, 2017). By contrast, Gould's positive conception of freedom makes no such requirement of domination being inter-agentic: what matters is the usurpation or deprivation of people's capacity for agency. This can happen through dyadic as well as structural forms of domination – and of course, the two often go together, as we will also see below. As suggested by Lisa Herzog and Rutger Claassen, such a positive conception of freedom allows us to capture relations of domination in the capitalist economy that are not exclusive to the workplace, such as the labour market, informal economies, unpaid reproductive work, welfare systems, among others. (Herzog & Claassen, 2021).

Lastly, participatory democrats depart from workplace republicans in that they emphasize the transformative, developmental and 'educational' role of political participation, singling out the workplace as a particularly important site for 'learning' democracy (Bachrach & Botwinick, 1992, p. 29; Gould, 1988, Ch. 11; Pateman, 1970).[69] While there is an instrumental side to this argument about the ways in which political participation in the workplace would improve political participation overall, there is a more interesting line of argument about the socializing

[67] See Gould 1988, p. 42; Bachrach & Botwinick, 1992, p. 60; Muldoon, 2022. See also Rutger Claasen & Lisa Herzog, 2021, for a more recent defence of the necessity for a positive notion of freedom to grasp structural domination.

[68] For an influential Marxist exposition of the thesis that subjection in capitalism depends less on a relation of domination between individuals but on the constraint exerted through impersonal mechanisms, see Moishe Postone's *Time, Labour, and Social Domination* (1995).

[69] This is sometimes referred to as the 'psychological support' argument, in the sense that democratic participation in the workplace would help constitute the psychological resources needed for the formation of democratic citizens (see Cohen, 1989, p. 29).

function of work. Put briefly, this argument is that, given the amount of time it involves and the subjective impact it has, work is a particularly important site for the acquisition of democratic dispositions, behaviours and habits (Pateman, 1970, p. 38). This thesis has found its most recent expression in the work of Jean-Philipe Deranty and Emmanuel Renault (2018; 2022). They argue that workplaces have great potential for the fostering of democratic habits because they are places where people need to cooperate, deliberate, make decisions, critically reflect on practices, and solve problems. They are thus already sites of potential democratic learning, but where due to the undemocratic structure of capitalist firms they are instead places where most acquire un - or even anti – democratic dispositions and forms of behaviour (Deranty & Renault, 2022, p. 155).[70] Democratizing the workplace would then introduce a novel *process of subjectification* that enables *all* workers to enjoy a degree of autonomy, a sense of agency, and a say over their work that is now reserved, at best, only for the most privileged of workers, or can only be reached by becoming a capitalist. In other words, these thinkers home in on the structural links between domination inside and outside work, and the important role workplace democracy has to play in turning this vicious cycle of domination into a virtuous cycle of emancipation and democratisation (Bachrach & Botwinick, 1992, p. 12; Deranty & Renault, 2022, p. 163; Gould, 2019, pp. 530-532; Pateman, 1970, p. 32).

To recap, thus far we have considered two kinds of justifications for democratizing work. One centred on an ideal of freedom as non-domination, and another centred on freedom as the effective capacity to self-develop – i.e., agency. Both, to be sure, share a concern with worker unfreedom and dominating relations of power. However, for many workplace republicans, democratizing work is instrumental to promoting non-domination, whereas for participatory democrats it is intrinsically justified for reasons of agency and equality. To risk oversimplifying: one holds non-domination to be the prime political value, the other self-development. The debates both these justifications are embedded in, however, have generally been based on the model of the full-time, permanent worker, who enjoys labour law protections and standard terms of employment. The trend toward underemployment and precarious forms of work identified at the beginning of this thesis raises important questions about how these changing conditions of work affect the way we should understand what it means to democratize work, both normatively and practically. Taking on-demand couriers in the gig-economy as a case of precarious work, is the target of institutionalizing workplace democracy that the above authors focus on sufficient to address forms of domination that a growing group of precarious workers are facing? If we take on board concerns about domination as well as agency, what might democratizing work look like in the gig-economy? Is it possible to address both normative concerns under current political-economic conditions, and what avenues can we explore to do so? To address these questions, I will first turn to the case of on-demand couriers working in the gig economy to explore the kinds of power they face and the issues they themselves have with these forms of power. The insights into these workers' conditions will then be brought into conversation with the literature on workplace democracy, non-domination, and agency explored above.

[70] Of course, there is considerable debate and contention on what would constitute a democratic disposition, or 'democratic personality'. For Gould's own account see *Rethinking Democracy,* Ch. 11.

III) 'This is Ours as Much as it is Theirs': Autonomy, Control, and Domination in On-Demand Service Platforms

Platforms such as Deliveroo, Uber, Stuart and JustEats often employ the language of freedom, flexibility, and autonomy to characterize the key benefits of their business model (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). This language slots into the larger narrative of what these on-demand service platforms claim to do: they purport to be 'middlemen' providing the technological means to connect customers to 'independent service providers' while taking a rent-like fee from each transaction (Srnicek, 2016, p. 47; Schor & Vallas, 2020, Möhlman et al., 2021, p. 2000). As 'independent service providers', workers on these platforms would then enjoy the autonomy and independence that come with being self-employed, and the ease of tapping into an already existing pool of clients. As was discussed in previous chapters, this classification is hotly contested. Classifying workers as independent contractors is argued by many to be a strategy to avoid significant overhead costs as workers are excluded from workplace protections and bear the costs and risks of employment (Graham & Woodcock, 2020, p. 44; Schor & Vallas, 2020, p. 280; Shapiro, 2020). [71]

On-demand platforms then need to manoeuvre around the regulatory prohibitions that come with the classification of their workers as 'independent contractors', as these constrain the kinds of control they can exert over their workforce (van Doorn, 2020; Griesbach, 2019, p. 5; Shapiro, 2020, p. 167). A burgeoning literature is describing this control as 'algorithmic management' (Griesbach et al., 2019; Ravenelle, 2019; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Shapiro, 2020; Möhlman et al., 2017; 2021). Algorithmic management can be concisely defined as the 'oversight, governance and control practices conducted by software algorithms over many remote workers', and is 'characterized by continuously tracking and evaluating worker behavior and performance, as well as automatic implementation of algorithmic decisions' (Möhlman et al., 2017, p. 4). In other words, in platform labour, algorithms take on the roles and actions that would normally befall individual managers. However, there is an increasing recognition that this algorithmic management has two core components which are at least conceptually distinct, which I will here refer to as 'algorithmic control' and 'market control'. The former is akin to managerial control in hierarchical firms, though here digitally mediated. The latter involves exerting control at the aggregate level of labour supply: by incentivizing, nudging, rewarding or punishing the behaviour of workers through gamifying the market architecture in which workers move (Griesbach et al, 2019, p. 5; Shapiro, 2020). While both these forms of control are executed through the platform's algorithm, they are distinct forms of power that are conceptually relevant, which also showed up consistently throughout interviews with couriers.

[71] I will continue to use the term 'workers' to describe those working on on-demand service platforms. Without wishing to get mired into legal debates about classification, here I take a worker to mean simply anyone exchanging labour-power for money, irrespective of their legal status.

In what follows I will thus focus on both these forms of control, as well as platform workers' experiences of this algorithmic management. In particular, I will focus on workers' own objections to, and critiques of, these forms of power they are subjected to, and bring these in conversation with the normative concerns about domination and agency explored above. I argue that whereas self-employment is traditionally thought to be purely a market relationship rather than a managerial one (self-employed are on an equal footing with their clients and not in an ongoing relationship of subordination to an employer) platform workers are in fact subjected to both (while promised relief from both). As such, I argue that this case of platform work and the rise of precarious work it is embedded in highlights the close relationship between intra and extra-workplace forms of power: market and managerial. Through interviews with the IWGB C&L's couriers, I show how this constitutes a particularly severe form of uncontrolled power in which one group of agents (company owners and managers, mediated through an algorithm) dominates another (workers) by usurping their agency.

Algorithmic Control: Informational Asymmetries and Illegibility

A key characteristic of platform work is the profound asymmetry of information between workers and the platform, which is used strategically by the latter (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Griesbach et al., 2019; Shapiro, 2020). Couriers generally do not have access to the full range of orders that have been placed by customers in their 'zone' but instead are presented with individual offers they must accept or reject (Griesbach et al., 2019, p. 6). Couriers also have no knowledge as to how the algorithm makes decisions on, for example, pricing and reward of a job, the frequency of jobs they get, what happens when they reject a job, or how exactly one's acceptance rates influences the allocation of jobs. As Jamie succinctly put it:

> […] on the one hand you work for an algorithm. It's nice to not have a boss, you know, looking over your shoulder, because a lot of us have been experiences with bosses looking over our shoulder that we don't want. But then, on the other hand, the fact that the operation of the whole thing is so remote, it means that we don't know anything about what they're doing or how it works.

This characterization of working for a platform as a trade-off between not having to be subjected to the direct authority of a boss or manager, while still being subjected to the opaque control of an algorithm was shared by many interviewed couriers. Furthermore, while couriers are then nominally free to accept or reject any job offered by the algorithm, this information asymmetry in effect elides the distinction between an offer and a command. This elision was poignantly exemplified by one courier's experience working for Stuart, an on-demand delivery company for restaurants. Tim, a Darby-based courier for Stuart in his early 30's, recounted a period of two weeks in restaurants were having to cancel customer's orders because there was nobody to pick them up. He was servicing 15 to 20 restaurants on a push bike and was exhausting himself by constantly working. When taking a break, he got a call from Stuart asking him to keep going:

> I got really angry with him. I said it nicely, but I got really angry and I went 'excuse me' – they says, 'we need you to go and pick up this order now', and I went, 'Excuse me. I'm knackered. I'm having a break. Give me five or ten minutes, I'll go pick it up. If not, cancel

> the order and I'll go home now. Simple as. I'm not being ordered about'. And they were like 'OK, take a breather, take this take that.'

At this extreme end of algorithmic control, the façade of commands being dressed up as job offers comes down, as when automated nudges do not produce compliance, a human supervisor will come and give a shove – something noted by other couriers and researchers as well (Griesbach et al., 2019, p. 11).

On-demand service platforms such as Deliveroo and UberEATS also retain control over their workers in terms of assessing the latter's performance and rewarding or sanctioning them. Couriers get assessed in terms of acceptance rates, attendance metrics (for platforms such as Deliveroo where riders book in shifts), delivery speed (Deliveroo, for example, now shows the rider up front what time they should be at the customer) and customer ratings (van Doorn, 2020, p. 13; Griesbach et al, 2019, p. 7). The most direct tool of discipline that the algorithm has at its disposal is to temporarily or permanently block couriers' access to their account. At the time of my involvement with the IWGB C&L, these ad-hoc terminations constituted one of the biggest issues couriers and drivers were facing. Across all platforms, workers reported being dismissed for unknown or unclear reasons, with little to no recourse to contest the decision or to even talk to a person about it. Couriers were often left to guess what the reason for their dismissal was. In a meeting on the issue held in August 2021, one courier who had worked for Stuart for three years reported being suddenly terminated for reasons unknown to him, which led him to worry financially for his family. Another had gotten in to rent arrears and was living in a hostel because of a sudden termination. As became desperately clear in these meetings and conversations, platforms simply have the power to ignore couriers' calls and emails, as well as those of a union such as the IWGB, or even those of MP's who write on couriers' behalf. While platforms' algorithms then take on features of human managers here, they severely decrease the ability of workers to contest decisions, even such impactful decisions as suspensions or terminations.

The comments made during these 'termination meetings' and by interviewed couriers often circled back to the word 'dehumanizing', highlighting a deep tension in app-based work between the freedom to 'be your own boss', while being minutely surveilled and managed by a remote and opaque algorithm. As Allison put it:

> In this kind of work you're not an individual, you're basically interchangeable. And like, you're not really seen in the kind of complex... You know, Deliveroo doesn't see me as the kind of complex individual that I am, it just sees me as, sort of a number, I guess, or like a part of the machine.

Workers are only legible to Deliveroo here as data points and in terms of how useful they are for the platform's interest of extracting value (see also: Gregory & Sadowski, 2021, p. 9; Möhlmann et al., 2021, p. 2007). Both Allison and another courier, Debi, who identified as non-binary, emphasized that the remoteness of the platform and its algorithmic management compounded and obscured certain gendered aspects of the work. Being treated as 'part of the machine' and having no recourse to human managers means that it is very difficult to address

the gendered issues that many female couriers face, such as sexual harassment.[72] Speaking about the inadequate procedures to report such harassment, Debi argued:

> If you do have an emergency or something happens there isn't... you can't pick up the phone and call your manager. Do you know what I mean? That's not a thing. You have to go through the app and be like, 'oh what's happened', 'this', no, 'this', 'this', 'that'. And then you just like, talk to a robot and it's quite... dehumanizing, if that's the right word to use.

Couriers trying to get in touch with their company are often met with a template response or are routed through an automated system of Q&A's, as Debi is referring to, which lacks a contextual understanding of the courier's issues. When it comes to sexual violence, the contrast between the shame, fear and humiliation often experienced in these situations, and the blunt indifference of an automated response starkly highlights platforms' treatment of workers as nodes of data production, legible only in terms of the company's interests.

While then on the face of it on-demand service platforms offer a degree of autonomy to workers that is attractive to many due to the escape it seems to offer from certain woes of capitalist work – arbitrary authority of bosses and limited freedom over one's time – the algorithm in fact assumes managerial roles in the interests of the company in a more uncompromising and distant way. The lines of communication between the platform and workers are primarily one-way systems, which means that workers lack even the opportunity to discuss or negotiate aspects of their work, as well as for any of the concessions or compromises that might be expected from a human manager. These are then clearly forms of arbitrary interference similar to the ones that managers usually hold in capitalist firms and can so be understood as a form of domination in the republican sense discussed above. As James Muldoon and Paul Raekstad then argue, drawing on republican insights, algorithmic control increases both the degree of domination that workers are subject to, as workers have less ability to contest or negotiate their conditions, as well as the 'severity with which that domination is exercised' (Muldoon & Raekstad, 2022, p. 10).

However, on this last point, it seems that the severity of domination is not only connected to the increased capacity for arbitrary interference, but also has to do with the absence of a mutually reciprocal relationship between the worker and the algorithm. To be brief, couriers are only tacitly recognized as an agent by the algorithm insofar as they serve the company's interests, which we can call with Carol Gould an instrumental form of reciprocity (Gould, 1988, p. 73). Whereas one finds this relationship of bare reciprocity usually between two individuals, its algorithmic mediation is experienced by couriers as particularly 'dehumanizing' due to the distance of one group of individuals (workers) from those that control them ('bosses', i.e., owners and managers who act on behalf of the corporation's interests). Gould contrasts this to a relationship of social reciprocity, in which there is a mutual acknowledgement of each-other's agency, interests and judgments as 'demanding respect and thus readiness to take the other's

[72] Laura Hancock, part of the Yoga Instructors branch of the IWGB, wrote an insightful article on gig workers' vulnerability to sexual harassment: https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/sexual-harassment-abuse-gig-economy-union/

purposes and views into consideration into one's own judgements and actions' (ibid, p. 74). The contrast with the algorithmic control described above is stark. The main point here is that algorithmic control replaces the human manager with an algorithm with increased capacities for arbitrary interference, and a reduced capacity for fostering relationships of social reciprocity.

While the arbitrary authority of the boss then takes on a different form in platform work, what about the flexibility to self-schedule? We shall now turn to the ways in which platforms employ market mechanisms to control not only how work is done, but also when. As we shall see far from being an attribute of democracy at work, the limited autonomy afforded to on-demand couriers in terms of scheduling points to important preconditions for such democratization.

Market Control: Dynamic Pricing and the Wage as a Wager

A big issue for on-demand couriers that was discussed in the previous chapter is the way in which the platform's power over market conditions made it difficult to anticipate how much one would be able to earn, fragmented working time, and restricted flexibility. To recall, worker flexibility is tethered to a great degree to consumer-demand: couriers are free to work whenever they want, but effectively they are constrained by the times when there is most demand for orders if they want to be sure to earn anything. Interviewed couriers frequently mentioned the way that the volatility of platforms 'hiring' practices impacted their capacity to work and earn. As Phil explained:

> […] ultimately, the companies at the moment have no disincentive to flood their platforms with riders. It costs them nothing. Because if you're paying someone for each piece of work they do, which is what the gig-economy is, your cost basis is the same if two people are doing two bits of work, or one person is doing two bits of work. So that's essentially what's happening. We need to build some disincentive where our interests are aligned there.

What Phil is pointing towards is an antagonism of interests between capital and workers within on-demand platforms. The latter aim to maximise revenue while 'striking a balance between labour and consumer demand within the regulatory constraints of the independent-contractor classification' (Shapiro, 2020, p. 168). A part of these constraints is that workers can self-schedule, creating the potential for platforms being either understaffed or overstaffed (Cachon et al, 2017, p. 3). While both situations represent 'costly inefficiencies for the company' (ibid), being understaffed is a direct cost to the platform, whereas the cost of being overstaffed falls on workers whose waiting times between jobs increase, driving their average earnings down. The cost for platforms of having too much worker capacity would come in the form of worker dissatisfaction or potential exit, both of which pose no credible threat to platforms because of their structural reliance on pools of precarious, underemployed labour (Srnicek, 2016). Or, as Phil remarked above, 'it costs them nothing'.

A method platforms have increasingly employed to deal with the coordination problem described above is to use not only the familiar technique of dynamic pricing (i.e., adjusting

consumer prices to capture marginally greater share of value), but dynamic *waging*.[73] As Shapiro succinctly explains:

> 'With dynamic wages, payment values are modulated as incentives and disincentives to corral those decisions [of when workers decide to work]. Raising the pay when demand is high incentivises workers to log on in the same way that lowering prices incentivises customers to buy. And by observing workers' responses to these incentives through the platform's data flows, managers can calculate the exact wage-rates needed to produce the most desirable courses of action' (Shapiro, 2020, p. 168).

In other words, by 'surging' the wage rates at times when (and places where) platforms anticipate demand will be high, they seek to maintain control over workers at the aggregate level of labour supply, while 'maintaining the façade of autonomy at an individual level' (ibid, p. 163). As Niels van Doorn memorably puts it, this technique effectively turns the wage into a 'recurring wager: a series of risky bets animated by the belief or hope that you will be able to cobble together a livelihood one gig at a time' (van Doorn, 2020, p. 9). This technique is then not the exercise of one discrete agent's power over another discrete agent, as the republican account of domination emphasizes, but rather a form of power leveraged on a structural level that constrains the agency of a whole group of agents.

For this technique to be effective, however, certain conditions must be in place. First, workers must learn the 'right' responses to wage manipulation, i.e., the responses that adhere to the 'rationality' of the incentives. On-demand platforms therefore design the market in a way that trains workers to recognise that only the choices that are worth their while are 'rational' (Griesbach et al., 2019, p. 6; Shapiro, 2020, p. 168). Secondly, platforms maintain control over the design of the architecture that organises market encounters, and therefore 'hoard' calculative agency (Shapiro, 2020, p. 173). Couriers have no access to the market information the platform holds, or to the 'calculative equipment' such as the analytics engines and algorithms platforms employ to nudge and manipulate their labour force. They crucially also have no say over the principles and rationality that guides the design of the market architecture, including issues such as how (and to what end) to regulate labour supply, or whether to employ techniques such as dynamic waging. On-demand platforms thus effectively control crucial aspects of the labour process, such as when couriers work, by leaving them the minimal, individual agency to learn the platform's 'rationality', but excluding them from having any voice over decisions about market-architecture or algorithm design.

Lastly, while the point of application of this market-based labour control is the algorithm, it modifies an already-existing structural relationship of power between labour and capital. This structural power relationship has already been described above as one in which the structure of capitalist property relations forces workers to sell their labour-power to some (though not any particular) capitalist (Marx, 1990, p. 109). Platforms heavily rely on growing pools of underemployed workers, many of them migrants, which can be described as serving an infrastructural role for platforms (Srnicek, 2016, p. 82; van Doorn et al., 2020). One of the

[73] For different models of combinations of price and wage dynamics, see (Cachon et al, 2017).

crucial yet simple reasons why platforms' calculative power over workers is effective is because of the lack of reasonable alternatives: many platform workers depend on what they earn on platforms for their livelihood.[74] On-demand platforms' use of market-techniques for ends of labour control thus does not exist in isolation from this broader power-structure of the capitalist labour market and the precarious conditions it produces for workers, but merely formalizes and gamifies them, while claiming to have overcome them. What platform work then poignantly highlights is the way in which domination *at* work is intimately connected to domination *outside* work, in the sense that workers' acceptance of the terms and conditions of the work on 'offer' and their submission to bosses' arbitrary authority (whether human or algorithm) hinges on a structural power imbalance between workers and capitalists where the former are forced to sell their labour-power to the latter.

This channelling and exercise of both market and managerial power through platforms' algorithms is then experienced by platform workers as a particularly severe form of uncontrolled power. As Jamie, a rider for Deliveroo explains:

> There was a big thing, just before I joined the Union, about everyone saying the fees had gone down, like, very noticeably, they had cut the fees per delivery. And this was in a period where there weren't enough orders to go around anyway. They cut the fees and there was no consultation with us, or even any kind of acknowledgment. They were just allowed to pay us less, you know.

Not only is the algorithm through which manages workers such as Jamie opaque and distant, platform companies are able to simply change the organisation of work or system for compensation without advance warning or justification, let alone workers' say in the matter. Phil expressed a similar frustration, arguing:

> This is just like a power that they want to have over us, that they shouldn't. You know, to change the algorithm like that, have it be totally untransparent, change your fees. Yeah it's stressful. Because I think, invariably, if you're being paid piecemeal, your income is going to fluctuate week to week, depending on the weather, depending on different kinds of things - Ramadan coming in. Those are things that I *know* and any rider knows and can predict. But waking up in the morning and having your fees cut is not something we have control over, and I think, you know, that's what we need. We don't mind our income fluctuating because of things that we understand – sudden hot day, people aren't going to order as much. I get that. Normally I'll just take the day off. But you know, the other things we don't have control over.

Phil's argument further highlights the relationship between domination as the capacity for arbitrary interference and the loss of agency. Whereas there are changes and fluctuations that couriers have the agency to deal with, others are clearly made unilaterally at the full discretion of the company without any worker say in the matter, effectively usurping the latter's agency over the organisation and conditions of their work. There is a clear appeal here not only to the

[74] However, Juliet Schor (2020) argues that the extent of this power depends of course on the extent to which workers depend on platforms to be their main source of income.

republican ideal of being free *from* domination, but to have equal power *over* the conditions of work in which one participates and a say over the decisions that one is affected by. One might then argue, with participatory democrats such as Gould, that when it comes to work, being free from being dominated by others and workers having joint control over their working conditions and managerial decisions are two sides of the same coin. For Phil, having such a say is particularly important because of the dependency of many couriers on platforms for their earnings: 'We can't set your own price, can't market for work, don't control the number of riders on the platform. We're dependent. We might not be employees, but we're dependent to a degree that means we should have more certainty over our contracts.' Tellingly, he adds 'this is ours as much as it is theirs'.[75]

To sum, what this exploration of couriers' experiences with algorithmic management shows is on the one hand the close relationship between intra-work and extra-work relations of power and domination, and on the other hand the close relationship between domination and the usurpation of agency. Regarding the first, the structural power of the capitalist labour market forms a necessary condition for the effective exercise of on-demand platforms' algorithmic management, a relationship which arguably holds for precarious workers more generally (see Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 81-88; 2000, pp. 202 – 205; Isabell Lorey, 2020, p. 28). The increased capacity for arbitrary interference of platforms thus depends on the wider economic vulnerability of underemployed workers, a relationship which is formalized and gamified in platforms. Regarding the latter, platforms' increased capacity for arbitrary interference is premised on a particular constraint of couriers' agency. Couriers' agency matters only to the extent that it serves the interests of the platform, which sets up a relationship of instrumental reciprocity that is experienced as dominating and 'dehumanizing'. In other words, their agency is subordinated to the interests of the platform, in which they have no say. What these two conclusions suggest is that, first: it is insufficient to focus on the minimization of domination without considering workers' capacities to act on their own behalf. And secondly, that democratising work requires paying close attention to the relationship between workplace democracy and economic democracy more broadly conceived. It is these two suggestions that will be explored in more depth in the following section. If democratizing platform work should be approached with an emphasis on increasing the capacity of those dominated – workers – to act on their own behalf, how can this be achieved in the context of the dual forms of power they face?

IV) Freedom of What Kind? Confronting Domination and Precarity through Platform Co-operativism

Freedom of What Kind? Subordinated and Political

[75] To be complete, with this sentence Joe was referring both to his work as a courier as well as the fact that platforms such as Deliveroo use public and mobile infrastructure that is publicly financed, previously arguing that 'they just built an app on top of it'. 'This is ours' then refers both to the wealth platforms owe to their workers, as well as to infrastructure publicly financed by citizens.

As on-demand platforms employ a language of democracy and autonomy to promote themselves, it is worth briefly revisiting the debates of workplace republicans and participatory democrats to tease out what exactly sets the democratic ideal apart from that of these companies, as well as establish more clearly the connection between domination and agency suggested above.

On-demand service platforms, as we have seen above, leave some room for their workers to exert their agency in the course of the labour process, while strictly limiting the control workers have over crucial aspects of their working conditions. Steven Vallas and Juliet Schor therefore characterise platforms as 'permissive potentates', as they incorporate a limited sense of worker agency into the labour process while power remains centralized within the corporation (Vallas & Schor, 2020, p. 282). Wood and Lehdonvirta (2021), in a slightly different context of remote platform workers, suggestively coin the term 'subordinated agency' to characterize this restricted form of agency available to platform workers. As was noted above, couriers' agency is subordinated to the platform's power in the sense that it can only be exercised within the parameters set by the platform, while workers have no say over key aspects of their work, the character of the algorithm, or the interests and principles which undergird it. To paraphrase Dalla Costa and James, couriers can 'take their own road', so long as it is through the platform's territory (Dalla Costa & James, 1975, p. 8).

This freedom on offer differs distinctively from that which workplace republicans or participatory democrats have in mind. To start with workplace republicans, recall their conception of freedom as the absence of arbitrary forms of interference that show no regard for one's interests and over which one has insufficient or no control. Couriers in the gig-economy are clearly subject to such arbitrary interference, and in this sense are dominated, as explored above and also argued by Muldoon and Raekstad (Muldoon & Raekstad, 2022). What is normatively relevant for republicans are then the unequal positions of power in which individuals or groups stand, where one (individual or group) has the unchecked power to control the other. Importantly, it is the *capacity* to do so that is relevant. This stands whether or not some platforms offer better working conditions than others or purport to have progressive principles undergirding their policies, to the extent that one group ('bosses') still have the unchecked capacity to exert their power over workers. This is an insight from neo-republicans that I wish to salvage here.

However, as already argued above, this negative conception of freedom treats worker voice within the firm as only instrumental rather than intrinsic to freedom, which leads to a range of different positions within the republican camp on whether such a voice, or workplace democracy, is necessary at all to reduce arbitrary interference. As we have seen, some prefer the mere strengthening of exit rights, while others prefer a contestatory mechanism that would allow managers to track workers' interests. The case explored above should make clear that these are insufficient measures. Even if exit were costless, 'job alternatives for workers may be as despotic, unregulated and arbitrary as their current job' (González-Ricoy, 2014, p. 241), something which is particularly the case for workers in the gig-economy (Birnbaum & De

Wispelaere, 2016, p. 66). Furthermore, to reduce domination in on-demand platform work, it is not enough to institutionalize more contestatory mechanisms without workers having a controlling say over vital conditions of their work, including the design of the algorithm and the principles that undergird it. As shown in this case of platform work, managers only track the interests of couriers insofar as it serves the profit interests of the platform, which itself is shaped by venture capitalists who urge platforms such as Uber to capture markets at breakneck speed with little regard for regulations or workers (Poletti, 2019; Srnicek, 2016). After all, it is not just workers that are subject to structural relations of power which urge them to behave in certain ways or inform their interests: capitalists are too. In the context of capitalism, at the core of which lies a relationship of antagonistic interdependence between labour and capital, workers cannot rely on the benevolence of managers, shareholders and capital owners to listen to their interests.

However, reducing domination cannot be the only target of democratizing work, as argued in section two, without a regard for increasing the agentic capacity of those dominated. What matters in terms of democracy as a social ideal, drawing on Gould, is the equal capacity for the effective exercise of agency: the capacity to 'do things' (Gould, 1988; Ober, 2007). For Gould, to recall, freedom is a relational and socially conditioned capacity for self-development and action, which relies on material and social conditions to be effectively exercised. On this understanding, while on-demand couriers are given a degree of individual autonomy by platforms, they are not treated as equal agents, as their capacity for agency is only recognized by the platform insofar as it serves the latter's interests, over which couriers have no say (this is true for workers under capitalism more generally). Furthermore, on this account the structural power of the capitalist labour market, channelled and formalized by platforms, itself forms a problem, as workers are dependent on selling their labour power to some capitalist, who then controls the conditions of their work and reaps the surplus produced. This positive conception of democratic freedom then establishes a close connection between non-domination and agency – i.e., freedom and participation. On a conceptual level this seems convincing, as some notion of autonomous agency is at the very least implicit in the critique of domination in order to make sense of what exactly is harmed when individuals in a social structure are dominated by others (Claassen & Herzog, 2020, p. 471). This also resonates closely at the level of couriers' experiences: it is the restriction of their capacity to have any voice in decisions that are being made that affect them, as well as over basic aspects of their work, that is consistently criticized. One might argue, then, that at the level of experience, domination and the usurpation of agency are immanently connected.

The democratization of work then cannot happen only through indirect, delegated and elite-led institutional structures but needs to involve those whose agency has been usurped in the first place. Participation, as Rahman puts it, is a necessary corollary to the critique of domination (Rahman, 2017, p. 55). Democratising work according to the principle of equal freedom defended above then includes a form of workplace democracy where workers have a controlling say in the management of the firm, in which workers are co-authors of the polity that is the firm and not merely beneficiaries of others' power. A form of workplace democracy is further needed, I argue, to begin breaking up the classed antagonism of interests that pervade capitalist

workplaces and will continue to undermine workers' equal capacity for agency. However, the interrelationship between structural and workplace forms of power that characterises precarious work suggests that democratising the workplace cannot be thought of in isolation from increasing worker-citizens' economic agency more generally (see also Vrousalis, 2019). Thus, in what follows, I will briefly explore platform co-operatives as an alternative, democratic way to organize platform labour, and its potentials and limits for confronting precariousness.

Platform Co-operativism against Precarity

Platform co-operativism draws on the longer history of the co-operative and council movements demanding worker ownership and democratic control over the workplace, stretching back in the UK to the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers founded in 1844. Put concisely, worker co-operatives are enterprises that are jointly owned and democratically governed by participating workers (Dow, 2003, p. 3). The principles which the Rochdale Society operated on continue to undergird many co-operatives today and give us a good idea of some basic co-op characteristics. These principles include open membership, democratic member control (one person, one vote), equitable distribution of surplus, a limited return on equity, and the promotion of education and training. Platform co-operatives draw on these democratic principles and adopt the democratic ownership and governance structure of worker co-operatives while selling goods or services through a digital platform (Scholz, 2016). Emerging in the late 2000's, there are currently around 536 initiatives in 49 countries around the world.[76] In the ride-hail and delivery sectors that are most germane for our purposes here, CoopCycle and Eva are two prominent examples of existing platform co-operatives.[77] To be sure, platform co-operatives come in different shapes and forms, depending on their ownership structure and what they do. For example, James Muldoon distinguishes between worker-owned, producer-owned, consumer-owned, and multi-stakeholder co-operatives (Muldoon, 2020, p. 76; see also Scholz, 2016, p. 15). For our purposes here I will focus exclusively on worker-owned and managed platform co-operatives, as these are most relevant to the case of platformed delivery work.

Advocates of platform co-operatives argue that they offer a fairer alternative to current business models by making the above-mentioned changes in ownership and governance structure (Scholz, 2016; Scholz & Schneider, 2016). Going off our discussion above, what role can platform co-operatives play in countering domination and enhancing worker agency? How and to what extent do they confront the managerial domination discussed above as well as the perils of precarity?

Firstly, managerial power in a platform co-operative is structured in a radically different way than in a capitalist firm. As platform co-operatives are owned and governed by their worker-members, the distinctions between owners and workers, and consequently those who make decisions and those who follow commands, employers and employees, are broken down. Workers in platform co-operatives can collectively decide on standards for acceptable times for

[76] See the Platform Cooperativism Consortium's directory for more details: https://directory.platform.coop/
[77] See: https://coopcycle.org/en/ and https://eva.coop/#/

delivery, determine allocation of working hours and how work is shared, and engage in business planning and strategy, thus gaining a share of control over their economic lives. They are further able to collectively shape the design of the algorithm according to principles and interests collectively agreed upon. CoopCycle, for example, has produced an open-source platform application that delivery co-operatives are able to source for free and adapt according to their local wishes.[78] Thus, rather than being used as a tool for labour control for the purpose of maximising the profit of owners and shareholders, the algorithmic management of platform co-operatives is repurposed in a way that is in line with workers' deliberatively agreed upon interests. This renders the otherwise abstract character of the algorithmic management more legitimate, legible, and democratically malleable, thus eliminating the dominating aspect of the relationship between riders and the algorithm.

Secondly, the smaller scale on which co-operatives usually operate and the collective decision-making processes that they employ enables a relationship of social reciprocity to emerge. Workers engage in deliberation and discussion, attend meetings, exert their judgement on key matters of the firm, vote and collectively make decisions. While all workers might have different sets of skills, expertise and responsibility, in democratically managing their firm there is a mutual acknowledgement of each-other's equality as agents (Gould, 1988, pp. 74-75). Not only do platform co-operatives then start to break up the antagonism of class interests which informs the dominating aspect of the algorithmic management, they also allow for collective habits of equality, solidarity and mutual reciprocity to form. Furthermore, collective decision-making processes lead worker-members to start considering the broader organisation and direction of the firm, which enables them to break out of the narrow role and subordinate agency assigned to them. As a worker-owner of Chicago-based co-op New Era Windows explains: 'at Republic [the firm they bought out] we thought we only knew how to make windows, you know, because this is what we were told, that we were window-makers. When we moved into our own plant, we found out we was [sic] electricians, we found out that we was plumbers! You know, we found out that we were people of industry'.[79] While of course this remark takes place in a very different context, it exemplifies how co-operatives not only protect workers from dominating power but also expand and develop workers' agency beyond the confines assigned by the interest of capital. With the firm no longer being split between a minority that governs in the interests of capital and a majority that is powerless but to obey – with the respective habits, attitudes and dispositions that are developed through these positions – we have a firm in which this 'division of the sensible' is scrambled and the roles are no longer so clearly aligned. No longer divided by actor and spectator, doer and sufferer, the democratic firm is one in which workers share in the experience of politics as much as their work.

While the dominating aspect of managerial relationships is thus removed, and participation enables an expansion of workers' interests and capacities, how do platform co-operatives confront precarity? Firstly, as argued above, co-operatives allow worker-members to have a share of power over their working lives, making them rendering them more predictable,

[78] See https://coopcycle.org/en/software/

[79] Own The Change: Building Economic Democracy One Worker Co-op at a Time: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8G1-SYMatNc&t=11s

shapeable and adaptable. Having control over the allocation of working hours and how many couriers to share the work amongst might take away some of the individual kind of freedom to log on whenever, but in return couriers enjoy a much higher degree of security, stability, and control over their working lives. Secondly, in a platform co-operative, the sudden termination of couriers through the algorithm would be replaced by an open and transparent process following procedures known to all and with appropriate avenues for appeal. This would further remove a key aspect of what makes courier work in the gig-economy so precarious. Thirdly, worker-members of a co-operative appropriate all income collectively, which is used to fund members' individual incomes as well as to further develop the co-op. While this wealth does of course fluctuate and members might decide to reduce their individual incomes, this is collectively decided on for reasons known to all, rather than imposed unilaterally in the interest of a few. This offers security in the sense that sudden changes in individual income cannot be unilaterally imposed but become predictable and legitimate. Lastly, platform co-operatives can also use their surplus to fund a social security scheme for members that can keep incomes relatively stable in times of fluctuating demand, as some artist co-operatives do (Sandoval, 2016, p. 63). However, this can only be realised if the co-operative is economically successful enough. Such economic success means competing in a capitalist market. This brings us to some of the constraints imposed on platform co-operatives as they operate within a wider capitalist context, and some criticisms of their emancipatory potential.

The most common criticism of co-operatives which applies to their platformed incarnation as well, is that they are merely islands of socialized production within a sea of capitalist exchange, and that to survive in these choppy waters they will inescapably need to resort to aggressive business tactics that mimic those of capitalist firms (Sandoval, 2016, p. 57; Muldoon, 2020, p. 78; 2022, p. 104; Scholz, 2016, p. 13). Rosa Luxemburg is often cited to make this point, as she argues that co-operatives constitute a 'hybrid form in the midst of capitalism', and that they therefore 'are obliged to take toward themselves the role of capitalist entrepreneur – a contradiction that accounts for the usual failure of production co-operatives which either become pure capitalist enterprises or, if the workers' interests continue to predominate, end by dissolving' (Luxemburg, 1900). Platform co-operatives thus run the risk of being co-opted through the pressure of capitalist exchange to adopt practices of 'self-exploitation' to compete with corporate giants such as Uber or Deliveroo. This is compounded by the fact that whereas the latter have floated on venture capital, platform co-operatives struggle to access similar capital resources, adding pressure to accept external investment that would come with control rights (Borkin, 2019, p. 26). Furthermore, as James Muldoon points out, once in competition with other firms, co-operatives tend to pursue goals advancing the interests of the firm and become more isolated from broader social issues (Muldoon, 2020, p. 79). In other words, platform co-operatives would be simply a better way of doing business that humanizes capitalism, while not addressing the structural problems of the capitalist economy, such as precarity, social inequality, and economic and environmental crises.

As such, while platform co-operatives challenge class divisions, enhance workers' agency, minimize domination and offer forms of security, they are also constrained by the structure of capitalist exchange, which potentially limits their challenge to the more structural causes of

precarity. To navigate these contradictions, both James Muldoon and Marisol Sandoval argue that platform co-operatives, and co-operatives more generally, need to be embedded within a wider political movement that can challenge the capitalist structure at a more systemic level (Muldoon, 2022, p. 104; Sandoval, 2016, p. 67). Platform co-operatives would need to work with and alongside trade unions, grassroots organisations, municipal institutions, and political parties, for example. To speak with Mouffe, they would need to be embedded within a hegemonic front to remain political. That is, rather than platform co-operatives coming to understand themselves and operate as individual businesses that simply have a more democratic structure, they would need to see themselves as part of a common political horizon, working alongside a host of other social forces and actors towards a transformation of society as a whole.

Lastly, to navigate the contradictory and ambiguous terrain that platform co-operatives occupy, we can draw on participatory democrats discussed in section two, and their understanding of workplace democracy in a pre-figurative sense. With pre-figurative politics is meant 'the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal (Boggs, 1977, p. 7). In other words, there is thought to be a close correspondence between the means and ends of social transformation. This matters both in terms of the development of the kinds of social relations, capacities, and practices required for the freer kind of future envisioned, as well as for the development of structures within capitalism that reflect aspects of a more emancipated system beyond it (see Raekstad & Gradin, 2020). While participatory democrats generally do not use the language of pre-figurative politics, their thought emphasizes this pre-figurative dimension of workplace democracy consistently. First, the *struggle* for democratising work is conceived as part of the process of this democratisation in the sense that it affords those dominated to recuperate and exercise their agency, as well as a transformation and exploration of their interests and desires (Bachrach & Botwinick, 1992, p. 32). In other words, they adhere to the core pre-figurative idea that those who are to be emancipated should themselves fully participate in the process of their emancipation (Raekstad & Gradin, 2020, p. 27). Secondly, democracy at work is thought of as valuable because it acts as a site of learning and enacting the kind of democratic culture, social relations, and dispositions that are the ends in themselves to be worked towards (Bachrach & Botwinick, 1992; Gould, 1988; Pateman, 1970). What we gain from casting participatory democratic arguments as pre-figurative in this context is an understanding of workplace democracy as an institution that reflects aspects of a different, more democratic economy which it cannot yet achieved on its own. As a pre-figurative project, platform co-operatives then demonstrate the possibility of a democratic alternative to the current platform economy, while being constrained by the capitalist reality they are trying to overcome. To counter domination, develop workers' agency, and challenge the structural precarity of capitalism, platform co-operatives then need to embed the immediate and immanent change they demonstrate within a wider hegemonic front working towards systemic transformations.

Conclusion

What full economic emancipation would be and what systemic changes would be necessary to achieve it would require a much more sophisticated and lengthy discussion, which will be pursued in the next two chapters. What I have argued throughout this chapter, however, is that 1) workplace democracy is a crucial condition for an emancipated economy, 2) this potential of workplace democracy stands in an increasing tension with the capitalist structure in which it is embedded, which gives rise to forms of domination that are not immediately addressed by democratising the workplace, and that 3) forms of workplace democracy such as platform cooperatives are thus best understood as pre-figurative projects.

Despite its contradictory position in the capitalist economy, forms of workplace democracy such as co-operatives are such a crucial component for democratising the economy more broadly for several reasons. As emphasized in the workplace republican literature, and further explored in the above case of on-demand platform work, democratising the workplace removes key sources of managerial domination while rendering the transformed managerial power of the labour-managed firm more legitimate. However, what participatory democrats such as Gould convincingly show is that democratising work cannot only be instrumental to the reduction of domination. It is rather an intrinsic democratic good, as participation in the management of one's own workplace is constitutive of one's capacity for freedom, affirms participants' equal capacities as agents, and constitutes a condition for workers' 'self-development': the development and expansion of agentic capacities and so the effective exercise of freedom. The case of on-demand platform workers from the IWGB's C&L branch highlights the close relationship between domination and the usurpation of agency, as platforms' increased capacity for arbitrary interference is premised on a particular constraint of couriers' agency, which is subordinated to the interests of the platform and over which couriers have no say. As the exploration of platform co-operatives as a democratic alternative has shown, workplace democracy starts breaking down the antagonism of class interests, removing a key source of domination, expands worker-members' capacity for agency and control over their working lives, and encourages democratic habits and dispositions through a structure of social reciprocity. Regarding the latter, however, it would be necessary to further study the effects that geographical dispersion of platform co-operative members has on the latter's democratic workings – even if platform co-operatives most commonly operate on the scale of a town or city.

This potential of workplace democracy is constrained however by the capitalist structure in which it takes place. This tension, which is by no means a novel phenomenon, is highlighted through the case of on-demand platform work. Platforms such as Uber and Deliveroo rely on the structural precarity of the capitalist labour market for the effective exercise of their algorithmic management, as they gamify market mechanisms for the end of labour control. What the case of the IWGB's couriers demonstrates is the close relationship between intra-and-extra workplace forms of power that workers are subject to, and thus also the relationship that democratized workplaces have with the capitalist economy as a whole. While platform co-operatives would take away the dominating aspect of management and counter precarity at a number of levels, they are constrained by the context of capitalist exchange in which they

operate, and thus have to face contradictions between their co-operative, equal and democratic internal principles, and the capitalist market. Workplace democracy, therefore, as Nicholas Vrousalis has argued elsewhere, implies economic democracy (Vrousalis, 2019).

The contradictions that co-operatives or otherwise democratized workplaces face do not merit their harsh dismissal as merely a more 'human' kind of capitalism. Workplace republicanism and participatory democratic theory help us make sense of the intrinsic values of a democratic workplace. However, for these intrinsic values to find full realization, they need to be carried over to the capitalist economy as a whole. Co-operatives will not change work, democracy or the economy single-handedly. However, as a pre-figurative political project embedded within a broader hegemonic front working towards systemic transformations, they do have an emancipatory potential to break class division, counter domination, expand people's agency over their working lives, and encourage a democratic culture rooted in day-to-day life.

5

The End of Work? Post-Work Imaginaries and Political Freedom

Neither abundance of goods nor the shortening of time spent laboring are likely to result in the establishment of a common world (Arendt, 1958, p. 117).

Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the emancipatory potential of co-operatives as worker owned and controlled workplaces. I argued that despite their role in breaking class division, countering domination, and expanding worker-citizens' agency, they are limited by their operation in a context of capitalist market forces. Thus, their potential should be understood as that of a pre-figurative political project: one in which the democratic social ideals of non-domination and freedom are embodied and performed continuously and immediately in the workplace. Here, however, I will go one step further and look beyond the confines of the workplace and onto that wider economic context in which it operates. If cooperatives' emancipatory potential is hampered by their embeddedness in a capitalist economy, what approaches are there to democratising the economy as a whole that might address this limitation?

In this chapter and the next I will look at two such approaches and explore their respective potential, limitations, and their relationship to one-another. The first approach is that of thinkers who can be grouped together under the 'post-work' genre of political theory. These generally propose to reduce and decommodify work, emphasizing the emancipatory potential of de-linking work from income. The second approach is one taken by thinkers such as Michael Albert, Robin Hahnel, and Pat Devine, who have articulated models of 'democratic economic planning'. Their focus is on how to exert democratic control over the economy through the socialisation of production and private property, as well as how to negotiate the various democratic trappings that are likely to arise through such an endeavour. Though in each chapter I focus on contemporary debates around post-work proposals and democratic economic planning, both approaches have deep historical roots and are intertwined in many important ways, as will become clear.

In what follows I will explore post-work theorists' proposals for addressing structural forms of domination arising from core traits of the capitalist economy. Some of these theorists' most prominent contemporary voices include Kathi Weeks (2011), Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams (2016), Aaron Bastani (2019), and Will Stronge and Kyle Lewis (2021). Their starting point for theorising is an analysis of a 'crisis of work' very similar to that which I make in the first chapter of this thesis: we are in the tail-end of the 'long downturn' in which there is a global downturn in demand for labour, resulting in our current precarious predicament. Even worse, this crisis

is interpreted as more terminal than previous bouts of capitalist stagnation, as the ensuing turn to the service economy as engine for economic growth and job creation is widely argued to be chimerical. Hence, these theorists' proposals coalesce around demands to decouple work and income, and so turn this situation of generalised misery into one that expands people's freedom. These are the demand for a Universal Basic Income (UBI) and for collective working-time reduction (WTR). While none of these authors envisage work to completely disappear anytime soon, which makes the header 'post-work literature' perhaps slightly misleading, what speaks in favour of this terminology is their emphasis on moving 'beyond' work in its current form as a condition for one's livelihood and as the centre of socio-political belonging.

This chapter will then proceed as follows. I will start with a brief interrogation of the IWGB's couriers' expressed desire for 'flexibility without precarity', which will start as a prompt for the ensuing reflections. In section two I will go on to explore post-work theorists' proposals for collective WTR and for a UBI, discussing their purported emancipatory potential. In the last section I will critically examine these proposals for the democratic ideals they harbour and project. I make two main, related arguments. Firstly, post-work theorists' proposals directly speak to two of the core problems with work that I identify in chapter one, namely that the increasingly precarious character of work means that people are not only unfree *at* work but increasingly *outside* work as well, and that this turns work into a troubled site of subjectification. Both proposals for a UBI and for collective WTR are oriented towards relieving people of their relationship of dependency on work to secure the means of their existence. They thus enable citizens not only to meet under conditions of relative equality as they become unburdened of such dependency, but also allows for them to develop ways of life less tethered to the necessity of work. Secondly, I draw on Hannah Arendt's distinction between private and political freedom (1963), and extend her insights on the latter by drawing on Robin Celikates' (2014) and Christian Rostbøll's (2015) arguments around the intrinsic relationship between autonomy, equal freedom, and democratic participation to insist on the emancipatory limitations of post-work proposals. In short, by focusing on freedom *from* work, post-work theorists lose sight of the idea of democratic control over the economy through which citizens have a share in power over the social conditions under which their individual autonomy plays out. How we might envision such democratic control over the economy will then be further fleshed out in the next chapter.

I) Flexibility Without Precarity

If there is anything that has surfaced throughout the preceding chapters, it is that on-demand couriers are in a double bind. This is the expressed desire for flexibility and autonomy at work, which in reality runs up against experiences of precarity and domination. While this may be read as a story of illusion and disillusionment, this would not be entirely right on both accounts. Couriers from the IWGB's Courier & Logistics branch consistently expressed that the capacity for 'flexibility', being self-directing in terms of when to work and how to work, is the job's main attraction. At the same time, they just as consistently emphasized that they 'see through' the way their platform employs this discourse to pursue their own interests, and that it obscures a

relationship of dependence that often lapses into the opposite of the kind of flexibility desired by workers. Ahmed, a courier in his mid-twenties who at the time of interviewing was just elected Vice Chair of the courier's branch, explained that:

> If there is a single position that we as members of the Union believe, is that we're not trying to get rid of the flexibility. It actually is one of the more positive aspects of what these companies have brought to work. Because I don't think anybody really wants to be working in some confining, like, strict Tesco service job or whatever. Maybe the best thing about this is you're out on the streets always and you can obviously... you can reject orders, and there are all the problems with that, but like, you can imagine a world where this would actually be quite... if it was well paid and there were all the regulations in place, and we had enough workers that mobilize to make demands, it could be like a pretty great job. Because, you know, you're out in the open, you're seeing the city always, you're interacting with people, and there is that flexibility as well, which is the main point I'm getting across. That it is positive in a way, but it doesn't have to... it's not an excuse, and that's the way I see it.

In other words, flexibility does not have to amount to an 'excuse': a tool for labour control, a way to keep wages down, or to cut costs. We can imagine a world in which flexibility really does amount to the hope expressed here, which seems to be that of self-directed time without the coercive characteristics of precarity. Another courier, Phil, echoed this argument:

> We work in an industry where we have no set workplace, and a lot of the things that people want to protect are kind of independent values, I think. Because I think lots of things with this job specifically... I love that freedom of just going out anywhere in London, kind of on my own. I like the feeling of it, this free feeling. I like being able to log in and out whenever I like. Those are not... So... how to word this. That's far removed from the traditional employment model of a nine to five factory unionizing. And so yeah, the Union needs to talk in a language that reflects its workers.

Here too there is an urge not to resist platforms' more coercive use of 'flexibility' by reverting back to the 'nine-to-five' employment model of the state-managed capitalism of the post-war period. Rather, as both Phil and Ahmed hesitantly argue, what should be defended or struggled for is a form of flexibility without precarity. Juxtaposed against the monotony and constraint of a 'strict Tesco service job', or the archetypical dullness of the nine-to-five job, 'flexibility' can be interpreted here as a real desire for more autonomy and self-determination inside and outside of work.

This desire and the ensuing critique are not particularly unique to couriers and has a long history. We only need to remind ourselves of what Boltanski and Chiapello famously termed the 'artistic critique' against the Fordist work ethic (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). Apart from a social critique targeted at economic injustice and exploitation, workers in France in the late seventies (the focus of their study) also articulated an 'artistic critique' against the monotony, dulling repetitiveness, and repressive constraint of the organisation of work at the time. According to Boltanski and Chiapello, as well as authors such as Paulo Virno, these frustrated yearnings for more autonomy and self-determination were, however, gradually accommodated

in a distorted way by the neoliberal political economy emergent at that time. 'Flexibility', in this regime, amounted to a labour-market policy aimed at increasing labour supply to deal with sluggish job-growth rates, an attrition of labour protection laws allowing firms to fire and hire workers more easily, and firms shifting towards the use of part-time or short-term contracts that orbit around a slim core of fully employed workers with relative job security (Benanav, 2020, pp. 52-64). In other words, the desire for self-determination within and outside of work that is contained within the demand for more 'flexibility' came to be experienced, perversely, as an increased exposure to job insecurity and precarity.

Here I will take this tension between 'flexibility' as a desire for more self-determination inside and outside of work, and its current expression as an experience of precarity as a starting point to reflect on proposals of post-work theorists addressing this tension, and the relationship of these proposals to what it might mean to democratise the economy.

Post-work theorists generally situate themselves within an analysis of what they take to be a terminal crisis of capitalism that has produced the tension described above, from which they articulate both a radical critique of this order and a vision of social transformation to match. To begin, it will be helpful to draw the contours of this analysis, to then go on examining two core post-work proposals: universal basic income and collective working-time reduction.

In a snapshot, the problem of work according to these theorists is one that has caused anxiety in previous generations of thinkers as well: there are simply too few jobs for too many people.[80] Srnicek and Williams summarise the conundrum as such:

> There is a growing population of people that are situated outside of formal, waged work, making do with minimal welfare benefits, informal subsistence work, or by illegal means. In all cases, the lives of these people are characterised by poverty, precarity and insecurity. Increasingly, there are simply not enough jobs to employ everyone (Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 104).

This diagnosis is, it should be noted, very similar to the one I discuss in chapter one of this thesis. In different ways, it is shared across the board by authors such as Kathi Weeks (2011, Ch. 1), Aaron Bastani (2019, p. 48), Aaron Benanav (2020, Ch. 2) Kyle Lewis and Will Stronge (2021, pp. 29-40), and Stanley Aronowitz (Aronowitz et al., 1998, pp. 31-43). In this literature there are two competing explanations for why this is the case, which for the sake of clarity it is worth briefly revisiting these. The first explanation for this low demand for labour centres around runaway technological innovation leading to technological labour displacement at a pace faster than jobs are created through the shift towards the service economy (Aronowitz et al., 1998, p. 35; Bastani, 2019, Ch. 4; Srnicek & Williams, 2016, pp. 92-105). In other words, according to these theorists, automation will continue to displace, or even eradicate growing swaths of jobs

[80] Most post-work theorists explain this low demand for labour in terms of technological change and growth. As Aaron Benanav points out, anxiety about technological replacements for labour reappears periodically throughout the history of capitalism. As such: 'automation theory may be described as a spontaneous discourse of capitalist societies that, for a mixture of structural and contingent reasons, reappears in those societies time and again as a way of thinking through their limits' (Benanav, 2020, p. 8).

and occupations in a context where there seems to be no replacement in sight to prop up job growth rates. From this terminal diagnosis a vision of the future of work is extrapolated which turns this situation in which 'plenty is sacrificed to keep capitalism going', to one in which capitalism is transfigured into a socialist alternative so that all can enjoy plenty – generally by decommodifying work and expanding leisure time for all. A competing explanation, offered by Aaron Benanav and more fully explored in chapter one, explains the low demand in labour as due to a long downturn in manufacturing output growth rates. For all these thinkers, however, the current conjunction offers a crucial opportunity to struggle for a society beyond scarcity, one in which the means of one's existence are not at stake in any of one's relationships and in which time for freely chosen activities is abundant for all. Here we will briefly examine two of their main proposals to do so, namely collective working-time reduction (WTR) and universal basic income (UBI).

II) Post-Work Proposals: Universal Basic Income and Collective Working-Time Reduction

Worlds of leisure free from the yoke of necessity have been envisioned at least since the ancient Greeks, for whom this ideal was only realizable through a form of slavery or indentured labour. Ideals of collective working-time reduction (WTR) and universal basic income (UBI) continue this line of thought, with the important difference that they envision a world where necessary labour is democratically shared and coordinated, and leisure would be available to all. In which, as W.E.B. du Bois contended, writing in the context of Jim Crow in the US, the reliance on coercing some to engage in 'menial service' so that others might make art would be abolished so that 'all be artists and all serve' (Du Bois, 2016, p. 69). These ideals have further occupied a central place in the long socialist and anarchist traditions of thought and political struggle (see Sloman et al., 2021, pp. 1-16) It is impossible to discuss this incredibly rich history of political and social thought here in a complete fashion, or to exhaustively review contemporary debates on how to practically implement these in existing societies. Suffice it to say, for now, that these are not only abstract points of speculation but are ongoing and concrete political experiments, and that their development and feasibility depends on the particular political, economic and social conditions of particular societies. Nonetheless, in what follows I will look at the way in which these proposals are envisioned within the post-work literature, focussing particularly on how to understand their democratic importance.

Let us then first turn to collective working time reduction. The struggle over working time has been at least as old as capitalism itself, for the simple reason that in capitalism, time is a measure of production and profit from the perspective of the employer, while from a broader perspective it is a foundation for human freedom.[81] Without time available to use as we will, we simply

[81] An acerbic explanation and indictment of this tension can be found in Marx's Capital (Ch. 10.5): '[…] the worker [from the perspective of capital] is nothing other than labour-power for the duration of his whole life, and that therefore all his disposable time is by nature and by right labour-time, to be devoted to the self-valorization of capital. Time for education, for intellectual development, for the fulfilment of social functions, for social

cannot do the things we want out of our own volition, form relationships we might desire, or tend to those we care about. Collective working-time reduction, then, is the simple idea to reduce the hours in a working day or week in a collective fashion (i.e., nationally, regionally or per sector), without a reduction in wages. This last part is important, as one might immediately retort that the increasing prevalence of part-time work already amounts to a reduction in working hours. To risk stating the obvious, current flexibilization of work rearranges work-schedules on an individual rather than collective level, is often involuntarily engaged in, reinforces gendered divisions of labour, and does so at the expense of the worker's income (de Spiegelaere & Piasna, 2017, p. 51). Collective WTR, by contrast, decreases the agreed-upon number of hours of the full-time working day or week to, say, 6 hours a day, or 30 hours a week, without reduction in pay.[82] In light of the diagnosis of the current crisis of work explored above, reducing collective working-time is first of all a pragmatic response to the conundrum of a low demand for labour, one that also has historical precedent as a policy aimed at tackling precisely this problem.[83] As mentioned, in the face of manufacturing overcapacity and a global slump in labour demand, the options available seem to be Keynesian-style interventions to stimulate labour demand, or shrink the labour supply: i.e., increase the work and spread it among workers, or share the work through shorter hours (Aronowitz et al., 1998, p. 62; Benanav, 2020, p. 69; Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 118). While Benanav is one of the few theorists in this genre to seriously discuss the first option, and explain why it is not feasible, for most post-work theorists this is simply dismissed, as they assume that developments in automation effectively rule out such a solution. Above all, however, shrinking labour supply through collective WTR is argued to have a multitude of benefits, and is intimately connected to a vision of progressive emancipation *from* work.

The most obvious reasons for a shorter working week are connected to what can generally be understood as 'human flourishing'. While numerous studies show the (hardly surprising) connection between shorter working hours and improved mental health and overall worker wellbeing (de Spiegelaere & Piasna, 2017, p. 51), post-work theorists gesture towards a broader philosophical point that the opening up of free time allows for a fuller development of individual freedom and provides the ground for forms of desire to flourish that are not tethered to the necessity of work (Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 115; Stronge & Lewis, 2021, p. 35; Weeks, 2011). Indeed, as Benanav argues, a post-scarcity society with a relative abundance of free time and the absence of the threat of destitution would allow all its citizens to ask: 'What am I going to do with the time I am alive?' rather than 'How am I going to keep on living?', and be able to

---

intercourse, for the free play of the vital forces of his body and his mind, even the rest time of Sunday (and that in a country of Sabbatarians!) what foolishness!'

[82] Most post-work theorists discuss WTR in terms of a shorter working week. However, as de Wispelaere and Piasna helpfully enumerate, there are different temporal scales on which WTR can be envisioned, ranging from a shorter day, week, or month, to a shorter year (e.g., additional leave) or a shorter working life (e.g. earlier pension, covered sabbaticals and career breaks, increased parental leave, etc.) (2017, p. 49).

[83] Most well-known is the example of the Roosevelt administration's brief implementation of the 35-hour working week during the Great Depression of the 1930's in an attempt to mitigate mass unemployment (Stronge & Lewis, 2021, pp. 84-85). However, as both Stronge and Lewis, as well as Aronowitz et al. note is that a particular ideology of work prevented the Roosevelt administration from seeing this measure as anything but a stopgap policy that should be, and indeed was, abandoned as soon as productivity picked up again. The anxiety was that an increase in leisure would undermine work's status as the centre of life, and that people suffered mentally and morally from a lack of work (ibid; Aronowitz et al., 1998, p. 63).

act more freely on this existential conundrum (Benanav, 2020, p. 89).[84] As such, collective WTR would serve the Gouldian principle that all have equal rights to the conditions of self-development, elaborated in more detail in the previous chapter (Gould, 1988, p. 61). However, as will be discussed below, while certainly serving as a necessary condition for this democratic principle of equal agency to be effective, it is not sufficient.

Furthermore, as Kathi Weeks argues, collective WTR has the potential to challenge gendered inequalities and hierarchies in the distribution of reproductive labour, insofar as it effectively reduces working time *for all*. She argues that in the context of current gendered norms around reproductive work, 'shorter hours of waged work may lead to a reduction in total working hours for men, but not always for women' (Weeks, 2011, p. 162). To reduce working time for all, it is necessary to look at the full working day, including reproductive labour, and interrogate the relationship between the reduction of waged work and the distribution of unwaged reproductive labour (ibid). Importantly, this also means interrogating existing social norms and inherited desires and dispositions that inevitably inform and shape what people's freed-up time should be used for. As Weeks argues, there is a tendency toward a moral prescriptiveness in common cases for WTR that is prone to reinforcing gendered inequalities and hierarchies (ibid, p. 159; see also Stronge & Lewis, 2021, pp. 50-64). For example, one of the most enduring cases for WTR centres around the importance of family life, a line of argument that moralizes non-waged work in a gendered manner to argue for a reduction of waged work.[85] Thus, the political process of organizing and struggling for WTR needs to be articulated in a way that challenges and transforms certain existing needs, desires and expectations around work; particularly those, Weeks argues, that are maintained through recourse to a heteronormative family ideal centred on a traditional gender division of labour (Weeks, 2011, p. 64). WTR, as well as demands for a UBI, are then *provocations* to freedom and of desire for Weeks as much as they are policy proposals – they are opportunities not just to 'advance pre-existing demands', but also to create 'new subjectivities with new capacities and desires, and, eventually, new demands' (ibid, p. 169). Weeks calls this a 'transfigurative' politics, in which pre-existing desires should be engaged with and transformed in order to advance the equal freedom of all. This kind of politics is very much in line with Mouffe's anti-essentialist conception of politics and hegemony explored in chapter four, in which it is necessary for pre-given interests and identities to be partially transformed in order to be articulated around the principle of democratic equivalence (Mouffe, p. 1993, p. 86).[86] For both Mouffe and Weeks, it is then of paramount importance that the process of articulating a demand for WTR challenges inherited desires and identities that would entrench

[84] This of course does not 'solve' this existential conundrum, which would be impossible to do a-priori. As Keynes famously put the problem: 'Thus for the first time since his creation man will be faced with his real, his permanent problem-how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure, which science and compound interest will have won for him, to live wisely and agreeably and well' (Keynes, 1930).

[85] Other popular arguments for WTR revolve around more a more conventional set of ideas about how a shorter working week boosts productivity, efficiency, and worker satisfaction (i.e., workers become 'fitter, happier, more productive') (Barnes, 2020; Spencer, 2022, p. 3). This 'business case' for WTR eschews any more radical ideas about social transformation, speaking to Weeks' point.

[86] See in particular Mouffe's chapter 'Feminism, Citizenship and Radical Democratic Politics' in *The Return of the Political* (1993), in which she articulates an anti-essentialist, radical democratic conception of feminism that overlaps in many ways with Weeks' feminism.

an existing gendered division of labour in the freed-up time, or surreptitiously fix people in their gendered roles.

Another argument for WTR relevant in the above respect is the role the reduction of working time can play in a transition to a more sustainable economy (Stronge & Lewis, 2021, p. 69). Working less would not only reduce the amount of resources used as part of the labour process but would also reduce the amount of carbon-intensive consumption that comes with the work-and-spend cycle (Hayden, 1999; Schor et al., 2013).[87] While this relation between the reduction of working time, democracy and the environment deserves a fuller discussion than can be given here to be fleshed out, it is important to note that no 'post-work' vision can do without taking into account the ecological conditions of production. Indeed, most post-work theorists highlight the ways in which their proposals for WTR and UBI fit within a 'degrowth' or 'post-growth' political ecology that respects the ecological limits of production. As global warming and ecological destruction form existential challenges of such a magnitude, these concerns must become foundational to the articulation of collective WTR and democracy at work (Cukier, 2022, p. 191).

While WTR would then expand workers' self-directed time, open up a space for a fairer redistribution of reproductive work, and reduce carbon emissions, it does not necessarily address the immediate concerns of workers in the gig-economy such as Ahmed and Phil, or those in precarious working situations. For couriers in the gig-economy, who are generally classified as self-employed as discussed earlier, WTR will do little good without new legislation that recognises them as workers, as currently there would not be any set 'working time' to reduce in the first place. Furthermore, as David Spencer notes, for precarious or underemployed workers WTR might be unattractive or even seen as threatening (Spencer, 2022, p. 5). For these workers, often in jobs that pay by the hour, and often working multiple jobs to make ends meet, reducing working time is likely not to be seen as in their direct interest as in the short term it might compound their precarity rather than alleviate it. This does not warrant a complete dismissal of the democratic potential of WTR but should alert us to some of the limits of the demand.

The second proposal made by most post-work theorists is aimed to work in tandem with WTR to overcome the latter's limits and the coercive aspects of 'flexible' working more generally (Aronowitz et al., 1998, p. 66; Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 118; Weeks, 2011.[88] This is the proposal for a form of Universal Basic Income (UBI). UBI is generally conceived of as an unconditional, non-withdrawable income distributed to individual citizens (not households), which would be sufficient for citizens to meet basic needs.[89] While the idea has a long history, it has regained popularity in the current economic context of a low demand for labour and

[87] In a study assessing the environmental impacts of working time in 27 OECD countries, Juliet Schor and colleagues estimate that reducing working time by 25% could lead to a carbon footprint reduction of up to 30% (Schor et al., 2013).

[88] Aaron Bastani is an exception to this rule, as he prefers what he calls 'Universal Basic Services' to the provision of a UBI (2019, p. 226).

[89] See Philippe van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght's *Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy* (2017) for one of the most influential, full treatments from the centre-left.

expectations of labour-displacing technologies – an interest that only increased since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. For post-work theorists, then, 'UBI is the technical solution that transforms the nightmare scenario of automation into the dream of post-scarcity' (Benanav, 2020, p. 72). To be sure, it is seen by most of these thinkers not only as a technical solution but as a political project that is subject to competing hegemonic forces. While the idea garners support from different political corners and for a vast array of reasons, for our purposes I shall focus on those emphasized by post-work theorists.

First and foremost: 'UBI unbinds the coercive aspects of wage labour, partially decommodifies labour, and thus transforms the political relationship between labour and capital' (Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 120). A UBI would alleviate the coercion to work for a wage as it decouples the provision of life's basic necessities from their dependence on waged labour (Aronowitz et al., 1998, p. 65). Against the moral panic of a citizenry full of slackers, most post-work theorists argue that the provision of a UBI would not do away with all incentive to work, but will rather render engagement in work more voluntary, and will provoke a re-evaluation of what is recognised as valuable work (ibid, p. 68; Srnicek & Williams, 2016, pp. 120-122). To take couriers in the gig-economy as an example, UBI would alleviate the pressure of precarity or the need to earn extra that are for most couriers the material reasons to engage in their work. It would dramatically reduce the pool of underemployed labour that gig-economy platforms draw on. However, as Carole Pateman points out, the only condition that is often attached to a UBI is some form of citizenship status (Pateman, 2004, p. 102). As we saw in earlier chapters, a sizeable portion of the labour force in the gig-economy in the UK are migrants, for whom platform work often represents a provisional step up from other labour-market options available to them. While this citizenship criterion is mostly interpreted quite generously by post-work theorists, the case of on-demand couriers highlights the necessity of articulating the demand for UBI in a way that does not create a two-tiered labour-market that plays into nationalist or nativist ideals: one of decommodified labour for citizens, and one of precarious, exploitable migrant labour.

Secondly, a UBI speaks directly to couriers' desire for flexibility without precarity. As Srnicek and Williams put it: UBI 'transforms precarity and unemployment from a state of insecurity to a state of voluntary flexibility' (Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 121). This does not mean that every available job will allow everyone to have a very flexible schedule, but rather that having the security of a basic income to fall back on will enable people to more freely make crucial choices about their work: how much to work, when to pursue a different career-path, when to take time to tend to the demands of caring for family, friends, or kin more broadly understood. Without work (as employment) and the family as the main principles governing the allocation of income, a freedom would be opened up for people to organize their lives and fashion themselves in ways removed from the coercive aspect of work. As Kathi Weeks eloquently puts it: 'Basic income can be demanded as a way to gain some measure of distance and separation from the wage relation, and that distance might in turn create the possibility of a life no longer so thoroughly and relentlessly dependent upon work for its qualities' (Weeks, 2011, p. 145). Furthermore, Weeks also stresses the feminist potential of a UBI. If it is paid out to individuals rather than families, UBI has the potential to reduce not only dependency on the wage, but also women's

dependence on any family, spousal, or household relationship (ibid, p. 144). This level of financial independence would also provide a material basis for the pursuit of different forms of family, community structures, and intimate relationships that are less bound by the conventions of the nuclear family (ibid, p. 145, 168; see also Mckay & Vanevery, 2000). Together with WTR, UBI would enable us to not just so we can 'have, do, or be what we already want, do, or are, but because it might allow us to consider and experiment with different kinds of lives, with wanting, doing, and being otherwise (Weeks, 2011, p. 145).

UBI, just like WTR, then seems to serve at least one of the same ends of the social ideal of democracy, namely an equal right to the conditions of self-development. Together, they would provide both the material security and time for citizens to create their lives in ways less tethered to the coercion of work. However, as we have just explored, for collective WTR and UBI to take on a form that would promote the freedom of all rather than some, the norms, desires and dispositions that underlie the reasoning for these proposals cannot be left uninterrogated. Kathi Weeks' notion of a *transfigurative* politics is helpful in capturing this dimension of subjective transformation that is crucial for ensuring that the freedoms won through WTR or UBI become available to all. For Weeks, as we saw, the political process of demanding shapes the form post-work proposals take on, but most importantly also shapes those participating in the demanding (ibid, p. 169). Such a politics of demanding is transfigurative in a sense similar to Mouffe's politics of hegemony previously explored: it does not only advance pre-existing desires or interests but conceives politics as engaging with these subjective dimensions and transforming them for the sake of advancing the equal freedom of all. This is particularly important for challenging the sexual division of labour, as we saw, as well as for challenging pre-conceived notions about what kinds of work is valuable or not. As a UBI would undo much of the structural coercion that pushes people into jobs with poor working conditions, low pay, and little power, it would provide a crucial opportunity for the revaluation of different forms of work, both in terms of social recognition as well as in terms of working conditions and pay.

As such, post-work proposals for a UBI and WTR are redistributive measures that would decommodify work. Their achievement would shift work from a site of necessity and precarity to an activity that is engaged in more voluntarily. This not only implies a minimization of work's more structurally coercive aspects, but also opens up the possibility for a revaluation of activities that are currently devalued under capitalism, as well as for the invention of new forms of living less tied to the necessity of work. In other words, by providing material security and opening up time beyond work, post-work proposals would enable a shift in the way people relate to and constitute themselves through work; work could possibly become a more expressive site of subjectification rather than one tied to necessity and coercion. Lastly, as we shall see below, post-work authors emphasize that their proposals would grant citizens the material conditions to be politically active to the extent that they desire. This is however where the shoe starts to pinch. As I will argue in the coming section, post-work thinkers here seem to conflate what I distinguish with Hannah Arendt and other thinkers as 'political' (or public) freedom and 'private' freedom, and from there assume that an extension of private freedom will translate into their preferred form of political action.

III) Post-Work Proposals and Political Freedom in the Economy

UBI, just like WTR, seems to serve at least one of the same ends of the social ideal of democracy, namely an equal right to the conditions of self-development. Together, they would provide both the material security and time for citizens to create their lives in ways less tethered to the coercion of work. However, post-work authors go further and argue that UBI and WTR would provide both the security and time for citizens to participate in democratic decision-making and politics (Aronowitz, 1998, p. 76; Frayne, 2015, p. 36; Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 121; Weeks, 2011, p. 174). Carole Pateman makes a similar argument regarding the democratic value of a UBI, explaining that it would enable 'all citizens to participate as fully as they wish in all aspects of the life of their society', as well as being a democratic right necessary for 'individual freedom as self-governance' (Pateman, 2004, p. 95). While it is undoubtedly right that UBI and WTR would expand freedom in the sense that Pateman alludes to, it is more doubtful that this lack of impediments would translate into the political action these authors envisage. Why would citizens suddenly spring into political action like wound coils? And what would they participate *in*? I.e., what public institutions or political organisations would be created or available, and for what purposes? The difference in the democratic objects of post-work proposals and the models of democratic economic planning, as well as an answer to this vexation can be further fleshed out by making a distinction with and against Hannah Arendt between 'political' (or public) and 'private' freedom.

For Arendt political freedom is a form of freedom that coincides with acting and speaking in a public realm, to be a 'participator in the government of affairs' (Arendt, 1963, p. 124). What makes this form of freedom specifically political is first of all its 'worldly' quality.[90] As opposed to an idea of freedom as an 'inner realm into which men might escape at will from the pressures of the world' or a '*liberum arbitrium* which makes the will choose between alternatives', political freedom depends on a public realm in which people speak and act – deliberate and participate in the governance of common affairs (Arendt, 2000, p. 442). Secondly, the specificity of political freedom for Arendt has to do with the connection that public association and acting in common has to do with power: the nourishing and maintenance of a collective power to *do things* (Arendt, 1958, p. 198-200). This is contrasted to forms of what she calls 'private freedom', under which she collects conceptions of freedom as an 'inner realm' that is experienced independently from one's association with others, or freedom as the pursuit of private happiness (Arendt, 1963, p. 124).[91]

[90] See Janover (2011) for an excellent interpretation of Arendt's multifaceted conception of 'worldliness'.

[91] Arendt's interest in the council movement stemmed from the Hungarian Revolution and the potential she saw for workers' councils being institutionalized spaces for citizen participation, deliberation and action (Arendt, 1963, p. 256). As James Muldoon notes, however, her interpretation of councils through her understanding of 'the political' and 'the social' led her to downplay their concern for democratizing the economy (Muldoon, 2018, p. 14). See Jeffrey Isaac's *Oases in the Desert* (1994) for a lucid exposition of Arendt's take on the council movement that nonetheless partakes in this downplaying, and Benjamin Popp-Madsen's more recent work on council democracy and Arendt (2021, Ch. 5).

Such an emphasis on political, or public freedom as an indispensable good for associational life is not special only to Arendt but has a long history in Western political thought (Villa, 2008).[92] However, the idea does not necessarily have to be cashed out in Arendtian terms, with its theoretical baggage of a division between 'the political' and 'the social', and her categories of labour, work, and action. A range of authors have articulated a democratic conception of freedom that recognizes both the importance of individual autonomy as well as the intrinsic relationship between participation in collective self-rule and freedom (Celikates, 2014; Gould, 1988, Ch. 1; Røstboll, 2008, 2015). As we saw in the previous chapter, Carol Gould is one of these authors. Because human beings are characterized by their capacity for agency, and are in this sense equal agents, Gould's argument is that they have not only a *prima facie* right to the equal conditions for the exercise of this agency, but also have an equal right to participate in decision-making processes concerning common activities in which they take part (ibid, p. 84). In other words, where activity is social, it is not enough on this account to have the material conditions to do what one likes on an individual level: one should also have an equal opportunity to participate in collective self-rule.

Both Robin Celikates and Christian Rostbøll further draw out this relationship between autonomy, equal freedom, and democratic participation. Rostbøll starts from a more procedural conception of autonomy than Gould, characterising it as a relational notion of 'not having another as one's master' (Rostbøll, 2015, p. 270). For a plurality of persons to relate to each other in a way where no one is in a position to dominate others and in which they can interact as autonomous beings requires not only a public order that keeps them from being able to dominate one-another (which is what a UBI or WTR would contribute to): it also requires these persons to participate in shaping the public order itself (ibid, p. 272). As both Rostbøll and Celikates point out, the danger is otherwise that of paternalism and oligarchy, where the few rule the many who can at best contest the decisions made or have their interests taken into account (Celikates, 2014, p. 51; Rostbøll, 2015, p. 273). While individual liberties might be respected in such a scenario, this would nonetheless be one where persons do not relate to each other as equals and in which they suffer a form of political unfreedom. In other words, for a plurality people to relate to one-another as equal agents, which is just another way to describe democracy, they need to be able to jointly act and decide by and for themselves, rather than being acted on behalf of and decided for by others. This requires what we distinguished with Arendt as political freedom: the capacity to participate in decision-making for common ends. However, for Rostbøll and Celikates' conception of freedom involving democratic self-rule, nothing hinges on where to draw the line between political and private freedom.[93] What matters for them is that the absence of democratic participation in collective self-rule means falling short of relating to each-other as equal agents as it enables some to rule while ascribing others a role of passivity. It is in this sense that I will continue to use the term political freedom: as a form of freedom that concerns our relationship to one-another as equal agents, and which requires democratic forms of participation to exist and be safeguarded.

[92] Most famous is Benjamin Constant's contrasting of political and private freedom as being the liberty of the 'Ancients' and that of 'Moderns' respectively (Constant, 2016 [1818]).
[93] To be sure, Bonnie Honig also convincingly argues against an interpretation of Arendt's distinctions between the political and social, as well as between work, labour and action, as being rigid, ideal categories (Honig, 2014).

This conception of political freedom can then help us make sense of the way post-work theorists envisage freed-up time and economic security to result in political participation and a flourishing of voluntary organisations. For most post-work theorists, this result is simply stated without being further interrogated. It would flow, Pfannebecker and Smith point out, from desires that post-work authors assume are either pre-existing, or need to be cultivated (2020, p. 124).[94] This is a tendency, it must be noted, that also exists among right-wing proponents of a UBI, such as Charles Murray (2016). With the difference being, Aaron Benanav quips, that 'the right envisions proliferating churches and rotary clubs, whereas the left envisions a strengthening of worker or consumer cooperatives and trade unions, as well as collective care organizations and community gardens' (Benanav, 2020, p. 76). One way to then interpret these projections is that these author's cases for WTR and UBI, while being themselves political, first of all extend the realm of private freedom, while being only tenuously connected to political freedom in sense just explored. They are redistributive proposals focused on an emancipation *from* work, in contrast to the emancipation *of* work that we explored in the previous chapter on workplace democracy. In further contrast to the ideal of workplace democracy, as well as the models of democratic economic planning explored in the coming chapter, WTR and UBI do not by themselves necessarily imply either the opening up and institutionalization of a public space, or an extension of democratic control (and thus popular political power) over production. To refer back to the quote by Arendt that opened this chapter, neither an abundance of goods produced by an automated economy, a basic income that allows a measure of dignity for all, nor a shortening of working time would necessarily result in the establishment of a common world, and as such, political freedom.

Discarding post-work proposals for UBI and WTR as 'mere' extensions of private freedom would however be a failure to appreciate their emancipatory, democratic potential. Taken together, these proposals not only form pragmatic responses to structural economic issues, but they also have the potential to be articulated in a way that serves the democratic end of an equal right to the conditions of self-development. Firstly, post-work theorists' proposals for a UBI and/or collective WTR provide both the economic security and the time for citizens to meet under conditions of relative equality, unburdened by relationships of dependency. Secondly, both these proposals have the potential to open up the free time and resources enabling people to develop in ways less tethered by the necessity of making a living, and as such could challenge the valuation of various forms of work. In particular, as discussed in section two, both UBI and WTR have the potential to challenge gendered inequalities and hierarchies in the distribution of care work. As such, the equal access to material, temporal and psychological resources that these proposals contribute to would challenge what Marxists have called the social division of labour: the attribution of particular kinds of work to particular groups of people who possess differential social power based on the work they do, which often if not always involves

[94] Aaron Bastani's *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* (FALC) being an exception, as it tries to avoid the moralization of free time by invoking a post-scarcity future full of whatever pleasures people can dream of. However, Pfannebekker and Smith point out that in doing so, he simply avoids critically interrogating the present desires that FALC is supposed to fulfil (2020, p. 121).

relationships of domination and subordination (gendered, racialized, ableist, etc.).[95] In other words, as a UBI and WTR would enable workers both to reject unattractive work and to develop in ways less tethered to the necessity of work, this could spur a revaluation of work that is currently low in social status, as well as disentangle the historically accrued association of certain tasks as belonging to certain groups of people – women and care work, for example (see Elgarte, 2008). However, as previously argued, there are no guarantees that demands for UBI or WTR take on a form that will enable them to be conditions for equality, or that they will challenge the social division of labour. This is contingent on the extent to which demands for UBI and WTR come to be articulated around the encompassing and open-ended goals of equal freedom and autonomy, and the hegemonic struggle for these goals.

As we saw however, the conception of political freedom as one that includes democratic forms of participation enables us to insist on the limits of these post-work visions. While WTR and UBI would further individual freedom as self-governance, they do not enable citizens to participate in shaping their social and economic conditions. In other words, post-work theorists focus on an emancipation *from* work while abandoning questions around the emancipation *of* work and democratic control over the economy. However, my contention here is not that the 'private' freedoms that post-work proposals aim to secure are in some way antithetical to, incompatible with, or subordinate to the kind of political freedom explored above. It is rather that the freedoms that a UBI or WTR would secure would not have the same meaning and value without the political freedom to participate in decision-making in the workplace and in shaping the wider economy. These measures largely leave untouched those areas of economic life which are still currently out of democratic reach, such as the workplace, private ownership, and investment decisions, which are dominated by private interests (Buller & Lawrence, 2022, p. 66). Thus, even as post-work proposals secure an extensive measure of personal autonomy, they play out within a social environment constituted by private interests over which worker-citizens have little to no say. As such, while reducing collective working time and introducing a basic income form effective proposals for transforming structural, coercive elements of the capitalist economy, they are not sufficient without the political freedom to participate in shaping that same economy so that it may serve social interests.

Conclusion

Even if one doubts post-work theorist's narrative of technological progress, their proposals for an emancipation from work are alluring for their vision of how to turn the dire state of current affairs into one of abundance and leisure for all. Firstly, they persuasively argue against a pernicious productivist ethic for the constraints it puts on human flourishing, the inequalities it reproduces and the havoc it wreaks on the environment and ecosystems. Secondly, post-work proposals for reducing collective working time and introducing a universal basic income would

[95] I am building here on Pat Devine's interpretation of what it means to abolish the social division of labour, which will be expanded on in the next chapter (Devine, 1988, Ch. 7). However, to be clearly understood here, Devine makes a distinction between the functional division of labour, referring to the different kinds of work that need to be carried out in a society, with their different tasks, from the social division of labour, which is the historically-developed attribution of certain kinds of work to particular groups of people and the establishment of hierarchies of social power based on this (Devine, p. 163).

not only encourage experimentation with different kinds of lives, increasingly untethered from the necessity to make a living, they would enable citizens to meet under conditions of relative equality, unburdened by relationships of dependency. Thirdly, as income and work become increasingly decoupled through both proposals, they have the potential to spur a re-valorisation of both non-work and work activities, and to challenge and transform the social division of labour in the direction of equality. Lastly, both proposals speak to the desire expressed by the IWGB's couriers for 'flexibility without precarity': to have more autonomy over one's time inside and outside of work. In the context of on-demand platform work it is particularly the demand for a UBI that would transform the state of insecurity many couriers find themselves in to one of voluntary flexibility (Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 123).

However, in focussing on the potentialities of decommodifying work and redistributing resources, post-work authors miss an element that is crucial for democratizing work and the economy. That is, the ability of ordinary citizens to participate in decision-making processes at their place of work and regarding the economic environment they are part of. UBI and WTR can serve as material conditions for democratic social relations and expand individuals' capacity for autonomy, but they do not by themselves enable further democratic control over the economy. Or, to put it in a slightly different language, they expand the capacity for private freedom in the economy, but not necessarily for political freedom. As Aaron Benanav and others point out, it is this latter aim of enabling citizens to have a voice in, and exert political power over, the workplace and economy that tends to be relatively neglected in the post-work literature, thereby overlooking a long lineage of thinkers who envisioned organizing economic power along more egalitarian lines through the abolition and socialization of private property (Benanav, 2020, p. 82; see also Buller & Lawrence, 2022, p. 67). In this lineage of thought it is the socialization of production that would ideally enable a form of popular, democratic control over the firm and over economic investment. Clearly, this raises a whole host of questions. What does socialization entail? How would democratic power over economic decisions be institutionalized and exercised? What about the market? How do we reconcile worker-managed firms with the wider interests of society as a whole? It is to these questions that we shall turn in the coming chapter.

6

Democratizing Interdependence

[…] the way forward is not to depersonalize interdependence by elevating the role of impersonal market forces but to personalize it through negotiated coordination and the democratization of politics (Devine, 1988, p. 258).

Introduction

What would a democratic economy look like? This might seem like an overly ambitious and top-heavy question to be answered in the length of a chapter, and slightly beside the point as well. Was the object of our inquiry not to look at democratic theory for ideas on how to democratize work in the context of advanced capitalist economies? It still is. However, as we saw in chapter four, democratizing work at the level of the firm has its limitations, namely: relationships of domination arising from the market are left untouched, and social interests other than that of the firm and its workers, though affected by their decisions, are excluded from decision-making processes. In the previous chapter we then turned to post-work proposals for a universal basic income and collective working time reduction as ways of addressing at least the relationships of dependency and domination arising through the market. However, here too we stumbled on a key limitation. That is, while these proposals should be understood as conditions for democratic social relations between citizens, they do not enable them to participate in shaping the socio-economic environment in which their lives play out. In other words, post-work proposals do not sufficiently challenge the private authority over production, while proposals for workplace democracy replace this private authority with that of workers whose interests are then privileged over other constituencies affected by their decisions. To democratize work we must then look at proposals for embedding democratically controlled workplaces within a structure of economic and political democracy. This is exactly what models of democratic economic planning aim to do.

The words 'economic planning' might conjure in the reader a frightful image of the Soviet Union's command economy and Stalinist five-year plans. However, discussions around democratic economic planning are embedded within a debate about the possibility of organizing a socialist, democratic economy which takes exactly the political and economic failure of planned economies as their starting point. Where the start of the twentieth century in Europe was marked by the well-known 'socialist calculation debate' – an exchange between economists from the Austrian school, including Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, and Oskar Lange, about the possibility of rational economic calculation within a socialist economic system – since the crumbling of the Soviet Union debates about alternatives to both statist planning and market capitalism have resurfaced.[96] On the one hand, many socialists turned to a form of

[96] See Lavoie's *Rivalry and Central Planning* (1985) for a comprehensive survey of the debate. See also Fikret Adaman & Pat Devine's take on the debate and its salient implications (1996). A more recent discussion is given by Daniel Saros in his *Information Technology and Socialist Construction* (2014, Ch. 3).

market socialism as a viable alternative (Brus, 1991; Schweickart, 2011). On the other hand, a growing number of thinkers have articulated models of democratic planning which are distinct from capitalism, market socialism, and command planning. The three most prominent of these models are Devine and Adaman's negotiated coordination (Devine, 1988; 2017; Devine & Adaman, 2022), Albert and Hahnel's participatory economics (Albert & Hahnel, 1991; Hahnel, 2012; 2021) and Cockshott and Cottrell's computerized central planning (Cockshott & Cottrell, 1993).

A review of all these models would not be possible within the space of this chapter.[97] I shall therefore restrict my discussion mainly to Pat Devine's model of negotiated coordination (which he later expanded on in collaboration with Fikret Adaman), offering points of comparison to other models where this is relevant. Devine's conception of democratic economic planning is particularly relevant for our purposes for several reasons. Firstly, the ontological commitments underpinning Devine's model are closest to those threaded through this thesis. Of particular relevance is his dynamic, relational conception of agents, and the related conception of their interests as socially constituted and transformable rather than given. Secondly, of the three models, Devine's is the most wary of succumbing to technological or computational solutions for the economic problems associated with economic planning. While not opposed to technological innovations where appropriate, he makes the reasoned assumption that the social interests which inform the overall priorities and direction of the economy cannot simply be 'discovered' and absorbed into sets of equations or algorithms, but should be constituted through a process of political deliberation. Lastly, Devine's commitment to, and proposals for transforming private interests into public ones at multiple levels in the economy is particularly sophisticated and illuminating. As I will argue below, the manner in which he envisages social interests beyond those of workers to be incorporated at the level of the firm while preserving the latter's autonomy is convincing and forms a particularly salient starting point for further dialogue with contemporary democratic theories.

As such, in what follows I will explore Devine's model as a particularly salient way of relating democratic enterprises to wider social interests, and as an alternative to post-work proposals for democratizing the economy. To this end I focus particularly on the way his model is sensitive to a host of democratic dilemmas or tensions. The first dilemma is that of socialization. That is, how can the means of production be employed in the interests of society without falling into the democratically unpalatable traps of *statism* on the one hand (exclusive state ownership and control over production), or *syndicalism* on the other hand (workers own and democratically control their workplace but the latter's goals are divorced from broader social interests)? The second, related dilemma is how to find an appropriate balance between centralized and decentralized forms of decision-making. I then explore the contributions Devine's model can make within democratic theory, arguing that his conceptions of social ownership and negotiated coordination as a deliberative process are particularly fruitful places to start thinking about, and working towards, a truly democratic economy. Lastly, I offer a reflection on the relationship between the post-work goals of achieving greater freedom *from* work, and that of democratizing

[97] For a succinct comparison of these models, their differences and convergences, see Tremblay-Pepin (2022).

work through socializing the economy. To be short, a democratically planned economy could, and should, incorporate post-work demands, which would strengthen citizens' individual autonomy and the position of equality from which they meet and decide. Drawing on the previous chapter's characterisation of political freedom, I show how the character and quality of political freedom *in* work and freedom *from* work are highly interdependent and mutually reinforcing. However, I argue that, these advancements notwithstanding, a democratic economy does not in the first instance depend on the premise of abundance and the latter's redistribution, but rather on the progressive socialization of private property and the reorganization of power in key economic institutions along egalitarian lines.

I) Social Ownership and Socialization as Democratic Dilemma

There are two preliminary questions that need addressing before delving into Devine's model. The first concerns the question of whether exploring a model of democratic economic planning is not simply another form of wishful thinking at best, and a dangerous form of utopianism at worst. Getting a better grip on what the conceptual status is of Devine's model will help assuage these fears as well as illuminate what the point of its exploration is. Firstly, we are dealing with a *model* for democratic economic planning, not a *blueprint*. That is, Devine's model is a rational reconstruction of an economy based on democratic principles of equality and (political) freedom rather than a description of an actual economy. I therefore understand it as serving as a guide for thinking through reorganizing the economy around democratic lines, not a manual for social transformation to be implemented. The 'vision' explored below should thus not be conflated with the political process of struggling *for* such a vision, and neither should the articulation of a consistent model be confused with a top-down political strategy of model-implementation that leaves no room for autonomous struggle. As I will further discuss below, socialization is conceived with Devine as a process that can be furthered or thwarted through a multitude of autonomous struggles. Secondly, while Devine's model is clearly utopian, it is a utopianism that is grounded in objective social conditions rather than in idealist speculation (Devine, 1988, p.137). The exploration of his model below should thus be taken as a grounded, rational reconstruction that enables us to imagine what a democratic economy might look like when consistently thought through with reference to democratic principles, and a provocation to think beyond the confines of our 'capitalist realism' (Fisher, 2009).

The second question that arises at this point is: why planning? A full consideration of this question is out of our current remit, but I will briefly shed light on Devine's case for it. He provides three key arguments. First, planning enables the broad structure and direction of the economy to be shaped in accordance with social priorities that are democratically determined, as opposed to this being steered by impersonal and coercive market forces beyond the control of anyone in particular (Devine, 1988, p. 15). As such, Devine argues, (democratic) planning is a 'necessary condition for people individually and collectively to be able to control their lives, to exercise self-government' (ibid, p. 13). Secondly, and relatedly, planning negotiates the fundamental uncertainty arising from the atomized decision-making characteristic of markets.

In a market-economy, firms' decisions (to expand, invest, contract, etc.) are all interdependent, though are taken individually and in ignorance of others' actions. Thus, these interrelated decisions are coordinated through the market mechanism in an *ex post* fashion: through the reactions of atomistic decision-makers. Planning would make possible the coordination of these interrelated decisions *before* they are implemented, substituting the 'conscious, planned coordination of decisions *ex ante* for the blind, anarchic coordination of the market mechanism *ex post*' (ibid, p. 18). It is this element that constitutes the most important democratic argument for planning, as it is the *ex ante* coordination of investment decisions that enables all those affected by these decisions to have a say, and for enterprises' decisions to thus serve social interests.[98] Lastly, in later work Devine has made an argument for the environmental potential of planning (Devine, 2017). Since major investments will be democratically planned, competition and growth incentives would be presumably rendered inoperative.[99] Democratic planning would then not only 'correct' the ecological destructive tendencies of capitalism, it would replace them with deliberatively constituted social priorities and interests, including ecological ones.

The core idea of Devine's model is then that the collective *ex ante* coordination of investment would enable economic activity to be self-governing to the greatest extent possible and anchored in public interests. As these latter cannot be assumed or be the outcome of aggregating given preferences, Devine argues they should be deliberatively constituted by those affected by the decision-making, at the most decentralized level possible (ibid, p. 125; Adaman & Devine, 2001, p. 230). This *ex ante* coordination does not replace 'the market' entirely, however. Devine disaggregates the market into two distinct dimensions: *market exchange* and *market forces*. Market exchange involves the sale and purchase of output within the existing capacity of an economy. Market forces, on the other hand, refers to process of change in the structure of productive capacity (Devine, 1988, p. 23). The difference is thus that between the *use of existing capacity* and *changes in capacity* (Adaman & Devine, 1996, p. 534). Market exchange remains integral to Devine's model of democratic economic planning. Market forces, which in capitalist economies are the result of atomized decisions in private interest, are replaced by a process of negotiated co-ordination.

However, democratic planning as described above is premised on the assumption that society has effective disposition over the means of production that it collectively owns, so that it can employ them for its self-defined interests. In other words, the means of production are effectively *socialized*. The classical historical materialist argument for socialization, which Devine situates his case within, is that capitalist social organization develops the forces of production to a high

[98] See Vrousalis (2019), Cohen (1989) and Stehr (2022) for similar lines of argument that lead from democratic principles towards a conclusion that the market should be replaced by a different, deliberative process at some, or all levels of the economy. See Devine (1992) for a comparison of market socialism with democratic economic planning.

[99] For a more detailed discussion on the ecological implications of democratic economic planning across different models (including Devine's), see the paper by the group of authors called 'Planning for Entropy' on this topic (2022). While these authors recognize the ecological potential of democratic economic planning, they argue that there is still important work to be done to embed these models more squarely within an ecological framework. An important recent contribution has been made by Matthew Huber who argues for social ownership and control of the energy sector (Huber, 2022).

degree of complexity and interdependence, but then becomes an obstacle for their effective and just use (Devine, 1988, p. 120). As capitalism develops, the production process as a whole becomes ever more social in character: it is increasingly complex, interdependent, and centred on cooperation and knowledge, with dominant corporations becoming increasingly large in scale and developing forms of internal planning.[100]

A good example of this social character of production is Walmart. As Leigh Phillips and Michal Rozworski show, the large multination corporation has grown to such an extent that it has found it necessary to form cooperative partnerships with its vast network of global suppliers, warehouses and retail stores, so that all included in this network can benefit from the reduced costs that real-time data transparency and cross-supply chain planning brings (Phillips, Rozworski, 2019, p. 48). This cooperative supply-chain approach tellingly goes by the name of Collaborative Planning, Forecasting and Replenishment (CPFR), in which all nodes in the chain collaboratively synchronize their forecasts and activity (ibid, p. 49). As these authors point out, Walmart is an example of how the market economy is already rife with planning, though planning that 'concentrates economic decision making in the hands of wealth owners and keeps workers in line' (ibid, p. 60). While Walmart's production process might then be social in character, it is highly undemocratic to say the least, and is informed by and large by the narrow interests of its owners and shareholders.[101]

As such, there is an increasing lack of fit, or contradiction, between the ever-more-social forces of production and the relations of production, particularly private property (Devine, 1988, p. 127). Socializing private property and production is then necessary to replace private authority within the corporation and over a highly interdependent and increasingly socialized economy, with a democratic authority that serves public or common interests. This is, however, where the shoe starts to pinch. How and at what level are these 'public interests' constituted? Recall the discussion in the last chapter on the limits of co-operatives due to their operation within a market context. One important limitation is that co-ops operate within the context of a market-economy, in which they are pressured to act competitively and in which their decisions are made in an atomistic manner. As Devine points out, co-operatives are *privately* owned in this sense, (or sectionally, as he also calls it) as decisions are made atomistically by enterprises, oriented towards their private, internal interests (ibid, p 121). On the other hand, the statist solution to this problem, in which the means of production are owned and controlled by the state, formally on behalf of the working class, is highly problematic from a democratic point of view. While state ownership makes planning and *ex ante* coordination possible, workers would have little to no say over decisions that affect them, and the centralization of decision-making power within the state is liable to lapse into a bureaucratic autocracy (ibid, p. 124).

[100] Ernest Mandel notably characterized the 'objective socialization of labour' as the 'basic historical trend of capitalist development from the Industrial Revolution onwards' (Mandel, 1986, p. 6).
[101] Buller and Lawrence make a similar argument regarding private property itself. Modern capitalism replaced individually owned property by socialized property 'pooled in the form of the corporation and stock markets, while private shareholders continued to set the purpose and appropriate the proceeds of socialised production' (Buller & Lawrence, 2022, p. 54).

This is what Nicholas Vrousalis elsewhere calls the *socialization dilemma* (Vrousalis, 2018, p. 90). Both ends of this dilemma give rise to unpalatable democratic consequences. On the one hand, the statist solution usurps power from workers and firms' decision-making autonomy. Democratic control over economic planning would be indirect at best, assuming the continuation of a parliamentary system, and a bureaucratic autocracy at worst (ibid, p. 91). On the other hand, a syndicalist-type system of worker-owned co-operatives coordinated through a market mechanism would dis-embed their decision-making from the wider social good. As Devine argues, socialization ideally encompasses both these aspects: 'In relation to society as a whole, it [socialization] involves collective decision-making about the overall disposition of productive resources, taking into account major interdependencies, which requires system-wide planning. In relation to individual production units, it involves decisions by those affected about what to produce in detail, where and how. Both planning and democratization are necessary' (Devine, 1988, p. 122).

The way in which Devine starts to negotiate this dilemma is by drawing a distinction between private and public ownership on the one hand, and *social* ownership and control on the other. Social ownership, in short, is ownership by those who are affected by the use of the assets involved (Adaman & Devine, 1996, p. 533; Devine, 1988, p. 128). This will vary according to the assets involved, as the set of people affected by the use of assets of an individual enterprise will be smaller than those affected by the interdependent investment decisions of a branch of industry, or decisions made about at the level of the national economy. Underlying the concept of social ownership is thus, firstly, the principle that the right to co-decide on the use of assets should be vested in those affected by their use, and that wherever possible those affected should be able to directly participate in the process of decision-making (Devine, 1988, p. 139). This creates a presumption in favour of decentralization, while recognizing that 'some decisions have to be taken and implemented at the level of the society as a whole, or at intermediate levels', and the need for representative forms of democratic decision-making at those levels (ibid). Secondly, this conception of ownership is intended to give all social owners a say in decisions that affect them, either directly or indirectly. In rejecting the notion that control over assets should be exclusively vested in the owners of capital (private or public), it avoids lapsing either into statism (means of production are owned and controlled exclusively by the state) or workerism (exclusive worker's control over the firm and the privileging of people's interests as producers over other interests and aspects of their lives).

Social ownership is thus distinct, firstly, from private ownership in either its capitalist or co-operative forms in that the latter make decisions in an atomistic fashion which exclude many of those affected by these decisions. Social ownership, on the other hand, is also distinct from state ownership of the means of production. State ownership is a form of *public* ownership, Devine argues, in the sense that it moves the means of production into the public domain (ibid, p. 123). However, as has become clear from historical experience of statist countries, while this allowed for a form of *ex ante* planning, decisions about the use of the means of production were certainly not made by those affected. As such, 'state ownership, then, is public ownership, but not necessarily social ownership' (ibid, p. 124). To be sure, social ownership is conceived by Devine not as an all-or-nothing achievement but as a process that can be furthered or set back (ibid, p.

126). The introduction of new laws, the nationalization of particular industries, or the promotion of the co-operative economy can thus all be understood as furthering social ownership.

The model of democratic economic planning that flows from this conception of social ownership is one that combines political democracy with economic planning and workplace democracy. All major decisions concerning changes in capacity are made at the most decentralized level possible by all those affected, through a mix of direct and representative democracy. Broad social priorities would be chosen at a national level through a deliberative process around comprehensive plans, which would inform the process of disaggregating macro-economic allocations, with ever more detailed decisions being made by successively smaller groups of people affected by them (ibid, p. 206). The chosen comprehensive plan is treated as an *approximation* of the common interest, with deliberative procedures at every stage of decentralization enabling a more local transformation of private interests into common ones within the framework of the comprehensive plan (ibid, p. 233). As such, the opposition between the vertical coercion of a bureaucratic or authoritarian imposition of economic decisions, and the horizontal and blind coercion of market forces is rejected in favour of democratic planning based on social ownership and the deliberative constitution of social priorities at all relevant levels. I shall now turn to the way this process of democratic planning works in Devine's model, the institutions it relies on, and the democratic principles of participation, decentralization, and deliberation it embodies.

II) Democratic Planning as Negotiated Coordination

Since Devine's model of democratic economic planning covers a lot of ground, much of which is dedicated to economic issues, it will be impossible to provide a full exegesis of the model. I will therefore focus on two aspects of the model relevant to the question of democracy: 1) Organization. *Where* are decisions taken and how is a balance struck between centralized and decentralized decision-making? And 2) Regulation. *How* are decisions being made?[102] In models of democratic economic planning, this ranges from a quantitative extreme to a qualitative extreme. Devine's model incorporates a mixture of quantitative and qualitative 'data' in the planning process, but his model strongly emphasizes the importance of deliberation and the transformation of 'sectional' interests into social ones.

Let us then take a look at the way Devine's model balances centralized and decentralized features. First of all, negotiated coordination builds on the institutions of representative democracy, including a national assembly chosen through the familiar electoral system,

[102] I glean these criteria from Simon Tremblay-Pepin, who has developed five of them for the purpose of comparing and potentially synthesizing different models of democratic economic planning (Tremblay-Pepin, 2022). The other three concern limitations (ecological and international), formalization (the scope for spontaneous economic activity), and the scope of involvement and conflict. All these other criteria are salient, though for reasons of space I am focusing on those of regulation and organization.

operating in a context of political pluralism and a separation of powers (ibid, p. 142). As broad decisions about social priorities are inevitably political decisions, Devine argues, they should be made at a national level. This happens through a process involving three institutions: the Planning Commission, the Representative Assembly, and the Chamber of Interests. The Planning Commission prepares alternative comprehensive scenarios and transfers them to a national Chamber of Interests, made up of representatives of interest groups (environmental, feminist, consumer, anti-racist, etc.) alongside those of trade unions, central government, and major industries. The Chamber of Interests is a variation on the idea of having a workers' parliament, with the intention of replacing the current privileged position of business in government with that of people as producers. However, the Chamber of Interest departs from the workerist disposition of this institutional innovation in its intention to include a whole range of interests in the process of working out a comprehensive plan acceptable to all (ibid, p. 148). Its role is advisory, and the Chamber presents a report to the Representative Assembly, which in the end decides what to take on and what not.

The national plan adopted by the national assembly then acts much like a directive in EU law: broad directions about investment are stipulated, but it is up to intermediary and local bodies to decide how to act on these. In Devine's words, major investment is decided on a national level, whereas decisions over the detailed use of this investment (minor investment) would be decentralized horizontally, between negotiated coordination bodies and enterprises (production units, in Devine's parlance), as well as vertically within both these bodies. These decisions continue to be made, however, within nationally decided social priorities.

The way decision-making is decentralized becomes clear when looking at the level of the enterprise. Apart from small-scale local activity, enterprises are socially owned, rather than publicly or privately. This means here that enterprises are internally self-managed by their workers, whereas their direction and long-term plans are decided by governing bodies which would be representative of those affected (ibid, p. 226). Devine proposes that representatives of four sectors should be included on the decision-making bodies of enterprises: the general interest (national, regional and local Planning Commissions and Negotiated Coordination Bodies); the interest of consumers, users and suppliers; the interest of workers (workers of the production unit itself and their unions); and the interest of the community (interest groups and activist groups) (ibid, p. 226). These representatives then deliberate on and define the social interest in relation to the enterprise's activities and decide on the latter's overall direction, while decisions about how to use the enterprise's existing resources to further that interest are made by workers. This then further decentralizes decision-making to those affected, while aiming to include social interests beyond those internal to those of the enterprise in isolation (ibid, p. 226).

Enterprises are thus self-managed, although their decisional power is limited to their existing productive capacities: they cannot for example choose to invest in new assets or close down a facility by themselves without reference to a Negotiated Coordination Body (NBC). This is where the distinction between market exchange and market forces (use of existing capacity and change in capacity, respectively) comes into play. While market exchange is retained in Devine's model, as explained, market forces are replaced by an *ex ante* negotiated coordination process

that aims to constitute and fulfil social interests. This process happens at the NCB: '[…] the negotiated coordination body is where the *ex ante* coordination of investment decisions within a branch of production would take place and where more general social control over the use of society's productive potential than is possible at the level of the individual production unit would be exercised' (ibid, p. 233). As such, while major investment decisions happen at a national level, NCB's are responsible for the allocation of resources in their sector, and decisions about the use of existing capacity are made by enterprises themselves. This is intended to ensure that decisions are made at multiple centres (although within an overall framework), that productive resources are used in service of socially constituted interests subject to a principle of subsidiarity, and that those affected can participate in the decision-making process to the greatest feasible degree.

Turning to *how* decisions are made, Negotiated Coordination Bodies come to decisions on the basis of both quantitative and qualitative information. Because negotiated coordination includes market exchange, day-to-day production can adapt to market signals, which produces data for the NCB to take into account. Market forces, however, are replaced by a process of deliberative decision-making between all social owners. Those included in NCB's decision-making process would be representatives from the sector's enterprises, consumers, relevant local government, the Planning Commission and civil society groups representing a more general interest (ibid, p. 245). When enterprises want to expand, for example, they put in a demand for the next planning cycle. Based on the National Planning Commission's projections and the Representative Assembly's social priorities, the NCB tries to establish the best way to allocate investment in its sector considering the variety of interests and the demands of the various enterprises (ibid, p. 237). Importantly, Devine envisages that the kind of interaction that takes place in the NCB to be a 'deliberative learning process of negotiation in the course of which people take account of others' interests and change their preferences accordingly' insofar as possible, rather than an aggregation of pre-existing interests (Adaman & Devine, 2022, p. 175). This deliberative conception of democratic planning will be situated in the literature on deliberative democracy in the next section.

It is this qualitative, deliberative dimension of decision-making that sets Devine's model apart from other models of democratic economic planning. This comes to the fore particularly when contrasted with Robin Hahnel's model of Participatory Economics (PE), where the interests of workers and consumers are separated out (Hahnel, 2012, Ch. 14; Tremblay-Pepin, 2022, p. 269). In Hahnel's model, worker and consumer councils are at the centre of the planning process. As opposed to Devine's model, both market exchange and market forces are replaced by the planning procedure, which is facilitated by a body called the 'Iteration Facilitation Board' (IFB) (Hahnel, 2012, Ch. 14). This body provides consumer and producer councils with a set of estimated 'opportunity costs' of the resources used in production and of the goods to be consumed (including the social costs of production), which are used by these councils to develop proposals for expected production or consumption respectively. The IFB, which is intended to play only a 'perfunctory role' (ibid, p. 92) then bundles together these proposals and adjusts their opportunity or social costs up or down 'in proportion to the degree of excess demand or supply for that good' (ibid, p. 92). Worker and consumer councils then vote on their peers' proposals (i.e., each worker council evaluates the others' proposal, but not those of consumer

councils, and vice versa) based on this 'social benefit-to-cost' ratio provided by the IFB. This process is then repeated – re-iterated – until a comprehensive proposal is reached without any goods or services in excess supply or demand (ibid).

Hahnel's Participatory Economics model is driven by a horizontalism in which there is planning, but no central *planner*, and in which no one issues proposals, let alone commands, about what others are to do. However, because of this horizontal emphasis, deliberation and participation only take place *within* each respective council in the process of arriving at a proposal to put forward. Importantly, there is no point at which deliberation *between* worker and consumer councils, or between different worker councils takes place. While the respective councils do vote on each-other's proposals, David Laibman argues that this vote, if it is not to slide into an extremely demanding effort of each council to evaluate in detail each other council's proposal, comes down to the perfunctory act of looking at the social benefit-to-cost ratio of each proposal and giving it a thumbs up or down (Laibman, 2014, p. 227). While individuals then participate in the process of composing their council's proposal, which would include a process of deliberation (Hahnel, 2012, p. 102), when it comes to evaluating other councils' proposals there is 'truly nothing to deliberate about' (Laibman, 2014, p. 229). The mode of interaction between different councils is thus *parametric* rather than deliberative: councils do not interact with each-other during the iteration-process but respond only to the information – the 'parameters' – provided by the IFB (ibid, p. 224).[103] Importantly, this means that in Hahnel's model, 'each individual takes decisions not based on the greater good of the larger society but always from their situation as workers or consumers' (Tremblay-Pepin, 2022, p. 269). At no point do workers or consumers transcend the boundaries of their own councils and engage in a process of articulating a common good. Devine's model, by contrast, is oriented towards exactly overcoming such parametric behaviour by placing deliberation at the heart of the coordination process. Interests of people as workers and consumers, which are separated out in Hahnel's model, are linked together in Devine's through his concept of social ownership and the political process of negotiated coordination.

Placing deliberation at the heart of democratic planning thus enables social interests to be constituted and articulated that are difficult, if not impossible, to absorb into the metric of 'social costs', and for decisions to be made about investment that include these social interests (see also Benanav, 2020). Importantly, this means that in Devine's model, when an NCB says 'no' to an enterprise's request to expand, for example, this enterprise will know why and will have had a chance to give and receive reasons for and against. In Hahnel's model, by contrast, decision-making about investment is dispersed through the iterative process, where this decision is rendered non-subjective – i.e., the 'decision' is merely an aggregate of numerous councils acting on a metric provided to them and thus not traceable to the judgment of any particular individual. Moreover, much, if not all of the qualitative information and tacit knowledge about the enterprise about which the decision is being made is lost in this iterative process. In other

[103] As Laibman (2014) and Adaman & Devine (2001) point out, Hahnel's Participatory Planning is modelled on an economic iteration process first articulated by Leon Walras, with the IFB taking on the role of the Walrasian 'auctioneer' and the worker and consumer councils replacing the individual consumer-exchangers divided by parametric barriers.

words, deliberation in Devine's model not only works to engage private interests and transform them into general ones, it also ideally renders decisions made more legitimate. While this in turn raises concerns about demandingness and bureaucratic domination, the role of deliberation in negotiated coordination is to make the latter a truly political process rather than an 'exercise in apolitical applied mathematics' (Adaman & Devine, 2022, p. 179).

To sum, Negotiated Coordination Bodies 'embrace the inevitable tension between the specific and the general interest' and form a crucial institution for the socialization dilemma to play out politically (Devine, 1988, ibid, p. 245). The model of negotiated coordination differs from the statist horn of the dilemma in that decisions about investment are decentralized to NCB's while workers self-manage firms on the basis of their existing capacities. It differs from the syndicalist horn of the dilemma (or market coordination in general) in that investment decisions within a sector are coordinated *ex ante*, on the basis of all available information, and informed by social interests constituted at various levels of locality. It further differs from both extremes of the dilemma, as well as other democratic economic planning models in the role that negotiation, or deliberation, plays at every level. It is this aspect of *how* decisions are made that Devine argues provides a better quality of information, enables decisions to be public in character and thus more legitimate, and enables citizens to be self-governing as equals (ibid, p. 238).

III) Democratic Objectives: Freedom in and Freedom from Work

Having reviewed Devine's model of democratic economic planning and contrasted it with Hahnel's conception to reveal distinct strengths of the former, I will now turn to the contributions this model makes to extending insights and ideals from different contemporary democratic theories into the economy and how it is supported by these ideals. Lastly, I will consider the relationship between post-work theorists' proposals to promote freedom *from* work, and the political freedom in the economy espoused by negotiated coordination.

Deliberation, Political Pluralism, and Hegemony

The first and most obvious argument, briefly touched upon already, is that Devine's model of democratic economic planning promotes deliberative democratic ideals. While in deliberative theory negotiation is not strictly speaking deliberation, negotiation in the sense that Devine uses it appeals to a deliberative process. In fact, in later work, Devine explicitly frames his conception of negotiated coordination as based on a deliberative democratic process (Adaman & Devine, 2001; 2020, p. 177). What makes negotiated coordination a deliberative democratic process? First, the process is not one of aggregating given and unchanging preferences. Rather, it is a process which 'incorporates a transformatory dynamic in which particular interests are viewed in relation to one another and are integrated into a socially constructed general interest at each level of decision-making' (Devine, 1988, p. 189). As such, it is a process 'in the course of which learning occurs, perceptions change and consciousness may be transformed' (ibid, p. 250).

Secondly, as can be surmised already from the above citations, deliberation in Devine's model is intended as a way to constitute a social interest from a multitude of private, or 'sectional' interests. Because social interests cannot reliably be calculated or assumed to be self-evident and unproblematic, they can only be 'deliberatively constructed by those whose interests they are' (Devine, 1988, p. 273). Whereas market forces 'generate information through a process that reinforces narrowly self-interested motivation' (ibid, p. 191), negotiated coordination encourages people to 'transcend their sectional interests and take account also of the situation of others' (ibid, p. 185). Deliberation also enables the tacit knowledge of the groups involved to inform the decision-making, providing an answer to the Austrian School's epistemological objection to planning.[104] While deliberative democracy is a broad church, it shares with Devine the critique of rational choice that underlies neoclassical economic theories and aggregative conceptions of democracy (Bächtiger et al., 2018, pp. 36-37; Gutmann & Thompson, 2000). Devine's model further shares deliberative theorist's broad agreement on democracy not being a market for the exchange of private preferences, but as a discursive forum where public agreements can be reached (Escobar, 2017, p. 426; Elster, 1997). While there are many internal debates on what exactly constitutes deliberation, Devine's notion thus seems very close to that shared by most deliberative democrats, namely 'debate and discussion aimed at producing reasonable, well-informed opinions in which participants are willing to revise preferences in light of discussion, new information, and claims made by fellow participants' (Chalmers, 2003, p. 309).

As such, Devine's model promotes at least two ideals commonly espoused in the deliberative democratic literature, namely: the transformation of private interests into public ones, and legitimate decision-making (see Cohen, 1989, p. 34). However, he goes much further than deliberative democrats in several respects. Firstly, deliberation is not only intended to produce publicly legitimate outcomes but is important for its transformational effect on participants and the role this plays in overcoming the social division of labour between those who govern, and those who are governed (Devine, 1988, p. 163). Devine makes a distinction between the functional division of labour, referring to the different kinds of work and tasks that need to be carried out in a society, from the social division of labour, which is the historically developed attribution of certain kinds of work to particular groups of people and the establishment of hierarchies of social power based on this (ibid, p. 163). Enabling citizens to participate in the democratic governance of their workplace as well as decision-making processes at more intermediate levels of the economy then contributes to the overcoming of the social division of labour in the sense that the 'planning, direction and regulation of social life to cease to be the possession of a distinct social group and to become the property of everyone' (ibid). This is made possible because the productive potential of advanced capitalist countries has developed to such an extent that all citizens could have the resources to be 'self-governing', a point that will be related to post-work theorists' proposals in the next section.

[104] The thrust of this objection is that the market depends on interactions in which the knowledge that emerges exceeds that of any participant. According to Hayek and Mises, this knowledge is impossible to objectify in a form of planning (Hayek, 1945). Among many other things, Devine's model is an attempt to show that planning and the effective use of tacit knowledge are complementary rather than incompatible (Devine, 1988, p. 254; See also Adaman & Devine, 1998).

The main point here is that deliberation and participation in economic decision-making by worker-citizens is not only transformative of interests or preferences, but also of their capacities as political agents. This is closer to the 'psychological support' argument put forward by participatory democrats explored in chapter four, which holds that political participation in economic decision-making helps constitute the psychological resources, experiences, and dispositions needed for the development of democratic citizens. That is, for the making of such economic decisions not to continue to be in the hands of a dominant social group by dint of their alleged expertise, social status, or access to resources, ordinary citizens must come to see themselves as being *capable* of governing together. This concern with transforming agents' capacities as political actors goes beyond deliberative democratic preoccupations with legitimacy and the common good (although arguably not incompatible) and ties in with the argument I have pursued throughout the thesis about the democratic importance of such subjective transformation.

Secondly, Devine's model of negotiated coordination connects deliberative democratic processes to economic decision-making in a way that grants citizens an actual share of power over the conditions of their lives. The explicit and sustained manner in which he does so is mostly absent in the literature on deliberative democratic theory. The most explicit effort to extend deliberative democratic principles to the economy was made by Joshua Cohen in the late eighties (Cohen, 1989).[105] Since then the field of deliberative democratic theory has swollen in volume and exploded in a whole variety of directions, while generally moving away from issues related to work or the economy. For example, the latest Oxford handbook of deliberative democracy includes over fifty-eight entries on the cutting edge of the deliberative field, though not one is dedicated to extending democratic control over the economy (Bächtiger et al., 2018). There thus seems to be a tacit acceptance of capitalist property relations and the *ex post* coordination of market forces that is rarely broached within deliberative democratic theory.[106] As such, Devine's model of democratic economic planning provides valuable conceptual resources and insights as to how deliberative decision-making can extend over the economy. For example, it could provide ways for the recent systemic turn in deliberative democracy to examine more closely the possibilities for furthering the deliberative qualities of multiple sites in the economy (Mansbridge et al, 2012). Vice versa, there are lines of enquiry that are well-trodden within the deliberative literature but that have not received much attention by Devine. For example, his conception of social ownership turns on the 'all affected' principle (all social owners should be able to have a say in decisions that affect them), which convincingly expands the constituents of the democratic workplace beyond those of workers exclusively. However, how should it be determined who is affected in some relevant sense, and how can this delineation be achieved in a way that is not itself undemocratic?[107] Furthermore, how can deliberation between all-affected parties of a corporation or NCB take place without this process

[105] Cohen however sees the market as the only viable form of economic coordination that would not undermine basic liberties, which contrasts with Devine's model (Cohen, 1989, p. 41).
[106] There are some notable exceptions, including the aforementioned Joshua Cohen (1989), but also John Dryzek's *Democracy in Capitalist Times* (1996).
[107] This is known as the boundary-problem in democratic theory (see Goodin, 2007) and has recently been addressed in the context of debates about workplace democracy by Philipp Stehr (2022).

becoming too unwieldy, complex, and demanding? These are questions that could be pursued through a more extensive and sustained engagement between theories of democratic economic planning and deliberative democracy.

While I have emphasized the deliberative quality of Devine's model, he himself in fact positions it within Laclau and Mouffe's project for radicalizing democracy. Whereas Laclau and Mouffe's framework does not enable them to articulate a 'set of proposals for the positive organization of the social' (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 188), Devine proposes that 'at the institutional level the model of negotiated coordination provides such a set of proposals, a vision of what the social organization of a radical democracy might look like' (Devine, 1988, p. 271). He further construes the role of political parties not along deliberative lines, but rather along hegemonic ones (or to run the risk of anachronism, agonistic ones). Political parties offer alternative unified and coherent perspectives for the overall direction of society, for which they seek to win hegemonic support (ibid, p. 147, 272). Their role is thus framed mostly in terms of hegemony and institutionalizing conflict as a way to maintain political pluralism (ibid, p. 272).

Here too, discussions on democratic economic planning can offer valuable insights in how to extend Mouffe's project of radical democracy by transforming liberal democratic institutions and socialising the economy. It can also provoke agonistic democratic theory generally to engage more thoroughly with democratising the economy and the institutional design necessary for it, issues that have largely been left by the wayside in this literature. For example, Marie Paxton's otherwise very illuminating book on agonistic institutional design leaves issues such as workplace democracy or economic democracy untouched, ending up with a comparatively rather tame proposal for a *Contestation Day* (Paxton, 2020). On the other hand, models of democratic economic planning could also gain much from engaging with agonistic insights into the necessity of conflict and the inevitability of politics. However, agonistic and deliberative democratic theory cannot sidestep or bracket the economy if they are not to become rarefied ideals: the only way forward is through it; to, paraphrasing Marx, start wading through the economic filth (Marx, 1983, p. 370).

The End of Work or the Democratization of Work?

Up until here we have looked at distinct visions of a freer economy in separation. On the one hand we reviewed 'post-work' proposals for decommodifying work, de-linking it from income and expanding 'time for what we will' beyond it. On the other hand, we have looked at Devine's model of negotiated coordination as a particularly promising conception of democratic economic planning. We explored how democratic decision-making could be possible over the economy without recourse either to market forces or hierarchical command. In what follows I will compare and contrast these two sets of proposals for the democratic ideals they harbour and project. To conclude, I will link back to the previous chapter's discussion on couriers' desire for flexibility without precarity to illustrate both the post-work and negotiated coordination approaches to this issue.

The most obvious difference between post-work proposals for a Universal Basic Income (UBI) or collective working-time reduction (WTR), and a democratically planned economy such as Devine's model of negotiated coordination is the *object* over which democratic power is exercised. In the former case, it is collective working time and dependency on the market that are the objects. In the latter case it is the means of production and market forces as such that become the object, from the workplace to the overall direction of the economy. However, the discussion on political freedom from the last chapter enables us to shed some light on the different democratic goals these proposals promote and to insist on the limits of post-work visions. The prime limitation from this perspective is that while WTR and UBI would further individual freedom as self-governance (i.e., private freedom), they do not by themselves establish the conditions for greater democratic control over collective, highly interdependent economic conditions. In fact, as both Aaron Benanav and Alex Gourevitch point out, 'economies that are already designed to reduce everyone to an atomic existence could easily accommodate UBI' (Benanav, 2020, p. 77; Gourevitch, 2016). As argued in the previous chapter, post-work theorists focus on an emancipation *from* work while abandoning questions around the emancipation *of* work and democratic control over the economy; they focus on 'technological progress rather than the conquest of production', leaving behind what has been seen as the 'basic precondition for generating a post-scarcity world', namely, 'the abolition of private property and monetary exchange in favor of planned cooperation' (Benanav, 2020, p. 82).

This latter project is, of course, exactly what Devine proposes to do (minus the abolition of monetary exchange). Private property is replaced by social property, over which all affected share control through negotiated coordination subject to the principle of subsidiarity. Whereas both a UBI and WTR are in principle compatible with the atomistic character of market forces, Devine's model is premised exactly on the aim to 'democratize interdependence' through replacing market forces by negotiated coordination. Another way to put this is that the aim of negotiated coordination is to make 'worldly', in Arendt's sense, market forces that are otherwise impersonally coercive, and thus political. That is: these impersonal forces that belong to no-one and everyone become denuded of their mystical aura and purported naturality by being made visible through public deliberation and subjected to democratic decision-making. Whereas post-work proposals then extend citizens' capacity for individual autonomy and remove many impediments to political action, Devine's model of democratic economic planning is geared towards expanding the exercise of citizens' capacity for participation in collective self-governance – i.e., political freedom in the sense that I have explored in the previous chapters with Gould, Arendt, Celikates and Rostbøll.

However, to see these two distinct forms of freedom as mutually incompatible or entirely unrelated would be a mistake. Particularly in the context of our discussion on emancipating work, freedom *in* and *from* work are by no means mutually exclusive goals. For Devine they are in fact inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing. He argues that alongside the socialization of production, 'the central requirement for advance to a self-governing society of equal subjects [as his model is intended to be a description of] is movement towards more equal access to the material and psychological resources necessary for self-development' (Devine, 1988, p. 275). For Devine, this equal access is a condition for such progress because it challenges the social

division of labour in which different social classes or groups possess differential social power based on relationships of domination and subordination (men over women, mental over manual labour, etc.). UBI and WTR would in the first place ensure that citizens can meet as equals, unburdened by relations of dependency. Furthermore, as they open up the free time and resources enabling people to develop in ways less tethered by the necessity of making a living, they would also potentially challenge the valuation of various forms of work, as discussed in section two. This would go a long way in disentangling the historically fused-together functional and social divisions of labour. While a technical hierarchy of functional tasks still remains an objective necessity, WTR and UBI have the potential to further denaturalize the social hierarchy associated with these tasks.

As such, in contrast to some post-work theorists, the objective of reorganizing social life to reduce the role of necessary labour is not about overcoming work as such for Devine. It is about creating the possibility for the 'planning, direction and regulation of social life to cease to be the possession of a distinct social group and to become the property of everyone, of self-activating people in a self-governing society' (Devine, 1988, p. 163). It is about abolishing the division of care labour, between those who nurture and those who are nurtured. It is lastly about having the 'time for what we will', the time and resources for all to engage in what Devine calls 'emancipatory activity': autonomous activity free from the necessity of work and recuperation from it. From this perspective a post-scarcity society can only come about by extending democratic control over the economy, while the expansion of private freedom this control might bring about would further contribute to the movement towards a society of equals.

The relationship between democratic control over the economy (in its entirety or parts) and deciding on collective working-time reduction or implementing a UBI then seems clear enough. As negotiated coordination between social owners replaces capitalist market forces, all sorts of considerations and social interests besides efficiency and surplus-maximalization enter the picture. Among many other things this could include the reduction of working-time. For example, certain sectors might decide on adopting a four-day workweek through their Negotiated Coordination Body if there is a strong mandate to do so and if it is judged feasible based on all the relevant information. Alternatively, this could be decided on at the national level as a social priority and disaggregated downward for NCB's to decide on how, and to what extent, to implement this priority depending on the state of their sector and its interests. While this might not sound very different from how sectoral bargaining currently works, the main difference is that the currently privileged position of business interests would be replaced by those of all social owners, and that there would be a permanent political-economic institution (the NCB) in place where such a matter can be proposed, deliberated and decided on.[108] The same line of reasoning applies to adopting a form of UBI, which Devine argues for in terms of 'personal autonomy' in a similar vein to Pateman (ibid, p. 160).

[108] Of course, one might also argue that this is putting the cart before the horse, and that it is exactly through processes like sectoral bargaining that an institution like a Negotiated Coordination Body could come into being. However, I briefly bracket the question of transition here for purposes of clarity.

Importantly, however, while democratic control over the economy will enable different social interests to inform the direction and character of the economy, in no way does this guarantee that post-work demands will be taken on. Or that when taken on they will reflect the left-wing preferences of the authors considered. Indeed, as many of these authors point out, one of the most formidable obstacles to the struggle for a UBI or for WTR is ideological rather than material (Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 123; Weeks, 2011, p. 170). Challenging an ethic of productivism that associates idle time with meaninglessness and insists that renumeration be tied to suffering would remain as vital a task in a democratically planned economy as it is in current capitalist ones. Furthermore, as previously discussed, demands for UBI and WTR can, and are, construed according to a variety of political ideologies. What form these demands will take in a democratically planned economy is as contingent on a hegemonic struggle as it is in a capitalist one. The difference being that these hegemonic struggles take place in a context that grants citizens far greater power in making decisions over these matters than is currently the case, that substitutes the private interest of capital for a host of social interests, and that allows these decisions to take place in durable deliberative institutions in parallel with the familiar party system.

Going in the direction from democratic control over the economy (in its entirety or parts) to deciding on collectively working less or implementing a UBI then seems clear enough. Going in the direction from post-work demands to increasing democratic control over the economy on the other hand seems less straightforward. Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams make the argument that a UBI would act as a 'red wedge': it would alter the balance of power between workers and capital in favour of the former as workers can effectively refuse work and are less susceptible to the disciplinary power of unemployment. This would thus increase class power and help push the interests of labour (Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 120) However, there are two critical responses to this argument. The first is that it effectively puts the cart before the horse, as to win a UBI that would alter social relations to such an extent depends on a sizeable movement in the first place (Benanav, 2020, p. 78; Gourevitch, 2016, p. 9). The second concern is more fundamental and in line with the distinction between private and political freedom made in the previous chapter. This is that even if the time and resources opened up by a UBI or WTR did give people a greater capacity to engage politically, it is unclear whether this would be a viable pathway towards broader emancipatory goals. As previously argued, they give people more individual autonomy and private freedom, but no greater role in shaping the social conditions under which this private freedom plays out (see also Benanav, 2020, p. 78).

As such, without being placed alongside demands for social ownership and control over productive assets, it is difficult to imagine how the political freedom that emerges from the struggle for WTR or UBI can be made durable after the moment of its realisation. Tellingly, for most post-work authors, it is mainly in the *struggle* for their demands that the question of democracy comes into play (Srnicek & Williams, 2016, Ch. 8; Stronge & Lewis, 2021, Ch. 5; Bastani, 2019, Ch. 9). This struggle, in combination with the amplifying effects of winning post-work demands, would accelerate the push towards a fully automated future with abundance for all. However, as Benanav argues, for these post-work demands to serve as the basis for an exit from capitalism, their analysis of the origins of the low demand for labour would need to be

correct (Benanav, 2020, p. 78). If correct, they would be right to insist that the main issue is one of reorganizing distribution rather than production. Benanav's own analysis, as we saw, casts great doubt over post-work theorist's thesis that their proposals would usher in a fundamental transformation of capitalist social relations. Or, to reformulate for the purposes of our discussion, that the political freedom won in the struggle for post-work demands would be durably carried over in the post-capitalist future these would ostensibly lead to. If not accompanied by demands for the progressive socialization of production that would extend democratic decision-making over the economy, it is much more likely that this political power and freedom would dissipate afterwards into an individualized enjoyment of private freedom. Or, in a more gloomy scenario, that a UBI would stabilize at a low level 'as a support of an ever more stagnant and unequal society built around private property' (ibid, p. 79).

As such, where the political freedom won through negotiated coordination over socially owned assets is slanted towards enabling progressive freedom *from* work, the reverse is not necessarily the case. From the perspective of democracy as a social ideal, the kind of democratic control over productive assets as envisaged by Devine thus constitutes a far more robust conception of an emancipated economy than post-work proposals for freedom from work.

Lastly, returning to the IWGB's courier's expressed desire for flexibility without precarity that prompted this chapter, we might ask what a 'negotiated coordination' approach to food-delivery platforms would be? Answering this question means starting from contemporary conditions rather than a speculative future where socialization has already taken place. As such, a first step would be to socialize delivery platform services. As these services are concentrated mostly within the jurisdiction of cities which provide both the demand for them as well as the vital infrastructure, one can imagine a municipally-owned public delivery platform company that displaces private alternatives such as Deliveroo. This is very close to James Muldoon's recent proposal for 'platform socialism', in which he also stresses the importance of social ownership and worker control. Muldoon, however, draws on a somewhat different range of sources to make his point, particularly G.D.H. Cole and Otto Neurath (Muldoon, 2022, Ch. 6). A Negotiating Coordination Body (which could perhaps find a more attractive header) would be established at the level of the municipality where representatives of municipal government, relevant consumer organisations, labour unions and other relevant social organisations would decide on the overall direction of the company. Workers on the service have a special interest in the organisation of their daily working lives and thus should have a priority say over their labour process. Most importantly, such a socially-owned company could develop a planned approach to labour supply in order to tackle the insecurity that delivery platforms' gamified approach produces. A flexible approach to scheduling could be maintained while the issue of rider over-supply would be rid of through the planning process. The algorithmic matching design and functionality of the platform would then further be informed by the interests of workers rather than geared towards the extraction of value.

While this might sound like a far-off speculation, something very much like it is happening in Barcelona's ride and hail industry at the time of writing. Barcelona's taxi union Elité Taxi Barcelona initiated a decree that was passed by the Catalan parliament which severely limits

private ride and hail platforms' activity in the city from the 1st of January 2023 onwards. Their further demand for a municipally-owned taxi app to replace private ride and hail platforms was met, which resulted in the PicMi taxi app (Arnau, 2022). At the moment the two major social owners having a say over the app are the municipal government and Barcelona's taxi union Elité. However, together they are already developing a planned approach to labour supply in the sector to ensure more stable working conditions (Wray, 2022). As this example shows, socialization is not an all-or-nothing accomplishment but rather is a process that can move further towards, or away from, social ownership and control. However small such beginnings, they harbour the real potential for a common, democratic economy.

Conclusion

Freedom within and outside of work are goals that are mutually interdependent and serve distinct democratic goals. However, in considering post-work visions alongside Devine's conception of democratic economic planning, I have tried to show that the latter constitutes the most promising avenue for pursuing a democratic economy that could potentially embrace both these goals. Replacing private authority over production with a system of negotiated coordination would enable a far more equal distribution of power among citizens to make decisions over economic conditions that affect them than is currently possible, where such power is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a privileged few. Far from resulting in a form of authoritarian bureaucracy devoid of political pluralism or conflict, I have explored the sophisticated manner in which Devine's model wrestles with the various democratic trappings associated with economic planning. His conceptions of social ownership and negotiated coordination as a deliberative process are particularly fruitful places to start thinking about, and working towards, a truly democratic economy.

At the same time, a democratically planned economy should not lose sight of the importance of freedom *from* work. Post-work theorists have persuasively argued against a pernicious productivist ethic for the constraints it puts on human flourishing, the inequalities it reproduces and the havoc it wreaks on the environment and ecosystems. Furthermore, their proposals for reducing collective working time and introducing a universal basic income would not only encourage experimentation with different kinds of lives, increasingly untethered from the necessity to make a living, they would enable citizens to meet under conditions of relative equality, unburdened by relationships of dependency. This expansion of what I have termed as 'private freedom' in relation to work is by no means guaranteed in a democratically planned economy and as such remains a vital objective. Its bringing about is as contingent on being articulated within a common hegemonic struggle within a system of negotiated coordination as it is today. However, it is post-work authors who seem to have lost sight of the goal of extending democratic control over the economy. However persuasive their cases for moving towards a society in which individual autonomy wins out over the compulsion to work, this goes at the expense of aiming for greater social control over shaping the conditions under which this autonomy plays out. It is this latter objective that is the more democratically salient one. It is only through democratizing the power to make decisions over investment that the economy can

grow to serve social, common goals, and clear the way towards conditions of substantive freedom both within and beyond work.

Conclusion

Work sits at the heart of a web of relationships of interdependence, as we have seen throughout the previous chapters. As the main source of income for asset-poor workers, the latter are in a relationship of interdependence with asset-rich owners of the company the former work for. As a main source of social recognition and esteem, work is associated with a social division of labour in which the various strata depend on each-other for their sense and meaning. As an economic necessity and a political obligation in societies structured around it, work compels citizens to take part as voiceless subjects in organizations whose decisions form the world they live in, shape the lives of many people near and distant, and affect the very biosphere that sustains life on earth. While the interdependency that arises through the necessity of work has perhaps never been organized on the basis of equality, this certainly is not the case today either. As those without wealth are coerced into work, once inside the workplace they are enmeshed within relations of arbitrary power and put in the position of subordinates. Even those promised a high degree of autonomy over their work such as the on-demand couriers we listened to throughout are *de facto* subordinates to the interests of the platforms they work for, while these platforms go out of their way to distance themselves from any form of responsibility they could bear for their workers. The power concentrated in these platforms, like any other large capitalist enterprise, is used to further a narrow set of interests shaped by the pressures of capitalist competition and responsibility towards shareholders, interests that are shaped in separation from workers and other affected constituents. The interdependencies created through working and the wealth that the latter produces are then based on relationships of inequality (despite the nominal 'freedom' of the wage-labourer) and marked by dominating relationships of power. The persistent tendencies towards overaccumulation and underemployment explored in chapter one only exacerbate these dynamics. If work has a worldmaking power, the world that is made by the collective efforts of workers today is done so 'behind their backs' and stands over and against them.

What the previous chapters have shown, however, is that such an interdependency premised on relations of inequality and domination is not inevitable. Drawing on conceptions of equality, freedom and agency gleaned from contemporary democratic theory and bringing them into conversation with critiques and experiences from the IWGB's couriers, it is possible to envisage a credible vision of democratic work. Not only is such a credible vision a possibility, it is in fact a key condition for a democratic society that more truly lives up to its promises of equality and freedom. This is one of the main arguments and conclusions that has emerged from the previous chapters. Namely, that to extend and deepen democratic relations of equality and freedom, we cannot go around questions pertaining to work and the economy but need to go *through* them. No project committed to radicalizing democracy, in Chantal Mouffe's sense, can do without a commitment to democratizing work. And any attempt to democratize work will run up against fundamental questions about democratizing the economy, especially in the context of a persistent trend towards underemployment. By being attentive to the commentaries and critiques made by the IWGB's couriers about their work and bringing them in conversation

with conceptual resources found in a variety of democratic-theoretic literatures, this thesis makes several contributions to ongoing debates about the democratization of work as well as a meta-theoretical contribution to the central question of the relationship between democratic theory and social practices of critique.

Firstly, listening to the IWGB's couriers' accounts and critiques of their experiences at work and bringing these into conversation with normative ideals of equality, freedom, and agency as found in parts of democratic-theoretic literature enabled not only a disclosing form of critique about what is wrong about these experiences, but also enabled the articulation of positive proposals that could address these concerns. In other words, drawing on democratic-theoretic ideals attuned to the IWGB's couriers' critiques enabled me to both deepen the latter and extend them towards proposals they did not initially consider. I will here briefly recall how this was achieved, the main claims I made throughout, and how this addresses the main question I set out to explore.

In chapter four I brought both neo-republican accounts of freedom as non-domination and participatory democratic conceptions of freedom as self-development in conversation with the IWGB's couriers' critiques of the relations of power and domination they face at work, as well as the ambiguities that emerged from their accounts around the kind of agency they had at their disposal. On the one hand, the neo-republican ideal of freedom as non-domination resonated strongly with the IWGB's couriers' accounts of arbitrary forms of power they faced working in the gig-economy. On the other, however, the instrumental relationship between democratic participation and freedom which this ideal establishes leaves the door too far open to forms of democratic voice at work which would challenge, but insufficiently transform the antagonistic relationship between the interests of platform companies and its workers. I thus supplemented this view of freedom as non-domination with a positive conception of freedom as self-development gleaned from Carol Gould (1999, 2019), which conceives of an intrinsic relationship between democratic participation in collective decision-making, the effective exercise of agency, and the creation of relations of equality (i.e., non-dominating relations). This not only helped disambiguate between the 'subordinate' forms of agency on-demand couriers have at their disposal and the political agency to participate as equals in shaping the conditions of their own work, but most importantly led to a defence of a form of workplace democracy (and, more narrowly, platform co-operativism) where workers have a controlling say in the management of the firm and are not merely beneficiaries of others' power. Such a form of workplace democracy starts breaking down the antagonism of class interests which are particularly pervasive in the platform economy, thus removing a key source of domination, while expanding worker-members' capacity for agency and control over their working lives and encouraging democratic habits and dispositions through a structure of social reciprocity. Bringing these neo-republican and participatory-democratic ideals of freedom, equality, and agency into a dialogue with the IWGB's couriers' critiques of the relations of power they face at work thus helped to not only to deepen the articulation of the latter's normative concerns, but also to go beyond the negative moment of their critiques and towards a credible idea of an alternative, more democratic way of organizing work.

An important insight that emerged in this same chapter is that the structural forms of domination that on-demand couriers are subject to, namely the economic vulnerability and precarity that coerces them to work, are not fully addressed by democratizing work at the level of the firm only. The embeddedness of democratized workplaces such as platform co-operatives in a capitalist economy limits their challenge to the more structural causes of precarity, while also pressuring such worker co-operatives or labour-managed enterprises to pursue interests and goals in isolation from broader social interests. In chapter five and six I then addressed these limitations by considering post-work theorists' proposals for a Universal Basic Income (UBI) and collective working-time reduction (WTR) (Weeks, 2011; Srnicek & Williams, 2016; Bastani, 2019; Stronge & Lewis, 2021), as well as Pat Devine's model of democratic economic planning (Devine, 1988). Both these chapters were framed around the hope and desire expressed by the IWGB's couriers for 'flexibility without precarity' at work. That is, a desire for more autonomy and self-determination inside and outside of work. In chapter five I argued for the emancipatory potential of post-work proposals of UBI and WTR, while drawing on debates around the distinction between private and political freedom to point out some of their limitations. Demands for a UBI and WTR, if articulated in a way that does not make the free time and security of some depend on the work or precarity of others, are redistributive proposals that would essentially decommodify work. Introducing a basic income could transform precarity and unemployment into a state of voluntary flexibility, speaking directly to the couriers' hopes. It would provide the economic security for citizens to meet under conditions of relative equality, unburdened by relationships of dependency. Reducing collective working time is similarly aimed at decommodifying work through the redistribution of social wealth. It would open up time free from the dependency on work, enabling people to develop in ways less tethered to the necessity of making a living. Both these proposals have the emancipatory potential to free up more autonomous time outside of work, while transforming the latter into a more voluntary activity.

However, the distinction I made with Hannah Arendt between private and political freedom, extended through the insights of more contemporary thinkers such as Robin Celikates, Christian Rosbøll and Carol Gould, enabled me to insist on the democratic limitations of these proposals. That is, while these proposals would provide material conditions for democratic social relations and expand individuals' capacity for autonomy, they leave the political unfreedom of workers in their workplace largely unaddressed. Most importantly, they do not by themselves extend democratic powers over production and the latter's purpose, which remains dominated by private interests. From the perspective of democracy as a social ideal, it is not enough to provide the material conditions for individual self-governance, this must be accompanied by pathways that enable citizens to have a democratic voice in their workplace and the purpose of the economic environment in which the latter is embedded. Here too, then, the democratic-theoretic ideals of equality, agency, and freedom drawn on enabled a critical contribution to debates about the democratization of work by teasing out the democratic potential and limitations of post-work proposals.

Chapter six then explored models of democratic economic planning, particularly Pat Devine's model of negotiated coordination, as a viable way to extend democratic processes of

deliberation and decision-making over the economy as a whole. I argue that his conceptions of social ownership and democratic economic planning as a deliberative process of 'negotiated coordination' offer particularly salient starting points for thinking about the relationship between democratically-run workplaces and a democratic economy that addresses the structural constraints noted in chapter four. A big contribution to discussions around democratizing work that these ideas offer is the insight that democratizing work cannot be thought of as only taking place in the workplace in isolation from the economic relations in which the latter is inescapably enmeshed. While replacing the private authority of capital in the workplace with a cooperative model or that of a labour-managed firm has distinct democratic strengths, as we saw in chapter four, this precludes the interests of other constituencies affected by these firms' decisions from being taken into account, and thus also limits the extent to which the purposes of these firms can be shaped according to the wider social interests of society as a whole. To speak about workplace democracy means speaking about the socialization of work in one way or another, at which point it becomes arbitrary to insulate the internal goals and aims of the firm from those of democratic society at large. To put it briefly, workplace democracy is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the democratization of work. The latter implies considering the relationship between democratically run workplaces and the wider democratic society they are embedded in.

Devine and others who have developed models of democratic economic planning enable us to think through a host of democratic dilemmas that come up in this effort: how to include other constituencies in the government of enterprises, how to safeguard the autonomy of workplaces while having them be informed by socially constituted interests, how to politicize economic relations without concentrating power in the state, and how to safeguard political pluralism in a democratically planned economy. Drawing on democratic ideals of the transformational potential of deliberation participatory decision-making, Devine's conceptions of social ownership and negotiated coordination also offer new pathways for thinking about democratizing platform work such as that of on-demand couriers. Socially owned on-demand platforms would combine democratic worker control over the internal functioning of the platform and the labour process with a form of social ownership that replaces private interest towards the extraction of profit replaced with that of the platform's workers, consumers, and the wider public affected by the platform's actions. This would go beyond the dichotomy between private ownership and a top-down process of nationalization, and towards a system of different-sized worker-run, socially owned platforms that serve deliberatively constituted common interests.

Lastly, drawing again on the ideal of political freedom previously articulated, I argue that whereas post-work proposals extend citizens' capacity for individual autonomy and remove many impediments to political action, Devine's conceptions of social ownership and negotiated coordination are more salient proposals from the perspective of democracy as a social ideal. While the freedom *from* work that post-work proposals promise is a crucial condition for social relations of equality, they are not sufficient for exercising and maintaining such equality without pathways for participation in economic, collective self-governance – i.e., without political freedom in the economy. These are by no means incompatible demands and are in fact

mutually dependent as I have explored, but I claim that post-work demands for progressive freedom from work cannot do without demands for social ownership over productive assets if they are to contribute to democratic social relations.

If these proposals of democratic workplaces, freedom from work, and social ownership seem utopian and a step removed from the current reality of the IWGB's couriers and that of other workers, it is because they in a sense are. However, this is also what this project set out to do: to tune my ears to the experiences, concerns and critiques of on-demand couriers organizing through their union while extending these to go beyond the here and now by drawing on democratic ideas and ideals. Thus, while these proposals are utopian in the sense that they point towards what is not yet, or what is possible, they are rooted both in couriers' present concerns as well as the concrete trends explored in the first chapter. After all, as we have seen, co-operative workplaces do exist, and proposals to collectively reduce working time, introduce a basic income, and socially own an enterprise are experimented with today. Furthermore, with the persistent trends towards underemployment and the long-term historical trend of capitalist development towards highly social forces of production, these are proposals that lie as possibilities within historical reality itself. To be clear, this is not a re-heating of an orthodox Marxist *prediction* of any such future based on objective tendencies. As I argued in chapter three with Chantal Mouffe, the realization of any of these proposals depends on fallible attempts to politically organize in the face of harsh constraints. However, any hegemonic transformation also depends on a credible vision of a different future; an imagination of how things could be otherwise.

Our capacity for such imagination, to think beyond what is given, should not be thought of as miraculous: thinking beyond what is directly given is a capacity most people exercise daily and is part of the fabric that makes up reality. However, when it comes to work, the conviction that there simply is no alternative to the way it is currently organized is widespread. Such 'workplace realism' can be seen as part of what Mark Fisher famously termed capitalist realism: the sense that there is no alternative to capitalism, however much we might criticize it (Fisher, 2009). The proposals considered in the previous chapters to democratize the workplace, decommodify work, and democratize the economy are attempts to break with both forms of realism by eliciting credible alternative visions of emancipated forms of work. The point however has not been to propose one particular model as the only right way forward, but to chart a direction for new ways to organize work and economic decision-making.

The relationship between the struggles of couriers in the here-and-now and the proposals guided by democratic ideals that point beyond the present is then one we can think of with Kathi Weeks as an attempt to think together the 'real-possible' and the 'novum' (Weeks, 2011, p. 197). That is, 'the new that is familiar insofar as it is sown from the seeds of the present' and a novelty that constitutes a radical kind of rupture from today's world (ibid).[109] The development of the previous chapters has, in a sense, charted a movement from a novelty that is strongly rooted in the present, to a novelty that radically breaks with the present conjuncture: from

[109] Kathi Weeks draws extensively on Ernst Bloch's ideas on utopianism and his conception of the 'novum'.

contesting domination at work to democratic economic planning. However, as detailed some of these visions may be, particularly Devine's conception of democratic economic planning, they should not be thought of as 'all-or-nothing' proposals that must be adopted or rejected wholesale. They are rather best understood, drawing again on Weeks, as utopian provocations or demands whose function is not prescriptive but serves rather to 'enlist participants in the practice of inventing broader visions and methods of change' (Weeks, 2011, p. 222). That is, the proposals for democratic workplaces, freedom from work, and social ownership articulated throughout this thesis are suggestive of directions for change in ways that break with the present in potentially radical ways: they do not offer clear-cut destinations as such.

Throughout the thesis it has then become clear that the ideals of equality, freedom, and agency found in different democratic-theoretic literatures enabled an opening-up of political imaginaries for the democratization of work that point far beyond the present, even if they stay rooted in it. However, I have also pointed out some limitations of the most common approaches to democratic theorizing, particularly agonist and deliberative approaches. In chapter three I argued that despite the merits of Chantal Mouffe's conceptions of hegemony and agonism, her ontological approach to democratic theorizing withholds her from articulating any kind of proposal for the democratization of work or the economy and leads to a rarefied idea of political agency. Exploring the themes of fragmentation and individualization that emerged from my engagement with the IWGB's couriers revealed a material dimension of constraint to the forging of collective agency that was too easily neglected by Mouffe's methodological orientation. Furthermore, while not discussed in as much depth as Mouffe's agonism, I argued in chapter two and six that the normative preoccupation of deliberative democratic theory with issues of democratic communication and legitimacy have deterred much of this literature from engaging with questions around democratizing work, even if their insights around the transformational dynamic of deliberation have much to contribute to debates around social ownership and economic decision-making.

These criticisms point to the meta-theoretical contribution this thesis has made. That is, by being attuned to the critiques and experiences of on-demand couriers and threading these together in complementary and critical ways with democratic-theoretic ideals of equality, freedom, and agency, I have shown one way in which it is possible to theorize with a 'democratic sensibility'. Building on Robin Celikates' work, with supporting roles given to Theodor Adorno and Patricia Hill-Collins, I articulate in chapter two a methodological approach towards democratic theorizing that incorporates a principle of epistemic equality, a presupposition of and aim towards autonomy, and an attentiveness to existing practices of justification and critique. The aim of this approach has been, firstly, to stay alive to the disclosing element of negative social experiences as told by actors engaged in particular struggles themselves, and as such to be attuned to those social relations that stand in need of democratization. Secondly, by listening to the experiences and critiques of on-demand couriers, the aim has been to broaden the range of insights, issues, and normative concerns to go beyond those found within the confines of the theoretical literature. Not deriving normative concerns straightforward from one or another conception of democracy – deliberative, agonistic, or otherwise – and not needing to trace back the plurality of problems on-demand couriers and workers face to a single principle

has enabled a more open-ended form of enquiry that nonetheless retains the element of critique. I do not claim to be alone in taking such an approach, or that the way in which I adopted a democratic sensibility in this project by building on interviews and participatory observation is the only way to do so. However, this thesis does contribute as a, hopefully stimulating, exemplar of how what I called a democratic sensibility could be translated to approach other pressing issues with an eye towards furthering social relations of equality.

Lastly, I want to point out some limitations to this project that suggest pathways to further research. Firstly, in this project I have mostly bracketed the international dimension to the democratization of work and the economy, mostly for reasons of scope and focus. However, considering the globalized character of supply chains and corporations, a fuller discussion on democratizing work and the economy would need to take this international dimension into account. Does democratizing work in the context of globalized capitalism and multinational corporations imply a drastic change in scale of such enterprises? How could international supply chains be democratized in a way that avoids the (for now entirely hypothetical) situation of a democratized 'lead' firm mobilizing and exploiting a string of other, non-democratized firms in the supply chain? Or vice versa, the situation of co-operatives or labour-managed firms in the global south getting locked in a supply chain of which the majority of surplus-value created is captured by a multi-national corporation? Furthermore, as Andrea Komlosy notes, '(…) overcoming work through displacement runs through human history to the present day' (Komlosy, 2018, p. 26). When it comes to the post-work proposals discussed, how could exactly this situation be avoided? That is, how can it be avoided that the enjoyment of, say, a universal basic income in the global north comes to depend on migrant labour within the relevant country, or exploited labour in the global south which produces the wealth captured by countries in the global north which then redistribute it as a basic income? These are all questions that are highly relevant to discussions around the democratization of work and the economy that are worth pursuing in much more depth than could be done in this thesis.

Secondly, various authors have repeatedly pointed out the way in which capitalist work sits at the nexus between the domination of human beings and the domination of nature (for example, Bookchin, 1993; Plumwood, 1993; 2002). In this thesis I have focused quite squarely on the former, while only bringing in concerns about the latter where these have been relevant. However, given the magnitude of the threat that the climate crisis poses and the latter's inextricable relationship to a capitalist organization of the economy shaped by narrow interests towards the extraction of surplus, there are many avenues for further research that this thesis has left unexplored. How could work be democratized in a way that takes into account its environmental and ecological effects? How could debates on democratic economic planning contribute to ideas for moving towards a decarbonized economy that respects the ecosystems on which it depends?[110] Furthermore, as there is no guarantee even in a democratized economy that the social interests that inform the latter would respect ecological limitations or environmental concerns, how would contradictions between democratic will and ecological

[110] For example, Matthew Huber has recently argued for a form of social ownership of utilities, in particular the electricity sector, as a crucial pathway towards a decarbonized economy (Huber, 2022).

limitations be negotiated? Such questions fell outside of the scope of this project but are promising pathways for further research.

As I argued in the first chapter of this thesis, work has become more precarious while being at the same time construed as a crucial path for gaining social recognition and a key site for the fulfilment of the self. Yet, workers have no democratic voice or determining say over the key conditions of their work or its aims and objectives, and even less so over the impersonal market forces that they are subject to. Instead, they are subject to relations of power that coerce them into work, become subject to arbitrary forms of authority *at* work, while depending on organizations whose interests often directly undermine fundamental aspects of their own wellbeing. While the highly complex and social character of contemporary work might make it impossible to overcome the social suffering associated with work I explored in this first chapter, it can surely be transformed and become more 'worldly' in the Arendtian sense. That is, by being able to have a democratic voice in one's workplace and participate in its decision-making processes, and by creating institutions for the democratic negotiation and deliberation on the direction of the economy and the social interests that inform that direction, such suffering is increasingly rendered *public* and thus amenable to change. By drawing on democratic ideals of equality, freedom, and agency, and bringing these into conversation with on-demand couriers' experiences and critiques of their work in the gig-economy, this thesis has explored pathways for making our economic relations to one-another, our interdependency, more worldly in this sense, and as such more free.

Bibliography

Ackerly, B., Cabrera, L., Forman, F., Johnson, G. F., Tenove, C., & Wiener, A. (2021). Unearthing Grounded Normative Theory: Practices and Commitments of Empirical Research in Political Theory. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 1–27.

Adaman, F., & Devine, P. (1996). The Economic Calculation Debate: Lessons for Socialists. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, *20*(5), 523–537.

Adaman, F., & Devine, P. (2001). Participatory planning as a deliberative democratic process: A response to Hodgson's critique. *Economy and Society*, *30*(2), 229–239. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085140120042299

Adaman, F., & Devine, P. (2022). Clarifications on democracy and economic planning: An engagement with Robin Hahnel. *Studies in Political Economy*, *103*(2), 173–181. https://doi.org/10.1080/07078552.2022.2096778

Adkins, L., & Dever, M. (2016). *The Post-Fordist Sexual Contract: Working and Living in Contingency*. Springer.

Adorno, T., & Horkheimer, M. (1997). *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (J. Cumming, Trans.). Verso.

Adorno, T. W. (2004). *Negative Dialectics* (E. B. Ashton, Trans.). Routledge.

Adorno, T. W. (2005). *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*. Columbia University Press.

Aglietta, M. (2000). *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience* (Vol. 28). Verso.

Albert, M., & Hahnel, R. (1991). The Political Economy of Participatory Economics. In *The Political Economy of Participatory Economics*. Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691216003

Albert, M., & Hahnel, R. (2002). In Defense of Participatory Economics. *Science & Society*, *66*(1), 7–21. https://doi.org/10.1521/siso.66.1.7.21015

Alcoff, L. M. (2007). Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types. In N. T. Shannon Sullivan (Ed.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (pp. 39–57). State University of New York Press.

Anderson, E. (2015). Equality and Freedom in the Workplace: Recovering Republican Insights. *Social Philosophy and Policy*, *31*(2), 48–69. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000259

Anderson, E. (2019). *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)*. Princeton University Press.

Apostolidis, P. (2018). *The Fight for Time: Migrant Day Laborers and the Politics of Precarity*. Oxford University Press.

Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press.

Arendt, H. (1963). *On Revolution*.

Arendt, H. (1968). *Men in Dark Times*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Arendt, H. (2000). *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (P. Baehr, Ed.). Penguin Books New York.

Aristotle. (1959). *Politics and the Athenian Constitution* (J. Warrington, Ed. & Trans.). Everyman's Library.

Arnau, R. (2022, November 2). *Ja podem demanar un taxi a Barcelona a través d'una app pública: Així funciona la nova 'Picmi Taxi'*. cadena SER. https://cadenaser.com/cataluna/2022/11/02/ja-podem-demanar-un-taxi-a-barcelona-a-traves-duna-app-publica-aixi-funciona-la-nova-app-picmi-taxi-sercat/

Aronowitz, S., & Cutler, J. (2013). *Post-Work: The Wages of Cybernation*. Routledge.

Arruzza, C. (2016). Functionalist, Determinist, Reductionist: Social Reproduction Feminism and its Critics. *Science & Society*, *80*(1), 9–30. https://doi.org/10.1521/siso.2016.80.1.9

Asenbaum, H. (2021a). Rethinking Democratic Innovations: A Look through the Kaleidoscope of Democratic Theory. *Political Studies Review*, 1–11.

Asenbaum, H. (2021b). The Politics of Becoming: Disidentification as Radical Democratic Practice. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *24*(1), 86–104.

Autor, D. H., & Dorn, D. (2013). The Growth of Low-Skill Service Jobs and the Polarization of the US Labor Market. *American Economic Review*, *103*(5), 1553–1597. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.103.5.1553

Bachrach, P., & Botwinick, A. (1992). *Power and Empowerment: A Radical Theory of Participatory Democracy*. Temple University Press.

Bächtiger, A., Dryzek, J. S., Mansbridge, J., & Warren, M. E. (2018). *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy*. Oxford University Press.

Bastani, A. (2019). *Fully Automated Luxury Communism*. Verso Books.

Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. Sage.

Benanav, A. (2020a). *Automation and the Future of Work*. Verso.

Benanav, A. (2020b). *How to Make a Pencil*. Logic Magazine. https://logicmag.io/commons/how-to-make-a-pencil/

Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press.

Birnbaum, S., & De Wispelaere, J. (2021). Exit strategy or exit trap? Basic income and the 'power to say no' in the age of precarious employment. *Socio-Economic Review*, *19*(3), 909–927. https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwaa002

Boggs, C. (1977). Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, And The Problem Of Workers' Control. *Radical America*, *11*.

Boltanski, L., & Chiapello, E. (2005). *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (G. Elliott, Trans.). Verso. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=9QuQihQ_4GsC

Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (2006). *On Justification: Economies of Worth* (Vol. 27). Princeton University Press.

Borkin, S. (n.d.). *Platform co-operatives – solving the capital conundrum*. 44.

Bourdieu, P. (1990a). *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*. Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990b). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time*. Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian Meditations*. Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P., Accardo, A., & Emanuel, S. (1999). *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*. Alhoda UK.

Breen, K. (2015). Freedom, Republicanism, and Workplace Democracy. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, *18*(4), 470–485. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2015.1033857

Breen, K. (2017). Non-Domination, Workplace Republicanism, and the Justification of Worker Voice and Control. *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, *33*(Issue 3), 419–439. https://doi.org/10.54648/IJCL2017018

Breen, K., & Hirvonen, O. (2022). Workplace Democracy and Republican Freedom. In K. Breen & J.-P. Deranty (Eds.), *The Politics and Ethics of Contemporary Work: Whither Work?* (pp. 150–165). Routledge.

Brenner, R. (2006). *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005*. Verso.

Brown, W. (2015). *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Zone Books.

Brus, W., Laski, K., Brus, W., & Laski, K. (1991). *From Marx to the Market: Socialism in Search of an Economic System*. Oxford University Press.

Butler, J. (1997). *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford University Press.

Butler, J. (2006). *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. verso.

Cachon, G. P., Daniels, K. M., & Lobel, R. (2017). The Role of Surge Pricing on a Service Platform with Self-Scheduling Capacity. *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management*, *19*(3), 368–384. https://doi.org/10.1287/msom.2017.0618

Cahill, D., & Konings, M. (2017). *Neoliberalism*. John Wiley & Sons.

Castells, M. (2011). *The Rise of the Network Society* (Vol. 12). John wiley & sons.

Celikates, R. (2014). Freedom as Non-Arbitrariness or as Democratic Self-Rule? A Critique of Contemporary Republicanism. In C. Dahl & T. A. Nexø (Eds.), *To be Unfree: Republicanism and Unfreedom in History, Literature, and Philosophy*. transcript.

Celikates, R. (2018). *Critique as Social Practice: Critical Theory and Social Self-Understanding*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Chambers, S. (2003). Deliberative Democratic Theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *6*(1), 307–326. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.6.121901.085538

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. SAGE.

Chibber, V. (2022). *The Class Matrix: Social Theory after the Cultural Turn*. Harvard University Press.

Christophe Dejours, J.-P. D., Emmanuel Renault, Nicholas H. Smith. (2018). *The Return of Work in Critical Theory: Self, Society, Politics*. New York : Columbia University Press.

Christophers, B. (2022). *Rentier Capitalism: Who Owns the Economy, and Who Pays for It?* Verso Books.

Claassen, R., & Herzog, L. (2021). Why economic agency matters: An account of structural domination in the economic realm. *European Journal of Political Theory*, *20*(3), 465–485. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885119832181

Cockshott, P., & Cottrell, A. (1993). *Towards a New Socialism*. Spokesman.

Cohen, J. (1989). The Economic Basis of Deliberative Democracy. *Social Philosophy and Policy*, *6*(2), 25–50. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052500000625

Cole, G. D. H. (1920). *Guild Socialism Restated*. Leonard Parsons.

Collier, R. B. (1999). *Paths Toward Democracy: The Working Class and Elites in Western Europe and South America*. Cambridge University Press.

Constant, B. (2016). 16. The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns. In R. Blaug & J. Schwarzmantel (Eds.), *Democracy* (pp. 108–110). Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/blau17412-021

Crouch, C. (2004). *Post-Democracy*. Polity Cambridge.

Crouch, C. (2016). The March Towards Post-Democracy, Ten Years On. *The Political Quarterly*, *87*(1), 71–75. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12210

Cukier, A. (2022). Democratic Work: Grounds, Models, and Implications. In K. Breen & J.-P. Deranty (Eds.), *The Politics and Ethics of Contemporary Work: Whither Work?* (pp. 150–165). Routledge.

Dahl, R. A. (1985). A Preface to Economic Democracy. In *A Preface to Economic Democracy*. University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520341166

Dalla Costa, M., & James, S. (1975). *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community* (Falling Wall Press).

Davies, A. (2020). Wages and Working Time in the 'Gig Economy'. *King's Law Journal*, *31*(2), 250–259.

Davies, H., Goodley, S., Lawrence, F., Lewis, P., O'Carroll, L., & Cutler, S. (2022, July 11). Uber broke laws, duped police and secretly lobbied governments, leak reveals. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/jul/10/uber-files-leak-reveals-global-lobbying-campaign

De Spiegelaere, S., & Piasna, A. (2017). *The Why and How of Working-Time Reduction*. European Trade Union Institute.

Dean, J. (2009). *Democracy and other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*. Duke University Press.

Dean, M. (2010). *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*. Sage.

Denning, M. (2010). Wageless Life. *New Left Review*, *66*, 79–97.

Devine, P. (1988). *Democracy and Economic Planning* (1st edition). Polity.

Devine, P. (2017). Ecosocialism For a New Era. In R. Westra, R. Albritton, & S. Jeong (Eds.), *Varieties of Alternative Economic Systems: Practical Utopias for an Age of Global Crisis and Austerity*. Routledge.

Doorn, N. V. (2020). From a Wage to a Wager: Dynamic Pricing in the Gig Economy. In W. S. James Muldoon (Ed.), *Platforming Equality: Policy Challenges for the Digital Economy*. Autonomy.

Doorn, N. V., Ferrari, F., & Graham, M. (2020). Migration and Migrant Labour in the Gig Economy: An Intervention. *SSRN 3622589*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3622589

Doorn, N. van. (2020). At what price? Labour politics and calculative power struggles in on-demand food delivery. *Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation*. https://doi.org/10.13169/workorgalaboglob.14.1.0136

Dow, G. K. (2003). *Governing the Firm: Workers' Control in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Dryzek, J. S., & Dryzek, P. of P. S. J. (1996). *Democracy in Capitalist Times: Ideals, Limits, and Struggles*. Oxford University Press.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (2016). *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. Verso.

Dubet, F. (2016). *Injustice at Work*. Routledge.

Duffy, M. (2007). Doing the Dirty Work: Gender, Race, and Reproductive Labor in Historical Perspective. *Gender & Society*, *21*(3), 313–336. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243207300764

Duncan, P. (2022, July 15). The worldwide scale of the Uber files – in numbers. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/jul/15/the-worldwide-scale-of-the-uber-files-in-numbers

Dupuis-Déri, F. (2004). The Political Power of Words: The Birth of Pro-Democratic Discourse in the Nineteenth Century in the United States and France. *Political Studies*, *52*(1), 118–134.

Durand, C. (2020). *Technoféodalisme: Critique de l'économie numérique*. La Découverte.

Durand, C. (2022). Scouting Capital's Frontiers: Reply to Morozov's 'Critique of Techno-Fuedal Reason'. *New Left Review*, *136*.

Ehrenreich, B., & Ehrenreich, J. (1979). The Professional-Managerial Class. In P. Walker (Ed.), *Between Labor and Capital* (pp. 5–48). South End Press.

Eley, G. (2002). *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*. Oxford University Press.

Elgarte, J. M. (2008). Basic Income and the Gendered Division of Labour. *Basic Income Studies*, *3*(3). https://doi.org/10.2202/1932-0183.1136

Emiliano Mellino, C. B., Gareth Davies. (2021). *Deliveroo riders can earn as little as £2 an hour during shifts, as boss stands to make £500m*. https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2021-03-25/deliveroo-riders-earning-as-little-as-2-pounds

Errejón, Í., & Mouffe, C. (2016). *Podemos: In the Name of the People*. Lawrence & Wishart.

Escobar, O. (2017). Pluralism and Democratic Participation: What Kind of Citizen are Citizens Invited to be? *Contemporary Pragmatism*, *14*(4), 416–438. https://doi.org/10.1163/18758185-01404002

Evelyn Huber, D. R., John D. Stephens. (1997). Economic Development and Democracy (the Role of Subordinate Classes). In E. Etzioni-Halevy (Ed.), *Classes and Elites in Democracy and Democratization: A Collection of Readings*. Taylor & Francis.

Farrugia, D. (2013). Young People and Structural Inequality: Beyond the Middle Ground. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *16*(5), 679–693.

Farrugia, D. (2018). The Formation of Young Workers: The Cultivation of the Self as a Subject of Value to the Contemporary Labour Force. *Current Sociology*, 0011392118793681.

Farrugia, D. (2019). How Youth Become Workers: Identity, Inequality and the Post-Fordist Self. *Journal of Sociology*, *55*(4), 708–723.

Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* John Hunt Publishing.

Five Criteria to Evaluate Democratic Economic Planning Models. (n.d.). https://doi.org/10.1177/04866134221093747

Floridia, A. (2017). *From Participation to Deliberation: A Critical Genealogy of Deliberative Democracy*. Ecpr Press.

Fossen, T. (2008). Agonistic Critiques of Liberalism: Perfection and Emancipation. *Contemporary Political Theory*, *7*(4), 376–394.

Foucault, M. (1984). *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. Penguin.

Foucault, M. (2007). *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*. Springer.

Foucault, M. (2008). *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (G. Burchell, Trans.). Springer.

Fraser, N. (2017). Crisis of Care? On the Social-Reproductive Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism. In *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (pp. 2–36). Pluto Press.

Frayne, D. (2015). *The Refusal of Work: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Work*. Zed Books Ltd.

Gall, G. (2020). Emerging forms of worker collectivism among the precariat: When will capital's 'gig' be up? *Capital & Class*, *44*(4), 485–492. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309816820906344

Geras, N. (1990). *Discourses of Extremity: Radical Ethics and Post-Marxist Extravangences*. Verso.

Gilbert, J. (2008). After '68: Narratives of the new capitalism. *New Formations*, *65*(65), 34–53.

Glenn, E. N. (1992). From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *18*(1), 1–43. https://doi.org/10.1086/494777

Gomis, R., Kapsos, S., Kühn, S., & Liepmann, H. (2020). *World Employment and Social Outlook—Trends 2020*. ILO.

González-Ricoy, I. (2014). The Republican Case for Workplace Democracy. *Social Theory and Practice*, *40*(2), 232–254.

Goodin, R. E. (2007). Enfranchising All Affected Interests, and Its Alternatives. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, *35*(1), 40–68.

Goos, M., Manning, A., & Salomons, A. (2014). Explaining Job Polarization: Routine-Biased Technological Change and Offshoring. *American Economic Review*, *104*(8), 2509–2526.

Gould, C. (2019). Protecting Democracy by Extending It: Democratic Management Reconsidered. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, *50*(4), 513–535.

Gould, C. C. (1988). *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Co-operation in Politics, Economy, and Society*. Cambridge University Press.

Gourevitch, A. (2011). Labor and Republican Liberty. *Constellations*, *18*(3), 25.

Gourevitch, A. (2013). Labor Republicanism and the Transformation of Work. *Political Theory*, *41*(4), 591–617. https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591713485370

Gourevitch, A. (2016). The Limits of a Basic Income: Means and Ends of Workplace Democracy. *Basic Income Studies*, *11*(1). https://doi.org/10.1515/bis-2016-0008

Gregory, K., & Sadowski, J. (2021). Biopolitical Platforms: The Perverse Virtues of Digital Labour. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 1–13.

Griesbach, K., Reich, A., Elliott-Negri, L., & Milkman, R. (2019). Algorithmic Control in Platform Food Delivery Work. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, *5*, 237802311987004. https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023119870041

Grossman, V. (2006). *Life and Fate*. Vintage.

Gutmann, A., & Thompson, D. (2004). *Why Deliberative Democracy?* Princeton University Press.

Habermas, J. (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. 2). Beacon press.

Hahnel, R. (2012). *Of the People, By the People: The Case for a Participatory Economy*. AK Press.

Hahnel, R. (2021). *Democratic Economic Planning*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003173700

Hardt, M. (1999). Affective Labor. *Boundary 2*, *26*(2), 89–100.

Harvey, D. (1990). *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Blackwell Oxford.

Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

Hayden, A. (1999). *Sharing the work, sparing the planet*. London ; New York : Zed Books ; Toronto : Between the Lines ; Sydney : Pluto Press. http://archive.org/details/sharingworkspari0000hayd_f4q7

Hayek, F. A. (1945). The Use of Knowledge in Society. *The American Economic Review*, *35*(4), 519–530.

Heelas, P. (2002). Work Ethics, Soft Capitalism and the 'Turn to Life'. In P. P. Du Gay Michael (Ed.), *Cultural Economy: Cultural Analysis and Commercial Life*. Sage.

Held, D. (2006). *Models of Democracy*. Stanford University Press.

Heller, A. (1991). The Concept of the Political Revisited. *Political Theory Today*, 330–343.

Herzog, L., & Zacka, B. (2019). Fieldwork in Political Theory: Five Arguments for an Ethnographic Sensibility. *British Journal of Political Science*, *49*(2), 763–784.

Higham, W. (2019). *The Work Colleague of the Future: A report on the long-term health of office workers*. Fellowes.

Hill-Collins, P. H. (2019). *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. Duke University Press.

Hilmer, J. D. (2010). The State of *Participatory* Democratic Theory. *New Political Science*, *32*(1), 43–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/07393140903492118

Hirschman, A. O. (1970). *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Harvard University Press.

Ho, B. J. (Director). (2019). *Parasite*.

Hochschild, A. R. (1997). *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*. Macmillan.

Hochschild, A. R. (2012). *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Univ of California Press.

Hochschild, A. R., & Machung, A. (2003). *The Second Shift*. Penguin Books.

Holgate, J., Simms, M., & Tapia, M. (2018). The limitations of the theory and practice of mobilization in trade union organizing. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, *39*(4), 599–616.

Honig, B. (2010). Towards an Agonistic Feminism: Arendt and the Politics of Identity. In *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* (pp. 135–166). Penn State Press.

Horgan, A. (2021). *Lost in Work: Escaping Capitalism*. Pluto Press.

How Uber Leverages Applied Behavioral Science at Scale. (2019, January 28). Uber Blog. https://www.uber.com/blog/applied-behavioral-science-at-scale/

How Uber won access to world leaders, deceived investigators and exploited violence against its drivers in battle for global dominance—ICIJ. (2022, July 10). https://www.icij.org/investigations/uber-files/uber-global-rise-lobbying-violence-technology/

Hsieh, N. (2005). Rawlsian Justice and Workplace Republicanism. *Social Theory and Practice*, *31*(1), 115–142. https://doi.org/10.5840/soctheorpract20053116

Huws, U. (2019). *Labour in Contemporary Capitalism: What Next?* Springer.

Illouz, E. (2013). *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*. Polity.

ILO. (2018). *World Employment and Social Outlook*. International Labour Institute.

Isaac, J. C. (1994). Oases in the desert: Hannah Arendt on democratic politics. *American Political Science Review*, 156–168.

Jaffe, S. (2021). *Work Won't Love You Back: How Devotion to Our Jobs Keeps Us Exploited, Exhausted and Alone*. C. Hurst & Co. Ltd.

Janover, M. (2011). Politics and worldliness in the thought of Hannah Arendt. *Action and Appearance: Ethics and the Politics of Writing in Hannah Arendt*, 25–38.

Jarrett, K. (2015). *Feminism, Labour and Digital Media: The Digital Housewife*. Routledge.

Jon, E. (1997). The Market and the Forum. In J. Bohman & W. Rehg (Eds.), *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*. MIT Press.

Jones, P. (2021). *Work Without the Worker: Labour in the Age of Platform Capitalism*. Verso.

Kalleberg, A. L. (2018). *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*. John Wiley & Sons.

Kalleberg, A. L., & Vallas, S. P. (2018). Probing Precarious Work: Theory, Research, and Politics. *Research in the Sociology of Work*, *31*(1), 1–30.

Kalyvas, A. (2019). Democracy and the Poor: Prolegomena to a Radical Theory of Democracy. *Constellations*, *26*(4), 538–553.

Keane, J. (2009). *The Life and Death of Democracy*. Simon and Schuster.

Kelly, P. (2016). *The Self as Enterprise: Foucault and the Spirit of 21st Century Capitalism*. Routledge.

Keynes, J. M. (2010). Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren. In J. M. Keynes (Ed.), *Essays in Persuasion* (pp. 321–332). Palgrave Macmillan.

Kioupkiolis, A. (2018). Movements post-hegemony: How contemporary collective action transforms hegemonic politics. *Social Movement Studies*, *17*(1), 99–112.

Knight, K. W., Rosa, E. A., & Schor, J. B. (2013). Could working less reduce pressures on the environment? A cross-national panel analysis of OECD countries, 1970–2007. *Global Environmental Change*, *23*(4), 691–700. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2013.02.017

Komlosy, A. (2018). *Work: The Last 1,000 Years*. Verso Books.

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2014). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. Verso.

Lacoue-Labarthe, P., & Nancy, J.-L. (1997). *Retreating the Political*. Psychology Press.

Laibman, D. (2002). Democratic Coordination: Towards a Working Socialism For the New Century. *Science & Society*, *66*(1), 116–129. https://doi.org/10.1521/siso.66.1.116.21016

Laibman, D. (2014). Horizontalism and Idealism in Socialist Imagination: An Appraisal of the Participatory Economy. *Science & Society*, *78*(2), 207–234. https://doi.org/10.1521/siso.2014.78.2.207

Landemore, H., & Ferreras, I. (2016). In Defense of Workplace Democracy: Towards a Justification of the Firm–State Analogy. *Political Theory*, *44*(1), 53–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591715600035

Lavoie, D. (n.d.). *Rivalry and Central Planning: The Socialist Calculation Debate Reconsidered*.

Lawrence, M., & Buller, A. (2022). *Owning the Future: Power and Property in an Age of Crisis*. Verso Books.

Lazzarato, M. (1996). Immaterial Labour. In *Radical Thought in Italy, a Potential Politics* (Vol. 7, pp. 133–150). University of Minnesota Press.

Lefort, C. (1988). *Democracy and Political Theory*. Polity Press.

Legault, F., & Tremblay-Pepin, S. (n.d.). *A brief sketch of three models of democratic economic planning*. 26.

Lemke, T. (2002). Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique. *Rethinking Marxism*, *14*(3), 49–64.

Levin, M. (1992). *The Spectre of Democracy: The Rise of Modern Democracy as Seen by its Critics*. Springer.

Lorey, I. (2015). *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*. Verso Books.

Louis, É. (2018). *The End of Eddy* (M. Lucey, Trans.). Vintage.

Lovett, F. (2010). *A General Theory of Domination and Justice*. OUP Oxford.

Luxemburg, R. (n.d.). *Reform or Revolution (1900)*. Retrieved 25 September 2022, from https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/index.htm

Macpherson, C. B. (1977). *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*. Oxford University Press.

Madison, D. S. (2020). *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (Vol. 3). Sage publications.

Malesic, J. (2022). *The End of Burnout: Why Work Drains Us and How to Build Better Lives*.

Mandel, E. (1986, September 1). In Defence of Socialist Planning. *New Left Review*, *1*(159).

Mansbridge, J., Bohman, J., Chambers, S., Christiano, T., Fung, A., Parkinson, J., Thompson, D. F., & Warren, M. E. (2012). A Systemic Approach to Deliberative Democracy. In *Deliberative Systems: Deliberative Democracy at the Large Scale* (pp. 1–26).

Marina Prentoulis, L. T. (2013). Political Theory in the Square: Protest, Representation and Subjectification. *Contemporary Political Theory*, *12*(3), 166–184.

Marx, K. (1999). *Capital: An Abridged Edition*. OUP Oxford.

Mason, R. M. (1982). *Participatory and Workplace Democracy: A Theoretical Development in Critique of Liberalism*. Southern Illinois University Press Carbondale.

Masquelier, C. (2019). Bourdieu, Foucault and the Politics of Precarity. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*, *20*(2), 135–155.

McAlevey, J. (2016). *No Shortcuts: Organizing For Power in the New Gilded Age*. Oxford University Press.

McCallum, J. (2020). *Worked Over: How Round-the-Clock Work is Killing the American Dream*. Basic Books.

McCallum, J. K. (2020). *Worked Over: How Round-The-Clock Work is Killing the American Dream*. Basic Books.

McDowell, L. (2011). *Working Bodies: Interactive Service Employment and Workplace Identities*. John Wiley & Sons.

Mckay, A., & Vanevery, J. (2000). Gender, Family, and Income Maintenance: A Feminist Case for Citizens Basic Income. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, *7*(2), 266–284. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/7.2.266

McLellan, D. (1980). *Marx's Grundrisse*. Springer.

McNay, L. (2009). Self as Enterprise: Dilemmas of Control and Resistance in Foucault's The Birth of Biopolitics. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *26*(6), 55–77.

McNay, L. (2014). *The Misguided Search For the Political*. John Wiley & Sons.

Medearis, J. (2018). After the Councils: Opposing Domination and Developing Democratic Agency. In J. Muldoon, *Council Democracy: Towards a Democratic Socialist Politics*. Routledge.

Medina, J. (2013). *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination*. Oxford University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2013). *Phenomenology of Perception* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Mihai, M. (2021). Foundational Moments, Representative Claims and the Ecology of Social Ignorance. *Political Studies*, 0032321721995639.

Möhlmann, M., Zalmanson, L., Henfridsson, O., & Gregory, R. W. (2021). Algorithmic Management of Work on Online Labor Platforms: When Matching Meets Control. *MIS Quarterly*, *45*(4), 1999–2022. https://doi.org/10.25300/MISQ/2021/15333

Morris, W. (2008). *Useful Work v. Useless Toil*. Penguin UK.

Mouffe, C. (1992). Preface: Democratic Politics Today. In C. Mouffe (Ed.), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community*. Verso.

Mouffe, C. (1993). *The Return of the Political*. Verso.

Mouffe, C. (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. Verso.

Mouffe, C. (2005). *On the Political*. Psychology Press.

Mouffe, C. (2013). *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. Verso.

Mouffe, C. (2018). *For a Left Populism*. Verso.

Moulier-Boutang, Y. (2011). *Cognitive Capitalism*. Polity.

Muldoon, J. (2018). *Council Democracy: Towards a Democratic Socialist Politics*. Routledge.

Muldoon, J. (2020). The Co-operativist Challenge to the Platform Economy. In W. S. James Muldoon (Ed.), *Platforming Equality: Policy Challenges for the Digital Economy*. Autonomy.

Muldoon, J. (2022a). A Socialist Republican Theory of Freedom and Government. *European Journal of Political Theory*, *21*(1), 47–67. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885119847606

Muldoon, J. (2022b). *Platform Socialism: How to Reclaim our Future from Big Tech*. Pluto Press.

Muldoon, J., & Raekstad, P. (2022). Algorithmic Domination in the Gig Economy. *European Journal of Political Theory*, 147488512210820. https://doi.org/10.1177/14748851221082078

Murray, C. (2016). *In Our Hands: A Plan to Replace the Welfare State*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Nash, K. (2002). Thinking Political Sociology: Beyond the Limits of Post-Marxism. *History of the Human Sciences*, *15*(4), 97–114. https://doi.org/10.1177/0952695102015004821

Negri, A., & Hardt, M. (2000). *Empire*. Harvard University Press.

Neilson, B., & Rossiter, N. (2008). Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *25*(7–8), 51–72.

Ober, J. (2007). The Original Meaning of 'Democracy': Capacity to do Things, not Majority Rule. *Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics Paper*, *090704*.

OECD. (1987). *OECD Economic Outlook, Volume 1987 Issue 1*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/oecd-economic-outlook-volume-1987-issue-1_eco_outlook-v1987-1-en

OECD. (2019). *OECD Employment Outlook 2019: The Future of Work*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/oecd-employment-outlook-2019_9ee00155-en

OECD. (2022). *Trade union density*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. http://instance.metastore.ingenta.com/content/collection/lfs-data-en

O'Shea, T. (2020). Socialist Republicanism. *Political Theory*, *48*(5), 548–572. https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591719876889

Palazzo, D. (2014). *The "Social Factory" in Postwar Italian Radical Thought from Operaismo to Autonomia* [PhD]. City University of New York.

Pateman, C. (1970). *Participation and Democratic Theory*. Cambridge University Press.

Pateman, C. (2004). Democratizing Citizenship: Some Advantages of a Basic Income. *Politics and Society*, *32*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329203261100

Paxton, M. (2019). *Agonistic Democracy: Rethinking Political Institutions in Pluralist Times*. Routledge.

Però, D. (2020). Indie unions, organizing and labour renewal: Learning from precarious migrant workers. *Work, Employment and Society*, *34*(5), 900–918.

Pettit, P. (1997). *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford University Press.

Pettit, P. (1999). Republican Freedom and Contestatory Democratization. In S. P. of P. S. and H. R. L. D. of the M. C. for I. and A. S. I. Shapiro, I. Shapiro, C. Hacker-Cordón, & R. Hardin (Eds.), *Democracy's Values*. Cambridge University Press.

Pfannebecker, M., & Smith, J. A. (2020). *Work Want Work: Labour and Desire at the End of Capitalism*. Zed Books Ltd.

Phillips, L., & Rozworski, M. (2019). *The People's Republic of Walmart: How the World's Biggest Corporations are Laying the Foundation for Socialism*. Verso Books.

Piketty, T. (2017). *Capital in the Twenty-First Century:* Belknap Press.

Planning for Entropy. (2022). Democratic Economic Planning, Social Metabolism and the Environment. *Science & Society*, *86*(2), 291–313. https://doi.org/10.1521/siso.2022.86.2.291

Polanyi, K. (2001). *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Vol. 2). Beacon press.

Poletti, T. (n.d.). *Uber and Lyft IPOs mean the cheap rides are coming to an end*. MarketWatch. Retrieved 21 September 2022, from https://www.marketwatch.com/story/uber-and-lyft-ipos-mean-the-cheap-rides-are-coming-to-an-end-2019-05-09

Popp-Madsen, B. A. (2022). *Visions of Council Democracy: Castoriadis, Arendt, Lefort*. Edinburgh University Press.

Postone, M. (1995). *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*. Cambridge University Press.

Przeworski, A. (1993). *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Reprinted). Univ. Press [u.a.].

Pugh, A. J. (2015). *The Tumbleweed Society: Working and Caring in an Age of Insecurity*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Raekstad, P., & Gradin, S. S. (2020). *Prefigurative Politics: Building Tomorrow Today*. Polity Press.

Rahman, K. S. (2017). Democracy against domination: Contesting economic power in progressive and neorepublican political theory. *Contemporary Political Theory*, *16*(1), 41–64. https://doi.org/10.1057/cpt.2016.12

Rancière, J. (1995). *On the Shores of Politics*. Verso.

Rancière, J. (1999). *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. U of Minnesota Press.

Rancière, J. (2004). *The Philosopher and his Poor*. Duke University Press.

Ravenelle, A. J. (2019). "We're Not Uber:" Control, Autonomy, and Entrepreneurship in the Gig Economy. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*.

Rehman, J. (2016). The Unfulfilled Promises of the Late Foucault and Foucauldian "Governmentality Studies". In M. C. B. Daniel Zomora (Ed.), *Foucault and Neoliberalism*.

Renault, E. (2010). A Critical Theory of Social Suffering. *Critical Horizons*, *11*(2), 221–241.

Renault, E. (2014). Work and Domination in Marx. *Critical Horizons*, *15*(2), 179–193. https://doi.org/10.1179/1440991714Z.00000000030

Rodrik, D. (2016). Premature Deindustrialization. *Journal of Economic Growth*, *21*(1), 1–33. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10887-015-9122-3

Rosanvallon, P. (2009). Democratic Universalism as a Historical Problem. *Constellations*, *16*(4), 539.

Rose, N. (1999). *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*.

Rosenblat, A. (2018). *Uberland: How Algorithms are Rewriting the Rules of Work*. University of California Press.

Rosenblat, A., & Stark, L. (2016). Algorithmic Labor and Information Asymmetries: A Case Study of Uber's Drivers. *International Journal of Communication*, *10*, 27.

Rostbøll, C. F. (2015). The Non-instrumental Value of Democracy: The Freedom Argument. *Constellations*, *22*(2), 267–278. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12159

Rueschemeyer, D., Stephens, E. H., & Stephens, J. D. (1992). *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Vol. 22). Cambridge Polity.

Sandoval, M. (2016). Fighting precarity with co-operation? Worker co-operatives in the cultural sector. *New Formations*, *88*(88), 51–68.

Saros, D. E. (2014). *Information Technology and Socialist Construction: The End of Capital and the Transition to Socialism*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315814001

Saward, M. (1998). *The Terms of Democracy*. Polity Press.

Saward, M. (2006). The Representative Claim. *Contemporary Political Theory*, *5*(3), 297–318.

Scholz, T. (2016). *Platform Cooperativism: Challenging the Corporate Sharing Economy*. Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung.

Scholz, T., & Schneider, N. (2016). *Ours to Hack and to Own: The Rise of Platform Cooperativism, A New Vision for the Future of Work and a Fairer Internet*. OR Books.

Schor, J. (2020). *After the Gig: How the Sharing Economy Got Hijacked and How to Win it Back*. Univ of California Press.

Schubert, D. J. (2014). *Suffering/Symbolic Violence* (M. Grenfell, Ed.; 2nd ed.). Acumen.

Schweickart, D. (2011). *After Capitalism*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Sennett, R., & Cobb, J. (1972). *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. Cambridge University Press. https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=6gk4AAAAIAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP8&dq=the+hidden+injuries+of+class&ots=O7xsvnnKDe&sig=_MJHMEu6Ah7oUJpP

GykHpvPylWo&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=the%20hidden%20injuries%20of%20class&f=false

Shapiro, A. (2020). Dynamic exploits: Calculative asymmetries in the on-demand economy. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, *35*(2), 162–177. https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12160

Shildrick, T., & MacDonald, R. (2012). *Poverty and Insecurity: Life in Low-Pay, No-Pay Britain*. Policy Press.

Smith, A. M. (1998). *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary*. Taylor & Francis US.

Smith, M., & Mac, J. (2018). *Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights*. Verso Books.

Spencer, D. A. (2022). A Four-Day Working Week: Its Role in a Politics of Work. *The Political Quarterly*, *93*(3), 401–407. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.13173

Srnicek, N. (2017). *Platform Capitalism*. John Wiley & Sons.

Srnicek, N., & Williams, A. (2016). *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*. Verso Books.

Stehr, P. (2022). The Boundary Problem in Workplace Democracy: Who Constitutes the Corporate Demos? *Political Theory*, 009059172211318. https://doi.org/10.1177/00905917221131821

Stockwell, S., & Isakhan, B. (Eds.). (2012). *The Secret History of Democracy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Stronge, W., & Lewis, K. (2021). *Overtime: Why We Need A Shorter Working Week*. Verso Books.

Süß, R. (2021). Horizontal Experimentalism: Rethinking Democratic Resistance. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 1–17.

Therborn, G. (1977). The Rule of Capital and the Rise of Democracy. *New Left Review*, *May/June*(103).

Townshend, J. (2004). Laclau and Mouffe's Hegemonic Project: The Story So Far. *Political Studies*, *52*(2), 269–288. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2004.00479.x

Tremblay-Pepin, S. (2022). Five Criteria to Evaluate Democratic Economic Planning Models. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, *54*(3), 265–280. https://doi.org/10.1177/04866134221093747

Tronti, M. (2019). *Workers and Capital*. Verso.

Tronto, J. C. (2013). *Caring Democracy*. New York University Press.

Tully, J. (2008). *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Volume 1, Democracy and Civic Freedom*. Cambridge University Press.

Vallas, S., & Schor, J. B. (2020). What Do Platforms Do? Understanding the Gig Economy. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *46*, 273–294.

van Parijs, P., & Vanderborght, Y. (2017). *Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy*. Harvard University Press. https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674052284

Vazquez-Arroyo, A. Y. (2008). Liberal Democracy and Neoliberalism: A Critical Juxtaposition. *New Political Science*, *30*(2), 127–159.

Virno, P. (2004). *A Grammar of the Multitude*. Semiotext (e) London.

Vrousalis, N. (2018). *Workplace Democracy Implies Economic Democracy* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 3300211). Social Science Research Network. https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3300211

Warren, M. E. (2017). A Problem-Based Approach to Democratic Theory. *American Political Science Review*, *111*(1), 39–53.

Weber, M. (2013). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (S. Kalberg, Ed. & Trans.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315063645

Weeks, K. (2011). *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Duke University Press.

Wenman, M. (2013). *Agonistic Democracy: Constituent Power in the Era of Globalisation*. Cambridge University Press.

Wolin, S. S. (2004). *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*. Princeton University Press.

Wolin, S. S. (2018). *Fugitive Democracy: And Other Essays*. Princeton University Press.

Wood, A., & Lehdonvirta, V. (2021). Antagonism beyond employment: How the 'subordinated agency'of labour platforms generates conflict in the remote gig economy. *Socio-Economic Review*.

Wood, E. M. (1998). *The Retreat From Class: A New 'True' Socialism*. Verso.

Wood, E. M. (2016). *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism*. Verso.

Woodcock, J. (2014). The Workers' Inquiry from Trotskyism to Operaismo: A Political Methodology for Investigating the Workplace. *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organizations*, *14*(3), 493–513.

Woodcock, J., & Graham, M. (2019). *The Gig Economy: A Critical Introduction*. Polity.

Wray, B. (n.d.). *After the defeat of Uber, a new taxi model is emerging in Barcelona*. The Gig Economy Project. Retrieved 1 December 2022, from https://eocampaign1.com/web-version?p=cf9268f4-5c63-11ed-9974-

dfe3f8bd39b6&pt=campaign&t=1667649922&s=d40cee027bd4f10dc6cabe2cdd22e5f9a478abcb7158b2ae87f5370c3d01b731

Wright, S. (2002). *Storming Heaven*. Pluto Press London.

Zacka, B., Ackerly, B., Elster, J., Allen, S. G., Iqtidar, H., Longo, M., & Sagar, P. (2020). Political Theory with an Ethnographic Sensibility. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 1–34.

Zalmanson, L., & Möhlmann, M. (2017). *Hands on the Wheel: Navigating Algorithmic Management and Uber Drivers' Autonomy*. 17.