When the common ground seems shattered: From self-precarisation to partial relationality in kleines postfordistisches Drama and Precarias a la Deriva

Sarah Charalambides

Supervisors:

Dr. Nicole Wolf

Dr. Stefan Nowotny

PhD in Visual Cultures

Goldsmiths, University of London

Declaration of Authorship

I, Sarah Charalambides, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

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Abstract

It is argued that in Western post-industrial economies struggles over common labour conditions are pre-empted by the internalisation of a highly individualised logic. Problematising strong desires for freedom, autonomy and self-determination in the context of cultural production, my PhD proposes possibilities for critical agency and collective resistance under the current dynamics of governmental precarisation in Western Europe.

First, I examine how the notion of self-precarisation is debated and negotiated through the artistic practice of the Berlin-based group kleines postfordistisches Drama. While narrating the everyday lived experiences of cultural producers who "freely" choose insecure living and working conditions, their video project *Kamera Läuft!* (2004) explores the potential for a critical reformation of precarious subjectivity. Secondly, I extend the scope of issues around exploitative labour in the early 2000s by taking a more intersectional approach to the critique of precarity. In doing so I turn to the activist research of the Madrid-based feminist collective Precarias a la Deriva. While bringing together antagonisms against shared yet distinct forms of feminisation among women working in the Spanish reproductive labour market, they develop a self-consciously enacted strategy for creating new socio-political alliances between stratified precarious subjectivities.

Drawing upon the theoretical works of Isabell Lorey, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Donna Haraway, I reflect on the ways in which my two case studies challenge identitarian understandings of the individual "I" and the collective "we". Through methods of militant research and consciousness-raising, both practices refresh the epistemologically, ethically and politically necessary critical encounter between the self and other(s). Ultimately my research demonstrates that it is through the articulation of partial relationality that self-precarisation can be transformed into an instrument of resistance to dominant and internalised discourses and practices of governance, enabling the imagination and production of different politics, lives and subjectivities in 21st century capitalism.

Preface – 'It's basically just me and the market'

In the summer of 2008, right when the global financial crisis hit Europe, I graduated from the graphic design department of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. After four years of training to work autonomously and generate my own content, it was obvious I would start working as an independent designer, rather than for a boss. Therefore, straight after my degree show, I rented a desk in a studio with other self-employed "young creatives" and embarked on a career in the cultural industries. After five years of working as a freelance graphic designer in and around the field of contemporary art, I was convinced I was moving towards higher levels of production and more fulfilling work than with a regular nine-to-five job at a commercial design company. At the same time, I struggled to deal with the numerous un(der)paid aspects of creative labour. Taking on new challenges at short notice, while managing multiple priorities and constantly mutating workloads, it was hard to keep my head above water. However, I enjoyed my working environment being in constant motion, filled with exciting disruptions, interesting discussions and new ideas. But in due course it became increasingly difficult for me to distinguish between production and reproduction, between work and life. Especially after I decided to combine my design practice with obtaining a degree in art history at the University of Amsterdam.

During my studies at university I was introduced to forms of academic research on the object and notion of art as well as the figure of the artist. Keen to learn more about the connection between creative practice and critical theory, I attended the fourth Former West Research Congress at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin between 18 and 24 March 2013. While considering the role of art and knowledge production in a post-1989 world, many of the theorists and thinkers present at the congress addressed the problems and potentials of the concept of the precarious. Following their discussions and debates revolving around different forms of insecurity in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism, it was evident that the precarious had become a defining feature of the everyday lives of large groups of people, including artists. Intrigued by this idea but not quite sure how it could be related to creative practice, I joined Isabell Lorey's workshop entitled 'Self-precarisation of

Cultural Producers'. It was here that I first became aware of the fantasy that flexible working and living conditions are chosen freely and autonomously.

During the workshop, Lorey presented the argument that, contrary to what neoliberal ideology suggests, the voluntary acceptance of precarious work and life is hardly based on free decision. Rather, it operates within and reproduces governmental technologies of the self that only make people believe that they act in an autonomous manner. Introducing the notion of self-precarisation, she argued that the strong beliefs in freedom and autonomy driving cultural producers can lead to a situation where self-determined modes of production contribute to the conditions for becoming an active part of the oppressive relations in contemporary capitalism. In order to demonstrate how this process of subjugation impacts the everyday lives, desires and perspectives of those whose workday is extremely flexible and largely autonomous, Lorey screened *Kamera Läuft!*, a short video made by the Berlin-based group kleines postfordistisches Drama (kpD) in 2004.

Comprised of Brigitta Kuster, Isabell Lorey, Marion von Osten and Katja Reichard, kpD investigates how cultural producers position themselves within a context where they are increasingly conventionalised as role models of economic privatisation. Developed in the framework of the research and exhibition project *Atelier Europa* at Kunstverein München in 2003, the group troubled the regulatory mechanisms through which creative workers are produced and maintained as entrepreneurial subjects. For their video project *Kamera Läuft!*, kpD interviewed fifteen cultural producers living and working in Berlin about their labour practices. Their personal testimonies were scripted into confessional monologues and acted out by nine actors in a pseudo-fictional casting setting. The result is a 35-minute fictional "sociological" documentary presenting creative subjectivities describing, analysing and evaluating their self-chosen precarious working conditions.

While first watching *Kamera Läuft!*, I was struck by the protagonists' accounts of daily experiences marked by structural instability and constantly changing demands. I recognised the situation in which every last bit of personal freedom can be taken over by work, resulting in the feeling that each minute must be devoted to something productive. The video made me think about how my own bulimic

working patterns and yo-yo hours and days were affecting my social relations and life as a whole. I was particularly struck when one of the characters stated: 'It's basically just me and the market'. This comment resonated strongly with my own individualised experience of freelancing in the cultural sector. Having to show great flexibility when undertaking work, it was not always easy for me to maintain family ties, build new friendships or develop intimate relations with people. I had shared feelings of isolation and loneliness with my studio mates, but it never occurred to me that these were directly connected to the ways in which my design and research practice was organised.

Listening to the testimonies of the cultural producers in *Kamera Läuft!*, I learned that self-precarisation not only stands for financial and material insecurity, but also has strong psychological, emotional and affective dimensions. It means that people are continuously questioned in their mode of being and continuously re-evaluate themselves as productive or unproductive beings. We cannot, however, speak only of an overpowering and totalising "economising of life" coming from the outside. In fact, many cultural producers enter into precarious circumstances of their own accord. With regards to my own situation, I always believed that I had chosen my own working conditions and that these could be arranged relatively freely and autonomously. But watching kpD's video made me realise that I had also consciously chosen the uncertainties and the lack of stability under these conditions. Nevertheless, I would not give up my own relationship to my practice, even though I knew, on some level of awareness, that the processes I was involved in were self-jeopardising.

Wondering to what extent the advantages of self-determination and the rejection of rigid orders of traditional labour regimes were still a convincing argument for self-precarisation, I felt a desire to explore possibilities for critical agency under the conscious and voluntary acceptance of precarious labour. I consequently began to ask the following key questions: Are there any possibilities for resistance, when power is no longer repressively exercised "from above" but rather through individual self-governing, and exercising, modes of behaviour? What happens if self-precarisation, with all its ambivalence, has destructive consequences for those who think they have successfully appropriated flexible working and living conditions in a

counter-hegemonic way? How can freelance creative workers become more engaged political actors and move away from the idea that 'It's basically just me and the market'? And how can they do so collectively?

It was precisely this last question that prompted my PhD research in the Visual Cultures department at Goldsmiths. Pursuing ways to interrupt processes of individualisation in a highly segmented sector, I came to London to investigate cultural practices that refigure commonality from within fragmented experience. My trajectory led me to various artistic and creative research projects, of which two are critically appraised in this thesis. Besides examining the notion of self-precarisation through kpD's video, my PhD looks at the work of the Madrid-based feminist collective Precarias a la Deriva (PalD). To extend the scope of issues around structural insecurity in neoliberal post-Fordist societies, their publication and video project *A la Deriva, Por los Circuitos de la Precariedad Femenina* (*Adrift Through the Circuits of Feminised Precarious Work*) from 2003 brings together antagonisms against shared yet distinct forms of exploitation among women working in the Spanish reproductive labour market in the early 2000s.

Focusing on the specific research procedures and organising goals of their workshops on globalised care held in Madrid in 2003, PalD provided me with a different kind of inflection on the problem of self-precarisation. By actively countering the agendas and self-interests of patriarchal and neo-colonial capitalism, their activist research challenges portrayals of social life in terms of atomisation or unconnectedness. Analysing PalD's practice of becoming common with others allowed me to determine strategies that have the potential to *collectively* loosen constraints and resist the exclusionary mechanisms inherent in cultural production. Through a focus on their militant political ethics, I could work out if, and when, new collective forms of action take shape, and which forms they are, or could be. Their feminist form of self-organisation made me realise that antagonisms in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism are not reducible to a personal struggle against oneself, but also require thinking and creating alliances with social and political actors outside the creative industries.

Very much informed by the urgencies of the world I have lived in since 2008, this thesis can be seen as an effort to rethink relationality under the becoming-normal of precarisation in Western Europe. By exploring possibilities for struggle and resistance under the individualising mechanisms of neoliberal self-government, I position myself in relation to the current and past discussions within which my two case studies are located. Expanding the discursive strategies of both kpD and PalD and bringing them into the present, my research proposes a conceptual reconfiguration of precarious work and life in the 21st century to enable the imagination and production of an insurgent togetherness at a moment in which the common ground seems shattered. In the following introduction I detail the central layout and structure of this thesis, as well as the methods employed.

Introduction – When the common ground seems shattered: From self-precarisation to partial relationality

1. Self-precarisation in kleines postfordistisches Drama

In the introduction of her book *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, Isabell Lorey states that 'if we fail to understand precarisation, then we understand neither the politics nor the economy of the present' (Lorey 2015, 1). Drawing upon Lorey's writings on forms of regulation in modern Western societies, my PhD starts by unpacking the complex interactions between instruments of governing and the conditions of economic exploitation, as well as modes of subjectivation in their ambivalence between subjugation and self-empowerment. Employing a Foucauldian-inflected genealogical analysis of the term "precarious", the first chapter of this thesis investigates some of the historical practices by which insecurity has become an object of techniques and deployments of power. Beginning with a search into the origins and developments of its meaning, I trace the contingencies in thinking and representing the precarious. From the precarial relations between owners and non-owners in early modern Europe to the emergence of precarity as a central political motif of the global movement in the early 2000s, the reproduction of exploitation and exclusionary mechanisms inherent in the concept cannot be dismissed.

Yet it seems there is something particular about its regime in the 21st century. Where subjects internalise abilities in order to control themselves and be subjects of control, precarisation can be regarded as a technology of the self that happens through a process of privatisation and individualisation. As capitalism advances, the consequences of this mode of subjectivation are hard to ignore. The restructuring of production that accompanied the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism was followed by radical ideological changes, including the offloading of governance functions onto private instances. As a result of the dismantling of state responsibility and the promotion of self-optimisation, working and living conditions in post-industrial economies have become increasingly unstable, insecure and flexible. A growing culture of entrepreneurialism and the rise of neoliberal modes of thought and

behaviour lead to a constant overtaxing of time and capacities as well as the weakening of collective bonds (Rose 1996; Berardi 2009).

A distinctive feature of neoliberal rationality is the relentless and ubiquitous financialisation of previously non-commercial domains and activities. In the Global North, capitalist relations have infiltrated not only politics and economy, but also common-sense ways of interpreting, understanding and relating to the world in both the private and public spheres (Brown 2015). According to Michel Feher, human beings are rendered and constructed as human capital, required to become private enterprises and self-invest in ways that enhance their future value (Feher 2009). This "Me Inc." model erodes social relations because it replaces them with a purely competitive logic. Connections between people are placed primarily in the service of economic valorisation, which reduces basic forms of mutual solidarity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). With the neoliberal conditioning of ego-related lifestyles and the valuation of the individual over the collective, it becomes increasingly difficult to address the shared dimensions of precariousness and construct common narratives.

This issue is discussed by a number of critics engaging with the prevalence of 'non-self-determined insecurity' (Raunig 2004) in Western Europe. The generalisation of precarity through the de-linking of wages and work has created 'surplus labour populations' (Sassen 2014, 63) who struggle to reproduce their livelihoods because they have no access to the means to do so. According to Isabell Lorey, the institutions of the 'precautionary state' only support economically productive and self-governing citizens who insure themselves and precarise others at the same time (Lorey 2011). For this reason, many thinkers have moved away from analyses focused on labour markets and capitalist restructuring towards investigating the complex self-practices by which governmental precarisation becomes a means of control.

Building on sociological and ethnographic studies of everyday life in neoliberalism as well as post-structuralist and neo-Marxist writings on the contingency of capital, cultural theorists connect the exploitation of subjectivity to the expansion and development of the creative industries (Florida 2002; Rossiter and Lovink 2007; Gill

and Pratt 2008). Post-Autonomist thinkers, such as Maurizio Lazzarato, Paolo Virno and Franco Berardi, regard governmental precarisation to be a consequence of the new economy that emphasises the immaterial production of information and services (Lazzarato 1996; Virno 2004; Berardi 2009). Following their analyses of post-Fordist working conditions, capital accumulation is no longer founded on the exploitation of labour power but increasingly on the exploitation of communication, knowledge, creativity, sociality and affect. Subsequently, the innovative processes and affective relations characterising "alternative" forms of production are used in order to promote the conditions required by the self-regulating markets of cognitive-cultural economies.

Dissecting corporate culture and management literature, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello identify an injunction that positions employees as free, independent, creative and dynamic individuals who are in principle alone responsible for their success or failure (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007). In this context, artists and creative workers become perfect role models insofar as they are used to adapt flexibly to new working conditions. Notably, the patterns of freelance work and self-employment associated with being a cultural producer have become a model for the generation of new jobs and an engine for economic growth (McRobbie 2001). Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, social-democratic governments across Europe set in motion a transformative shift towards a culturalisation of the economy and a corresponding economisation of culture. This is exemplified in the structural adjustment plans of the German labour market in which self-employed and freelance professionals working in the creative sectors are presented as self-motivated sources of productivity (von Osten 2011b). With the introduction of the "Ich-AG" scheme – public subsidy for business start-ups and one-person companies – the view that independent cultural production might be connected to movements for progressive social change is being neglected in favour of a view more compatible with contemporary capitalism.

Around the turn of the 21st century, artists and social theorists, concerned by the ideological restructuring of cultural forms of labour in an age of creative industries and urban development policy, started to engage in collaborative forms of research in order to develop new perspectives on creative labour. The Berlin-based group

kleines postfordistisches Drama (kpD) was one of these initiatives. Through a "workers'-inquiry-without-a-workplace", kpD examined the social context within which cultural producers in the early 2000s position themselves as they are increasingly conventionalised into role models of economic privatisation. Learning about the everyday lives, desires and perspectives of those whose workday is extremely flexible and largely autonomous, the group perceived that those who work in cognitive-cultural sectors are more readily exploited, because they seem to inherently bear their living and working conditions due to strong beliefs in freedom and autonomy (kpD 2005c). According to Isabell Lorey this leads to a process of subjectivation that is called 'self-precarisation' (Lorey 2006). It is precisely the condition of free and autonomous self-activity in the increasingly exploitative dynamics of neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism that the second chapter of my PhD will consider.

Whilst focussing on kpD's process-based, collaborative and transdisciplinary way of working, I examine how their artistic practice debates and negotiates the conscious and voluntary acceptance of precarious work and life. Speculating on the paradoxical role and ambivalent status of cultural production in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism, I specifically investigate transgressive and subversive techniques of self-government through kpD's video project *Kamera Läuft!* (2004). For this project, Kuster, Lorey, von Osten and Reichard interviewed "Kulturarbeiter" working and living in Berlin – including themselves – about their self-chosen labour practices. By dramaturgically reworking their testimonies and scripting their experiences into sample performances played out by actors, *Kamera Läuft!* makes visible the regulatory mechanisms through which creative workers are produced and maintained as entrepreneurial subjects. The mediated public sphere in which the protagonists are forced to produce and reproduce themselves, creates a dynamic that prevents their individuated understandings and subjectivities finding commonality. As such kpD problematises the potential for social transformation in the cultural sector.

Instead of anticipating the emergence of a new and disobedient self-government of the precarious, their project further underlines the practical and theoretical difficulties associated with actualising the political potentials of creative labour. Yet

I argue *Kamera Läuft!* functions as a form of resistance to dominant and internalised discourses and practices of governance. Looking at kpD's employment of the confessional mode, I engage with the ways in which cultural producers can establish themselves as self-reflexive beings with the aim of subverting exploitative powers that operate internally. Through Michel Foucault's work on practices of self-examination (1978; 1998), Judith Butler's study of the subject turning against itself (1997), as well as Donna Haraway's conception of splitting (1988), I explore the extent to which *Kamera Läuft!*'s narrative mode allows for a critical reformation of precarious subjectivity.

Following kpD's discursive strategies and conceptual tactics, this chapter regards the (re)constitution of the self under the current dynamics of governmental precarisation in Western Europe. I consider the potential for 'lines capable of collectivity' (kpD 2005c) amidst pervasive individualisation in the creative sector. I do so by seeking to differentiate self-precarisation from the situation in which self-determined modes of production contribute to the conditions for becoming an active part of the oppressive relations in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. Notably, I explore the extent to which kpD's project allows for a shift from 'it's basically just *me* and the market' to 'it's basically just *us* and the market'. In order to do so, I probe *Kamera Läuft!* as a consciousness-raising tool. Here I draw on my own experience of encountering the video as a device for artists and creative practitioners to raise awareness of the oppressive mechanisms they are involved in.

Besides analysing kpD's work as an aesthetic product "representing" self-precarisation, I study their practice as a mode of knowledge production and critical self-organisation. Starting from the deconstruction of the realities of "freely" chosen precarious conditions, their video project becomes an instrument to explore new ways of interpreting and shaping the paradoxical status of cultural production in the neoliberal economy. I argue that whilst allowing for a less restrained constitution of subjectivity, *Kamera Läuft!* enables a practice of freedom, one that is capable of challenging dominant discourses and offering new understandings of the reality of self-chosen precarious work and life. Considered as a viable site of re-articulation, the work of kpD becomes part of the urgent, fundamental and politically

indispensable task of developing new practices of the self – the formation of an ethics, "an art of living", or in this case, an art of cultural production.

kpD's practice does not, however, actively engage the question of wider social and political organisation under governmental precarisation. While the protagonists in *Kamera Läuft!* perceive certain forms of injustice that collectively put them in an exploitable position, they do not develop collective strategies in order to counteract individualising forms of production. It is precisely this problem that will be addressed in the third chapter of my PhD. Moving away from the notion of self-precarisation, it will focus on how to become common in the 21st century. Whereas the first two chapters of this thesis investigate when and how precarious subjectivities are enabled and constrained, the final two chapters consider strategies that have the potential to loosen these constraints while resisting the exclusionary mechanisms inherent in post-Fordist production. Focussing on activist-research practices that create new ways of relating to others in the context of precarity, I'm taking the next step in exploring possibilities for struggle and resistance under the individualising dynamics of neoliberal self-government.

2. Partial relationality in Precarias a la Deriva

It is essential to maintain lines of communication – exchanging experiences and reflecting together – in order to overcome the distances between precarious subjectivities within a proliferating hyper-segmented social space. Not only as a tool for diffusion but also as a new place, a new competence and primary material for the political. At the same time, it seems necessary to oppose portrayals of social life in terms of atomisation or unconnectedness. The timing and shape of new forms of collectivism needs to be re-conceived in order to challenge the idea that in Western post-industrial economies struggles over common conditions are pre-empted by the internalisation of a perverse and highly individualised neoliberal logic.

The third chapter of my PhD regards the ways in which workers, identifying themselves as precious, have mobilised in Europe since the turn of the 21st century. It starts with a brief survey of social and political movements in the early 2000s, such as the Intermittents du Spectacle in France and the transnational EuroMayDay

mobilisations. While sidestepping the seemingly disparate fields of the political and the cultural, these activist movements aim to bring together antagonisms against common but differing forms of exploitation in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. Rooted in encounters between dispersed social groups, their forms of self-organisation include the positions taken by temp workers in chain stores, students, professionals working in the entertainment industries, journalists, and undocumented migrants.

However, critics have pointed out the risk of identifying common grounds for struggle by drawing out the implications of transformations in labour and life that do not necessarily resonate with those experiencing them, or do not necessarily produce unproblematic alliances (Shukaitis 2012, 246). Notably, aspirations towards organising around a new political subject emergent from changing relations of production – such as the precariat – can problematically suppress difference(s). This issue raises questions concerning commonality within precarity debates. Can precarity be used as a shared name for highly diversified experiences? Is it possible to articulate alliance without falling back upon identity, without flattening or homogenising structural insecurity? How can activist movements politicise precarious subjectivity without essentialising it? Crucially, what is the role of intersectionality in the formation of solidarity across different precarities?

Taking into account issues around the construction of limiting identities and the reiteration of normative narratives of collectivity, this chapter extends the scope of issues around exploitative labour conditions in Western Europe. Aiming to build a less monolithic and more multi-faceted understanding of the transformations happening, I employ feminist Marxist theories to break with binaries of production and reproduction in evaluations and representations of precarity. It is in this questioning of polarised accounts that a potential emerges for creating new understandings of agency and resistance in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. At the same time, specifically conditioned positionalities need to be acknowledged and recognised. While taking an intersectional approach to the analysis of governmental precarisation, I confront the myth of the precariat sharing a common predicament. In doing so, I expose the dangers of disguising inequalities between different subjectivities living and working in post-industrial societies. That is, the exclusion of

some from generalised proclamations about who is exploited contributes to the oppression of those who do not fit the dominant construction of precarious experience.

Many feminist critics have argued for a less androcentric and Eurocentric understanding of insecurity in favour of increased awareness of the gendered and racialised labour relations within precarity debates. Consequently, the fourth chapter of my thesis will build on these critiques by looking at the Madrid-based feminist collective Precarias a la Deriva (PalD). Involved in the European precarity movements of the early 2000s, their activist research attends to the difficulties associated with self-organisation and thinking through different experiences and articulations of precarisation. PalD has allocated much of their militant research to the ongoing invisibility of social reproduction as the motor of contemporary capital, with a focus on the prevalence of women working in feminised sectors. Their publication and video project *A la Deriva, Por los Circuitos de la Precariedad Femenina* (*Adrift Through the Circuits of Feminised Precarious Work*) from 2003 addresses the devaluation and subsequent de-politicisation of reproductive labour that persist in contemporary society, despite the feminist insistence on the accumulation of "surplus value" by this type of work.

I consider the ways in which PalD explores possibilities of articulation among women who share the common experience of precarious labour but are engaged in extremely different types of work. I do so by focussing on the specific context of the emergence, research procedures, organising goals and theoretical inspirations of their practice. Comparing the different realities of sex workers, freelance journalists, child minders, translators and migrant domestic workers, PalD demonstrate variations in social recognition and degrees of vulnerability (PalD 2004a). At the same time, they probe possibilities for forging a sense of community amidst radical dispersion within post-Fordist neoliberal capitalism. Their investigation is, above all, 'a way of thinking together towards collective action, an effort to locate the scattered sites of conflict and know how to name them' (PalD 2003b).

Through a careful engagement with their innovative research-intervention methods, I analyse PalD's work using Donna Haraway's arguments for thinking and practicing

knowledge in accountable ways. I evaluate PalD's picket surveys and "interviews in movement", as well as their feminist version of Situationist drifting – a kind of 'derive a la femme' (Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias 2007) that can be seen as a practice of feminist embodiment that is not about being in a 'fixed' location (Haraway 1991, 154). I particularly focus on the ways in which PalD actively addressed their own implications as research-activists with specific interests and desires. While taking into account the dialogue and complicity produced in their encounters, I describe their practice as a situated epistemology that is constituted by partial perspectives. Through a rereading of Haraway's seminal text 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective' (1988), I probe PalD's goals of engaged and accountable positioning in the formation of new coalitions around feminised precarious work in unregulated economies. Looking at PalD's practice of collective listening, I argue their practice challenges the image of women as striving, solipsistic and isolated individuals balancing on a tightrope, as well as the idea of women as inherently vulnerable subjects in need of protection.

In the course of their explorations, PalD discovered that precariousness cannot be separated from the multidimensional crisis of care (PalD 2005a; Lorey 2015; Dowling 2016). This finding lead to a new stage in their practice, more focused on politicising the everyday lives of women working in the globalised care sector. Taking into account the vast amounts of un(der)paid domestic work done by (undocumented) migrant women as well as racialised labour divisions within contemporary modes of production, PalD began to explore alternative standards of knowledge and objectivity regarding women's exploitation in the Spanish reproductive labour market. In doing so, they developed a particular and specific embodied vision on the question of care. This is exemplified in their proposal for 'a very careful strike' (PalD 2006a), which enables an alternative response to the "problem" of insecurity.

Regarding the ways in which PalD created spaces of encounter between women from very different backgrounds, this chapter also looks at their workshops on globalised care held at the squatted feminist social centre La Eskalera Karakola in Madrid in 2003, as well as their involvement in the Agencia de Asuntos Precarios

(Agency of Precarious Affairs) in 2006. Whilst negotiating different interests, demands and expectations, PalD did not shy away from exposing conflict and confrontation in the process of bringing together women from multiple localities to share experiences related to domestic work. Uncovering the difficulties at play when dealing with contentious positionalities, their activist research disturbs prevailing discourses and expectations surrounding notions of coming together as a social congregation, free of friction. Their work entails searching for commonalities and fostering singularities, while maintaining the tension between them (Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias 2007).

While turning to questions concerning relationality with precarious others, this chapter aims to push some of the actions and arguments surrounding governmental precarisation to a more ethically engaged encounter. I consider Judith Butler's discussion of precariousness as a shared, socio-ontological category associated with the vulnerability and susceptibility of human life (Butler 2004, xi-xiii). I likewise address her analysis of precarity, which designates the politically induced condition by which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and are thus differentially exposed to symbolic and material insecurities (Butler 2009, 2). Supplementing Butler's relational ethics with a critique of heteronormative ideas of masculine independence and the feminisation of the need for protection, I examine how PalD's care community challenges dominant conceptions of collectivity determined by European nation states as well as traditional political parties and trade union structures.

Drawing on critical theories that challenge narrow understandings of "belonging", I stress the need to destabilise the notion of commonality as solid, unified and total. I engage feminist epistemologies that explore pathways towards alternative social ontologies in order to demonstrate that the impossibility of defining an identitarian "we" still enables connection to others. I thus focus on Donna Haraway's call 'to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another' (Haraway 1988, 586) as the basis for solidarity across difference(s). Crucially, I evaluate the implications of PalD's practice of care and 'response-ability' (Haraway 2016) through the notion of partial relationality. Entertaining the possibility of making connections with "others" without assumptions of comparability, I argue that this conception offers an

imaginative entry into how we might conceive of social relationships under the 'becoming-normal' of precarisation.

Relating philosophical perspectives on subjectivation to the organisational circumstances of labour relations in neo-patriarchal and neo-colonial capitalism, this chapter draws heavily on feminist critiques of individual autonomy and reframing of social relationality. Along the way, it outlines theories of care and social reproduction while considering PalD's concept of "cuidadania", a new form of living together in which the relationality with others is considered fundamental (PalD 2006a; 2011). Attending to the immediacy of the precarisation of everyday life created through austerity measures and the withdrawal of the state from its duty of care for the common good (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2010; Dowling 2016), I analyse how PalD's practice becomes the foundation for an ethics of knowledge production, a form of research that links knowing, being, and doing. Finally, I argue their 'militant political ethics' (Mennel and Nowotny 2011, 26) concerns the constitution of partial relationality itself.

3. Critical agency and collective resistance against governmental precarisation

Considered as viable sites for the re-articulation and re-negotiation of contemporary modes of subjectivation, the practices of kpD and PalD become part of the urgent and politically essential task of developing new practices of the self – the formation of "an art of living" – in neoliberal capitalism. In order to create new openings for the politicisation of everyday life, both groups draw upon methods of militant research and consciousness-raising. Examining the extent to which these methods offer possibilities for resistance under the current dynamics of governmental precarisation, my investigation builds on traditions of worker inquiries and co-research associated with the Italian workers movement of the 1970s as well as women's consciousness-raising groups deriving from second-wave feminism. As a form of activist knowledge production, I probe militant research in terms of a situated investigation that reads struggles against precarity from within. Revisiting the feminist idea of the personal is political, I understand consciousness-raising as a

practice that takes the self as a point of departure in order to get out of oneself and connect with others.

Throughout my thesis I focus on the production of situated knowledges, discursive languages and audio-visual representations of structural insecurity through procedures of articulation between theory and praxis. Because methods of militant research and consciousness-raising are embedded in the very context of my research, I address my own implication in this process as well. Notably, analysing kpD's and PalD's work entailed the investigation of my own conditions, while working as a freelance graphic designer in Amsterdam, but also as a PhD candidate and associate lecturer in London. Therefore, in the conclusion of this thesis I briefly elaborate on how the logic of insecurity I study in this thesis can also be applied to the current situation in the academic labour market. It will address how I became involved in the anti-casualisation struggle at Goldsmiths, University of London.

For me, writing this thesis has operated as a tool to raise awareness of my own subjectivation. Promoting a political reinterpretation of contemporary working and living conditions and establishing a basis for its transformation, I regard my PhD as a form of consciousness-raising in itself. Even though it is mostly theory-based, my research is not just about developing critical capabilities; it also makes it possible to understand what is shared in governmental precarisation and what it means to become common in the past, present, and future. Most importantly, it addresses the question of *how* to do so. By looking at practices that refigure commonality from within fragmented experience, I consider strategies for self-organisation in order to overcome some of the distances that a segmented and competitive social space multiplies everywhere.

Even though precarious working and living conditions are nothing new in principle, the circumstances identified in kpD's and PalD's practices are now institutionalised and profitable in ways not seen before. The discourses and practices of governing addressed by kpD are distanced even further from accountability and agency. Regarding the removal of any form of protection against precarity, the dismantling of collective safeguarding systems confronted by PalD has almost become total. Since the turn of the 21st century, the privatisation and individualisation of

exploitation is becoming ever more apparent. Following Isabel Lorey, precarisation is no longer an exception, it is rather the rule (Lorey 2015, 1). Not only is there a widespread adaptation to structural insecurity, today the conditions of its subjectivation have gained real hegemony. Moreover, as capitalism advances, this type of conditioning gains neo-patriarchal and neo-colonialist forms. In the wake of Trumpism, Brexit and the re-emergence of white supremacist nationalisms during the Covid-19 crisis, a reassessment of governmental precarisation seems paramount.

Yet, my PhD does not present ideas concerning the self-shaping of 21st century individuals and the social regulation of their relationships as already understood or resolved. Here I follow kpD and PalD. Building on their radically discursive and open-ended strategies, the hypotheses presented in this thesis remain partial and tentative. Following PalD's practice of care and response-ability, the notion of commonality remains unstable and insecure – as much as uncommonality, it can never be guaranteed. Taking into account kpD's acknowledgement of the ambivalences inherent in cultural production, my response to the issue of self-precarisation remains open and contingent, unknowable in advance – in other words, precarious.

Instead of coming up with a quick fix solution to the "problem" of governmental precarisation, my research embraces the complex and contradictory processes taking place within contemporary mechanisms of privatisation and individualisation. As the "object" of self-precarisation can never be fully grasped, and only paradoxical and ultimately precarious strategies derive from it, I maintain that its dynamics can only be approached in an approximate manner. The same can be said about commonality. Considering the creation, maintaining and evolving of socio-political alliances between dispersed subjectivities demands difficult and unrelenting work, processes of becoming common are not necessarily harmonious. Consequently, in trying to slowly and carefully break through habitual polarisations, the recognition of distance is crucial.

For this reason, I resort to the notion of partial relationality. In order to produce an integrated understanding of the experience of self-precarisation and to think its

different features such as independence and dependence, agency and exploitation, individuality and commonality together. This reflects a politics that holds different subjectivities and labour practices in some degree of conceptual and material separation while articulating them in struggle. Crucially, I employ partiality for tracing the relational zones among the conceptual components of my PhD – as in a constellation.[1] Not always able to guarantee the different elements between which my thinking occurs, the movements I make in this thesis are meant to challenge the autonomy of the materials I'm working with, whilst strengthening their mutual integrity. In addition, I use partial connections for exploring modes of resistance that are relational, rather than oppositional. Regarded as a methodology active in my case studies, as well as in my approach to thinking the topics present within them, my research probes the potential of partial relationality in critical thinking.

Here it is worth paying some attention to the role of case studies in my project. A widespread format in the arts and humanities, the typology of the case study frequently follows a clear distinction between the subject of study: the case itself, and the object, namely the analytical frame through which the subject is viewed and which the subject explicates. As a result, case studies are often presented as classifiable by their purposes and the approaches adopted. Following Donna Haraway's logic of partial perspectives (1988), my research challenges such divisions between theory-centred and illustrative studies. Instead of employing the practices of kpD and PalD as illustrations to produce generalised knowledge for a particular field, my case studies function as lenses, or filtering devices, for reconfiguring the relation between artistic practice and activism. The interdisciplinary nature of my PhD, and its stress on knowledge production through discursive and creative practice, locates my project firmly within recent debates around methodology in Visual Cultures.[2]

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[1] A constellation is a group of associated things that are structurally related. Like a grouping of stars in the sky defining the lines of a figure and representing a story, I regard my PhD to be a constellation, drawing a distinct picture of governmental precarisation in the 21st century while narrating a story about it. As I will show in the next section of this introduction, working in such a constellation reflects the constitution of the materials and key thinkers I am working with.
[2] Throughout my studies in the Visual Cultures department at Goldsmiths, the question of *how we work* has been at the forefront of discussions in lectures, seminars and workshops around contemporary transformations of research formats in art theory, history, practice and visual culture. See Irit Rogoff. 'The Way We Work Now'. In *Potential Spaces: How Can Art and Design Be Studied and Researched in the 21st Century?* Karlsruhe, Germany. 16-18 February 2017.

4. How do I work? kleines postfordistisches Drama and Precarias a la Deriva as case studies

Rather than rendering the situated knowledges and embodied practices of kpD and PalD as illustrative representations of self-precarisation and becoming common, I approach my case studies in ways that avoid the exemplification of a field of study or practice as such. In my view, this method allows for new and unexpected ideas to emerge while creating space for the partial connections within and between the materials that make up my research constellation. While "theorising" the social relations, affective energies, and formal arrangements of my case studies, I try not to turn them into abstractions of precarious experience. Instead, I *redescribe* the works of kpD and PalD, as to make them become 'thicker' (Haraway and Goodeve 2000, 108) then they first seem. Carefully reviewing their artistic and activist research projects, it becomes possible to read their practices through one another, without comparing them as such. Refusing to determine one example as potentially more "effective" or "imaginative" than the other, I argue that militant political ethics are present in every step of the making and thinking of their work, whether that concerns the development of an aesthetic product, a theoretical discourse, or a socio-political field of action.

At the same time, however, it is important to acknowledge the very different research conditions at play in my project. For my PhD I developed distinct forms of engagement with kpD's and PalD's practices. As for kpD, I conducted primary research into their work. During an Erasmus+ funded period of study at the Institute for Art and Visual History at the Humboldt University in Berlin in 2015, I benefitted from extensive conversations with the members of the group, as well as other people involved in their project. During my time in Berlin, kpD generously shared documents and records providing information about the development and making of *Kamera Läuft!*. They gave me access to all kinds of "archival" materials, such as notes, emails, drafts, scripts, different edits and additional film material as well as a variety of projects, works, films and exhibitions related to their practice and thinking. As there was no existing body of research – I believe few, if any, extensive studies of kpD's work have since been undertaken – I constituted an original archive

of their work and translated a considerable amount of data into English.[3] This allowed me to investigate both the pragmatic and infrastructural aspects of the production, organisation and distribution of their video project, while also focussing on kpD's process-based, collaborative and transdisciplinary ways of working. Considering the frameworks through which their practice was developed, as well as their most important references (such as Helke Sander's 1977 semi-autobiographical film *Redupers*), and other relevant materials (such as Tatjana Turanskyj's 2010 experimental film *Eine flexible Frau*), allowed me to situate their work in the historical moment and geographical context in which it was developed. In doing so I have been able to relate this to the politics of cultural production in Western Europe today.

The conditions of research were very different in the case of PalD. For my PhD I did not contact any of the former members of the group. This was partly because of there was already an extensive body of research there, most of it publicly available online. But more importantly, those who were associated with the initiative are not necessarily willing to speak on behalf of PalD anymore (Casas-Cortes 2009). For them the project, driven by an open and changing collective of women that operated under a common name, has finished. Therefore, whilst drawing upon a large amount of already existing data, I mostly conducted secondary research into PalD's practice and thinking. Through close readings of their published texts[4] as well as Maribel Casas-Cortes' interviews with former members of the group, I focused on the form, content, production and reception of PalD's activist research. Focussing on the specific context of the emergence, research procedures, organising goals and theoretical inspirations of their practice, I investigated the social and material conditions that shaped (and were shaped by) the production of their care

[3] Notably, I used the conversations that took place and the collected data of kpD's "archive" as background for my PhD research. Because I do not directly reference any of its content in this thesis, there is no immediate major risk involved, neither for my interlocutors nor for myself. However, even though my research is low risk, I have considered issues such as data protection, confidentiality and anonymity. I maintained integrity in all aspects of research, including the core elements of honesty, rigour, transparency and open communication, care and respect. See the Visual Cultures PhD Research Ethical Approval Form I submitted with this thesis.

[4] For my research I mostly engaged with English translations of PalD's work, but I also analysed sections from the original Spanish versions of their book and video *A La Deriva: Por Los Circuitos de La Precariedad Femenina* (2003). In addition, I drew directly from *Was ist dein Streik? Militante Streifzüge durch die Kreisläufe der Prekarität* (2011) a publication consisting of German translations of PalD's texts, translated by Birgit Mennel and Stefan Nowotny.

community. Looking at the intellectual and affective infrastructures PalD established in the early 2000s, I paid special attention to the question of *who* their practice was making room for. At the same time, I considered the ways in which their work has circulated since its release, in the attempt to assess the kind of space that PalD creates in the present moment.

While bringing practices of critical and collective knowledge production from the early 2000s into existence today, I hope to find a new audience for kpD's and PalD's work, and therefore take it further. Consequently, I use the two case studies to cast light on the continued, and in many ways intensified, mechanisms of labour exploitation in Western Europe. At the same time, kpD and PalD help me explore ways of tracing relations and making new connections between precarious entities in the contemporary moment. Bringing artistic and activist practices from the early 2000s into the historical present, my research entails "constellation work". Monica Dall'Asta and Jane Gaines postulate constellating as a method for engaging historical material across the gaps of time, effectively creating 'a temporal wedge in our present that makes us momentarily coincident with the historical past.' (Dall'Asta and Gaines 2015, 19).[5] As I undertake a constellating study of kpD's and PalD's practices, I come to align myself with the objects, subjects, figures and concepts at play in their projects. Forming a constellation with them, I also have to locate myself, historically and geographically, at the moment that I "find" them. What I find when I locate my case studies is that, actually, I am discovering and locating myself in my own historical moment living and working in Western Europe. Notably, this is a moment in which the common ground seems shattered. It follows that my PhD can be seen as an attempt to respond to this conjuncture.

According to Angela Mitropoulos, 'a different future, by definition, can only be constructed precariously, without firm grounds for doing so, without the measure of a general rule' (Mitropoulos 2005). Following this statement, it seems necessary to adopt a creative and speculative stance when challenging contemporary processes

[5] While recognising the inevitable incompleteness of the histories feminist researchers compile, Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight state the activity of constellating never stops: 'history is never "finished," fixed for all time. We may preserve "historical objects," but the process of history-making is ongoing.' (Gledhill and Knight 2015, 11). This is also how I conceive of my research – incomplete and in continuing development.

of privatisation and individualisation. By reimagining the notion of self-precarisation, I am not so much asking *what* it is and how it can be described as a phenomenon, but rather what it *does*, how it operates and what it mobilises. Similarly, I believe the question of becoming common is not so much about *what* precarious subjects may share, but rather *how* they make connections with others. Rather than approaching governmental precarisation as a diagnosis, or even a context, my PhD considers it as a methodology for unlocking critical agency and collective resistance.

Following kpD's and PalD's militant strategies, I argue that in trying to change oneself and relate to others, normative and identitarian understandings of the individual "I" and the collective "we" need to be resisted. While kpD proposes ways for cultural producers working in cognitive-cultural economies to refuse normative configurations of creativity, PalD explores non-identitarian forms of commonality among women working in the reproductive labour market. Although situated in very different contexts, both groups confront essentialist models of subjectivity in relation to processes of self-organisation and becoming common. By deconstructing distinctions between the exteriority of power and the interiority of the self, they stress the split, fragmented, and contradictory aspects of precarious subjectivity as well as the epistemologically, ethically, and politically necessary opening up of the self towards others.

Expanding the concrete tactics and methods of my case studies, my PhD proposes a conceptual reconfiguration of precarious work and life that integrates interior and exterior aspects of subjectivity, stressing a form of relationality that is not "whole", but partial. I employ the notion of partial connections as a potential pathway towards mutual support and solidarity across different politics, lives and subjectivities in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. Instead of pursuing personal empowerment based on individualised autonomy, this concept allows dispersed subjects to form socio-political alliances with "others" without assumptions of comparability. Ultimately my research demonstrates that it is through the opening up of the precarious self towards others, and the articulation of partial relationality that self-precarisation can be transformed into an instrument of resistance to dominant and internalised discourses and practices of governance. Thus enabling

the imagination and production of an insurgent togetherness at a moment in which the common ground seems shattered.

Chapter 1 – Securitisation, privatisation, individualisation: A brief genealogy of governmental precarisation in Western Europe

> Precarious is [the] person who is able to know nothing about one's own future and therefore is hung by the present and praises God to be rescued from the earthly hell (Berardi 2010, 148).

In recent decades, the use of the term 'precarious' has spread rapidly through various social, political, economic, cultural and artistic contexts. Because it represents a condition that is caused by a wide range of processes, extending across space and time, and played out over diverse and sometimes overlapping fields, the many levels of its meaning are put to use in different ways. Consider, for example, the circulation of numerous derivatives of the term – precarity, precariousness, precarisation, precariat – as well as its translations into different languages – Prekarität, précarité, precario, precariedad, prekarisering. In surveying the various ways and specific contexts in which these words have circulated, it is necessary to establish a framework by which questions of the precarious can be understood.

Starting with a search into its origins and the development of its meaning, the following works closely and precisely on the genealogy of the precarious in Western Europe. Eschewing a reductionist approach, I trace the contingencies in thinking and representing the concept. Locating the precarious in its changing constitutive settings while examining the social, political and economic bases of its different interpretations, I adhere to Michel Foucault's genealogical method. Concerned with an inquiry into the emergence of the precarious and its 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1980, 131), this chapter can be regarded as a particular investigation into historical practices by which the precarious becomes an object of techniques and deployments of power. Developing a pointed critique of its regime, makes it possible to better understand what it might mean for people to identify themselves and others as precarious.

1. From indebtedness to dispossession: Precarious relationality in early modern Europe

Generally speaking, the adjective "precarious" describes a situation that leads to an interminable lack of certainty. It refers to the state of being unable to predict one's fate or to have some degree of stability on which to construct a life. If something is precarious, it means it is subject to a high level of insecurity and liable to change for the worse. Moreover, it is uniquely tied to risk: a condition involving exposure to danger. Many people associate the term with physical instability, suggesting something is not securely held, rickety, or likely to fall or collapse. They may well be familiar with expressions like 'a precarious existence', but these are often perceived as a metaphorical usage related to material fragility.

However, the word has quite different origins. Etymologically, it comes from the Latin "precarius", which means 'imploration': begging or asking someone earnestly for something (Harper 2018). The word shares the same root ("prec-") as the verb "to pray" ("precare") and first signified that which is obtained by requesting or entreating. This initial meaning is reflected in the use of the term in the late Roman Empire, where a practice known as "precarium" referred to a type of landholding. Someone would ask or "beg" a landowner for a plot of land to cultivate. If granted, the petitioner would receive the property for a specific amount of time and have the right to enjoy its use and advantages, including the right to derive profit (Davies and Fouracre 2002). Yet the precarium was not a gift. The owner retained full title to the land and could reclaim it whenever he wanted.

In his digest of writings on Roman jurisprudence compiled in the 6th century, emperor Justinian stated:

> A *precarium* is what is conceded in use to a petitioner in response to prayers for however long, while the grantor agrees. This type of liberality comes *ex iure gentium*, and differs from a *donatio* where who gives, gives in such a way that he does not receive it back; who gives a *precarium* gives in such a way that he will receive it back, when he wishes to take the *precarium* back to himself (Davies and Fouracre 2002, 45).

The Spanish archbishop Isidore of Seville provides a similar definition in his early 7th century etymological encyclopaedia. Referring to the temporary right to usufruct found in civil law, he writes: 'A *precarium* is when a creditor, having been petitioned with prayer, allows a debtor to take *fructus* from the *possessio* of a *fundus* ceded to him.' (Davies and Fouracre 2002, 45). Here the emphasis is on the right to take the fruits or products ('fructus') from the land ('fundus') given. In this situation, the petitioner might not own the property, but he does have an interest in it. Although this interest is non-possessory, he has the ability to use and even modify the property. For example, in the case of agricultural use, the petitioner could not only grow crops on the land, but also make improvements that would help in farming, such as building a barn. But this could be disadvantageous to the usufructuary, as he did not own the improvements, and any money spent on those improvements would belong to the original owner at the end of the usufruct. It is for this reason that Isidore calls the petitioner a debtor; his interest is allowed or sanctioned by a creditor.

Taking into account the first use of the term, the adjective "precarious" refers to a condition that is produced by a regime of power on whose favour one depends and to which one can only petition. Correspondingly, the Oxford English Dictionary defines precarious as 'held or enjoyed by the favour of and at the pleasure of another person; vulnerable to the decision of others' (OED 2018c). Notably, the word does not just describe a situation characterised by a lack of security, stability or certainty, but is also inscribed in a form of relationality. Besides referring to a one-sided form of reliance, whereby someone or something is dependent on or being controlled by someone or something else, this relationality may indicate a situation of interdependence and reciprocity in which people or entities are equally bound and have shared agency and responsibility.

This two-way flow is also reflected in the complex exchanges between debtors and creditors in the late imperial period. Although the petitioner's hold on the land, and its assets, could never be assured, the precarium was given without need for payment, suggesting precaria were free of costs to petitioners. However, following John Beeler's economic analysis of landholding structures in mediaeval France, this was merely a legal fiction. In Carolingian Europe, the precarium was actually a lease

of land for rent under a contract, written or otherwise agreed upon between a grantor and a grantee. Although an owner could legally evict a tenant at any time, there was usually no trouble if the rent was paid regularly or other obligations were met as specified. Despite its technically precarious nature, it was possible to pass the tenement down to one's heirs (Beeler 1971, 3). While in theory the precarium refers to an agreement by which the owner of something at the request of another person gives him something to use as long as the owner pleases, in practice this type of request could not be revoked easily. As a matter of fact, any arbitrary expulsion of an occupant was restricted, and in the event of an owner wanting to dispossess a recalcitrant tenant, he had to be in a position to use force. No doubt precarial relationships were hierarchical, but they were certainly not one-sided. Although the landowner would possess greater wealth, power or prestige that enabled him to help the petitioner, the bonds between them found formal expression in legitimate definition of responsibilities, including those of grantors to grantees.

Nevertheless, power relations between debtors and creditors intensified when a pervasive politics of fear settled over medieval Europe. Due to the insecurity and turbulence of the late imperial period, many small landowners were pressed by debt, crushing taxation, or fear of aggressive neighbours, and 'voluntarily' gave up their lands to more powerful landowners in order to receive it back as precaria (Beeler 1971, 3). The civil wars of the sixth and seventh centuries, when the lower classes were in much need of protection, gave the system further impetus. At this time not only secular but also ecclesiastical owners had an interest in extending the use of the precarium. Since it was forbidden to alienate religious property, the church found it profitable to grant much of its holdings to individuals as precaria (Thompson 2016).

As Catholicism spread through Western Europe, many people transferred title of their lands to the clergy in return for assurance of salvation. Here the practice of precarium becomes a technique of securitisation for ecclesiastical creditors, allowing the church, as security-holders, to benefit from those in need of protection by transforming moral guilt and debt into tradable securities (Lazzarato 2012, 23). While initially it simply meant "to ask" or "to beg", it was at this point that the verb "precare" began to signify a request for help or expression of thanks addressed to a

saint, God or other deity. The etymological association of precarious with prayer in the theological sense, as in relating to religious belief, is reflected in Franco Berardi's quotation above, which states that precarious is the person who 'praises God to be rescued from the earthly hell' (Berardi 2010, 148). As such, the process of precarisation can be seen as a specific mode of governing people, rather than things or territories as such.

Mediated through Christian pastoral power, the securitisation of people expanded when the practice of precarium was absorbed into the feudal system. Individuals were increasingly dispossessed of the land to which they were bonded, while the great proprietors extended their domain and increased their wealth. The power of the aristocracy, in control of cultivatable territory, lead to a society based upon the exploitation of individuals working on lands, typically under serfdom by means of labour, tax or rent. During this time the dependence of the weaker on the stronger man and the performance of some service in return for personal security became formalised. Precarial relationships were institutionalised and absorbed into public law and administration (Thompson 2016). This also enabled the dismantling of collective systems and the restructuring of common resources. In England and Wales small landholdings were legally consolidated into larger farms from the 13th century onwards. Once enclosed, public use of these lands became restricted (Hall 2013). Exercising their control of state processes to appropriate common land for private benefit, prosperous landowners expelled resident populations to create a 'landless proletariat' (Harvey 2003, 149), whose only possession of significant material value was their labour-power.

Following the rapid development of British industry, brought about by the introduction of machinery in the 18th century, many displaced farmers, in search of jobs, migrated from villages to areas where factories were established. This change contributed to social fragmentation and disparity, affecting individuals by creating perceived insecurity. However, it also developed class consciousness and theories related to this, most notably Karl Marx's analysis of the conflict between the bourgeoisie controlling the means of production and the working classes enabling these means. For Marx, "proletarianisation" – the social process whereby an increasing mass of the population is reduced to dependence on wage labour for

income – could foster revolution and overthrow the ruling class. Here, the process of precarisation becomes inscribed in a form of relationality that points towards the question of whether "precarious" indicates a condition of subjugation or empowerment. Connected to one of the classic problems of liberal politics and modern governance, the inherent power dynamic between dependence and independence is still at the heart of current critical investments in the concept. Promoted by some as a necessary precondition for freedom, or instrument of human agency, and demoted by others as a form of exploitation or sign of control that needs to be refused, the precarious and its regime continue to incite controversy within debates around the formation and constitution of subjectivity. These discussions are played out often in relation to developments in labour productivity discourse in 19th and 20th century capitalism.[6]

2. From alienation to securitisation: Wage labour in 19th and 20th century capitalism

Following Marxist critiques of the historical process of primitive accumulation, the precarial relationships between owners and non-owners in medieval Europe can be regarded as an exemplar for understanding the power dynamics between capitalists and wage labourers in the 19th century (Marx 1976; Crafts 1978; Federici 2004). In pre-capitalist systems it was obvious that most people did not control their own destiny – under feudalism serfs had to work for their lords. Capitalism seems different because individuals are, in theory, free to work for themselves or for others as they choose. As unprotected and rightless labourers, however, most proletarians had as little control over their lives as feudal serfs (Singer 2000, 91). Because they had nothing but their labour to sell, they became factory workers often

[6] Throughout history there have been many forms of resistance to exploitative relations between owners and non-owners of power. Questions of agency in pre-capitalism are explored by Silvia Federici, who reconstructs the anti-feudal struggles of the Middle Ages as well as the protests by which the European proletariat resisted the advent of capitalism (Federici 2004, 10). She particularly regards the role of women in these conflicts. In doing so she insists on the necessity to expand Marxist accounts of primitive accumulation to include not just the appropriation of land but also of women's bodies and their reproductive labour (Federici 2004, 97). With regards to the analysis of the relations between debtors and creditors in medieval and early modern Europe, Federici's analysis demonstrates how the precarium as a form of land tenure also had strong biopolitical dimensions. This feminist angle on precarisation will be further explored in chapter 4.

out of necessity. It is precisely this compulsion to create capital by depending on wages that made the industrial working class a precarious entity (Barchiesi 2012).

Alluding to the precarisation of wage workers, Marx wrote in the first volume of his *Capital*:

> The higher the productivity of labour, the greater is the pressure of the workers on the means of employment, the more precarious therefore becomes the condition for their existence, namely the sale of their own labour-power for the increase of alien wealth, or in other words the self-valorisation of capital (Marx 1976, 798).

By exploiting labour-power of workers, capitalism enforces insecure conditions of employment in order to increase abstract value. In this particular form of subjugation, workers are coerced to earn a living without opportunities for self-fulfilment, or any 'natural reward of individual labour' (Hodgskin 1825). Marx argued that this experience, which he appropriately called "alienation", becomes the basis for modern capitalist accumulation. By way of conducting the lives and bodies of workers in order to serve the productivity of capital and strengthen the bourgeoisie, the proletariat becomes governable and thus exploitable. Following Foucauldian conceptions of sovereignty and biopolitics in Western modernity, this process can be analysed as a mode of subjectivation that is based on legitimising and securing relations of domination as well as an economy of exhaustion. The economy of exhaustion has a long history in the modern world. It started with colonial slavery, mining human energy to death. The Industrial Revolution adopted this logic, exhausting the bodies of white workers and children until they finally obtained a reduction of working hours and hard physical labour thanks to the exhaustion of racialised bodies in the colonies (Vergès 2019).

With the growth of factories and the mass production of manufactured goods in the early 20th century, the structural subordination of the activities of the working class to the benefits of the ruling classes culminated in Taylorist models of production. In order to maximise productivity, American engineer Frederick Taylor developed a technique of labour discipline and workplace organisation based on studies of human efficiency and automation. Utilising factory workers for their purely physical force, Taylorism is rooted in a form of organised dependency that gives a specific

meaning to the experience of precarisation. Alienated into 'the total dehumanisation of a storehouse of machine replacement parts' (Draxler 2007), employees in Taylorist workplaces experienced a loss of control over not just their working activity, but also the contexts and products of this activity. The growing split between human life and labour power caused workers to feel increasingly estranged from the interests of capitalism.

In an attempt to reorganise social and disciplinary structures in factories and reconnect workers to capital, labour productivity thought moved from Taylorist to Fordist models of production in the 1930s. Inside the Fordist factory, workers repeatedly performed a single task whilst manufacturing standardised products in large volumes. Pioneered by the American motor manufacturer Henry Ford, the extreme functionality, specialisation and streamlining of processes led to a drastic reduction of production costs. In order to tackle absenteeism and employee turnover, workers were paid relatively high living wages, which also meant they could afford to purchase the commodities they made. This contributed to growing levels of consumption (Gielen and Bruyne 2009). To generate national demand, wealthy industrial nations implemented a range of institutions and policies supporting workers, such as family wages, job stability and internal labour markets leading to broadly shared prosperity.

Because employees were entitled to all kinds of rights and protections, Fordist modes of regulation generated relative social and economic stability. By the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, the prosperous regions of the West had succeeded in moving wage labour away from disadvantage, associating it instead with safeguards against risk, thus transforming life under precarious conditions into a secured life (Lorey 2015, 45). By means of pensions, unemployment benefits and healthcare services, European welfare states could present themselves as protecting and promoting the economic and social well-being of their citizens. At the same time, the implementation of such provisions allowed governments to influence the distribution of wellbeing and personal autonomy, as well as the ways in which people consume and spend their time. In fact, the social protection institutions of welfare states were intended to support economically productive techniques of self-government among obedient and cautious citizens

(Lorey 2015, 39). In this dynamic, guaranteed wage labour was not only a way for people to secure themselves and become independent. It was also, following Foucault's analysis of the structural entanglement between the government of a state and technologies of the self in Western modernity, an instrument to make people socially, politically and economically controllable (Foucault 2007a, 389). This form of subjugation develops in a specific way under neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism, which will be discussed in the following section.

3. From flexibility to insecurity: Human capital in post-Fordist neoliberalism

When Western nations experienced a stagnation in economic growth and rising inflation in the 1970s, as a result of the oil crisis, the liberal celebration of guaranteed wage labour and social advancement, mediated by consumption, began to fade. With a decline in production and regulation by the nation state, and the rise of global markets and corporations, the traditional image of the factory as a place of relative privilege for employees began to tarnish. As industries pursued cheaper labour, formerly centralised production sites dispersed, and factory workers became deprived of the specificity and long-term nature of their place on the assembly line. Subsequently the labour force changed drastically, with an increase in franchising and subcontracting, as well as part-time, temporary and self-employed work.

On the one hand the new flexible labour forms were associated to an increase in freedom, autonomy and independence for individual workers. Production became more diverse and differentiated. Workplaces became more design-oriented and multidisciplinary, involving constant collaboration between entrepreneurs, designers, engineers and workers (Kumar 1995, 63). On the other hand, these forms of labour were linked to a decrease in the quality of working conditions. Theorists associated with the renewal of Italian Workerism and Autonomist Marxism denounced flexibility as the paradigmatic solution for rigid labour markets in post-industrial economies (Marazzi 2011). They argued that the restructuring of production that accompanied the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism made the question of precarity an essential feature of daily existence (Berardi 2009). The

change from large-scale mass-production methods towards small just-in-time manufacturing units produced a rise in "atypical" and irregular forms of employment, a multiplication in the types of contracts and pay structures, and an increase in "hire and fire" policies. For many workers, everyday life became marked by structural discontinuity and permanent fragility.

Moreover, the rights and protections workers were previously entitled to were compromised. Labour unions began to vanish, and the size of workers' collectives diminished (Weeks 2011). In European welfare states, the shift from disciplinary to flexible models of production brought with it the dismantling and erosion of social security systems and safety nets. Many properties, functions and activities previously attributed to the nation state, the hierarchical firm, the nuclear family, and the centralised trade union were relocated (Lash 2002, x). While some were outsourced globally, others were displaced onto the individual. It is precisely this process of insourcing that enabled a new form of exploitation in post-industrial societies, one that operates through the privatisation of risks and self-responsibility. Isabell Lorey has called this particular process governmental precarisation.

Governmental precarisation is a form of governing that is not legitimised by the promise of protection and security. Contrary to the old rule of domination that demanded obedience in exchange for protection, governmental precarisation proceeds primarily through insecurity, or as Lorey writes, 'through regulating the minimum of assurance while simultaneously increasing instability' (Lorey 2015, 2). Adhering to Foucauldian biopolitics and technologies of the self in Western modernity, governmental precarisation can be understood as a power relation that consists of inwardly held self-discipline. Through modes of subjectivation and processes of individualisation people internalise forms of discipline and become subjects of control. Based on intimate self-management and self-actualisation, governmental precarisation can thus be seen to run parallel with the ideology of neoliberalism.

According to David Harvey, neoliberalism is in the first instance a political theory of economic practices which proposes that human well-being can be best advanced through the liberation of individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills, within an

institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey 2005, 2). In the writings of neoliberal economists such as Friedrich von Hayek (2007) and Milton Friedman (1982), the prosperity of both political and social existence was to be ensured, not by centralised planning and bureaucracy, but through the activities and choices of autonomous entities striving to maximise their own advantages. Consequently, state benefits and welfare were denounced as inefficient and patronising, confiscating private choices and freedoms, and violating individual rights (Rose 1996, 167).

Whilst governing at a distance, neoliberalism rests upon an image of the autarkic self that is economically independent and self-sufficient (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, xxi).[7] It assumes that individuals alone can master the whole of their lives, that they derive and renew their capacity for action from within themselves. Financial success, career progress and personal development intersect in this new autonomous subjectivity, and labour becomes an essential element in its path to self-realisation. If previously work ethic was the means by which already disciplined workers were delivered to their exploitation, it serves a more directly productive function in Western neoliberalism: 'where attitudes themselves are productive, a strong work ethic guarantees the necessary level of willing commitment and subjective investment.' (Weeks 2011, 70).

Exploring the traits of neoliberal rationality further, Michel Feher analyses the Marxist figure of the free labourer and its gradual replacement by a new form of subjectivity: human capital (Feher 2009). Understood as the predominant subjective norm of neoliberalism, the notion of human capital implies the strive to constantly value or appreciate the self. People are incited to live as if making a project of themselves, to shape themselves in order to become that which they wish to be (Feher 2009, 33). At the same time, they are problematised in terms of their lack of enterprise, which epitomises their weaknesses and failings. Correlatively, workers are encouraged 'to conduct themselves with boldness and vigour, to calculate for

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[7] In its neoliberal form, capitalism has been shifted to a discreet position behind the political scene and rendered invisible as the structural foundation of contemporary society. As Berthold Brecht once observed: 'Capitalism is a gentleman who doesn't like to be called by his name' (Garland and Harper 2012, 422). It is precisely this invisibility that makes capitalism neoliberal.

their own advantage, to drive themselves hard, and to accept risks in the pursuit of goals' (Rose 1996, 154). In order not to fail, they need initiative, determination, flexibility and tolerance. Opportunities, burdens, dangers, uncertainties must be perceived, interpreted, decided and processed by workers themselves.

As Western European governments find more and more avenues to promote the self-optimisation of the individual, many critics have identified the devastating consequences for those working and living in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. Today people are encouraged to feel that their poverty, unemployment or lack of opportunities is their own fault. Confronting the effects of this responsibilisation, Zygmunt Bauman writes:

> If they fall ill, it is because they were not resolute or industrious enough in following a health regime. If they stay unemployed, it is because they failed to learn the skills of winning an interview or because they did not try hard enough to find a job or because they are, purely and simply, work-shy. If they are not sure about their career prospects and agonise about their future, it is because they are not good enough at winning friends and influencing people and have failed to learn as they should the arts of self-expression and impressing others. This is, at any rate, what they are told and what they have come to believe – so that they behave 'als ob', 'as if', this were indeed the truth of the matter (Bauman 2002, xvi).

Bauman's sharp analysis reveals the extent to which the neoliberal condition presents itself as an inevitable and logical fact of life. Consequently, it becomes difficult for people to consider alternative social, political and economic possibilities, or imagine different modes of thinking, acting and being. In his book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009) Mark Fisher addresses the narrowing of political horizons that has occurred over the past couple of decades and the powerful ideological grip that capitalism holds on the collective, social psyche. He illuminates the major cultural and social effects of a post-Cold War politico-ideological condition in which 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism' (Fisher 2009, 2). This phrase – attributed to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek – captures what Fisher means by capitalist realism: 'the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it.' (Fisher 2009, 2).

The effects of the oppressive pervasiveness of capitalist realism cannot be dismissed. Through the promotion and cultivation of self-sufficiency and self-optimisation, each person must take on all of the burdens of production and reproduction. Because people assimilate abilities in order to govern themselves and be subjects of governance, they look for personalised solutions to meet individual needs. This entrepreneurial model erodes social relations because it replaces them with a competitive and purely economic logic. The disappearance of any sense of interdependency or mutual obligation leads to the weakening of collective bonds and the proliferation of feelings of isolation. The permanent race to secure one's own livelihood – and perhaps those of one's immediate social milieu – against the achievement of others, obscures the fact that a better life cannot be an individual matter.

4. Precariousness, precarity, precariat: Social exclusion in the 21st century

As stated in the introduction, Isabell Lorey insists that 'if we fail to understand precarisation, then we understand neither the politics nor the economy of the present' (Lorey 2015, 1). Indeed, following the development of the meaning of the precarious in Western Europe since its first use in the late Roman Empire, it seems there is something particular about its regime in the 21st century. In the neoliberal world of globalised and unregulated financial markets, precarial relations have become institutionalised and profitable in ways not seen before. Through a process of privatisation and individualisation, the medieval practice of precarium has turned into a highly exploitative debtor-creditor relationship. That is to say, its intensified power dynamics have now been fully internalised. In today's post-industrial societies, individuals are required to act as both petitioner and grantor at the same time. To update Franco Berardi's quotation: precarious is the person who is able to know nothing about one's own future and therefore is hung by the present and praises *oneself* to be rescued from the earthly hell.

Is it still possible to speak of shared agency and collective responsibility if inwardly held self-discipline and self-optimisation are normalised and lived through everyday practices perceived to be self-evident and natural? With the neoliberal conditioning

of ego-related lifestyles and the valuation of the individual over the collective, it becomes increasingly difficult to address the relational dimensions of precarisation and construct common narratives. For this reason, many critics have tried to develop alternative approaches to the aggravation of self-enclosed individualisation by shifting to a more fundamental understanding of the precarious. This shift is conspicuous in its grammatical development from the adjective "precarious" to the noun "precariousness", or as Angela Mitropoulos writes, 'from condition to name' (Mitropoulos 2005).

Of all the thinkers engaged in the recent turn to precariousness, Judith Butler has offered a sustained and influential rethinking of the term. Following her analyses of the discourses and practices of global security in the early 2000s, precariousness can be understood as an enduring feature of human existence, for it addresses the intrinsic vulnerability of life itself. Rather than a transhistorical state of being human, it designates both a condition of life and a foundation of the social and the political. Drawing upon the ethical thought of Emmanuel Levinas, particularly his conceptualisation of 'the I in the face of the Other' (Levinas 1996, 23), Butler articulates precariousness as always relational and therefore a socio-ontological "being-with", involving other precarious lives (Butler 2004, xviii).[8]

Crucially, precariousness does not exist independently from processes of discrimination. 'Precisely because each body finds itself potentially threatened by others who are, by definition, precarious as well, forms of domination follow.' (Butler 2009, 31). Subsequently, the fundamental vulnerability shared with others is judged, hierarchised, and precarious lives are categorised. Butler addresses the unequal distribution of insecurity with the notion of precarity. Referencing Achille

[8] By referring to ontology, Butler does not claim to describe a fundamental structure of being that is distinct from social and political organisation. On the contrary, the being of a body to which she refers does not exist outside of its socio-political interpretation. This is why Butler's ontology – that is a social ontology – allows for an understanding of the ways in which people are made possible or impossible by the social, political, economic and legal conditions on which they depend. This will be further explored in chapter 4.

Mbembe's work on contemporary forms of subjugation[9], she states that precarity designates the politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer through failing social and economic networks of support and differential exposure to symbolic and material insecurities (Butler 2009, 2). Following this analysis, precarity implies disposability, which is on the rise in advanced capitalist societies. As Athena Athanasiou contends in her critique of European biopolitics: 'bodies (that is, human capital) are becoming increasingly disposable, dispossessed by capital and its exploitative excess, uncountable and unaccounted for.' (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 29).

These ideas point to an important and sometimes overlooked feature of the precarious: that of structural exclusion and marginalisation. Besides referring to insecure and unstable labour contracts, dispersed workplaces, and speculative housing markets, flexible rent agreements, temporary land holdings and derivative debt, precarity designates the exclusion of large social groups from civil society, the job market, and the basic requirements for a stable livelihood and social mobility. Isabell Lorey states that, as more and more people find themselves in unstable and dangerous conditions, precarisation is currently in a process of normalisation, which enables governing through insecurity. She writes: 'In neoliberalism precarisation becomes "democratised".' (Lorey 2015, 11). Even in prosperous regions of Europe it imposes itself as the general condition of the everyday lives of large groups of people. As Alex Foti confirms, regardless of whether one is in a position of power, 'the danger of social exclusion hangs in balance over our heads as a sword of Damocles.' (Foti 2005).

Confronting the prevalence of 'non-self-determined insecurity' (Raunig 2004) in contemporary societies, many scholarly meditations produced in the last two decades have analysed the generalisation of precarity through the de-linking of

[9] Achille Mbembe is known for his concept of "necropolitics" that deals with contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death. Thinking the relation between European biopolitics and colonial regimes of necropolitics, he argues the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die: 'to exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power (Mbembe 2003, 12). Butler links Mbembe's analysis to the conditions of domination legitimised in hegemonic Western political thinking, in order to understand how systematic and violent categorisation and hierarchisation produces social, political and economic relations of inequality.

wages and work. As capital finds more and more avenues to valorise activities in ways that are not coded as work, including debt and financial risk, this disconnect is becoming ever-more apparent (Dowling 2016, 463). Taking into account the accumulation of enormous public deficits in countries around the world, it seems obvious that the de-linking of wages and work does not signal the end of exploitation but actively creates 'surplus labour populations' (Sassen 2014, 63) who struggle to reproduce their livelihoods because they have no access to the means to do so. Since the turn of the 21st century, thinkers engaging structural insecurity as the dominant mode of contemporary discourse in the West have referred to these surplus workers as the 'precariat'. Combining the meanings of "precarious" and "proletariat", this neologism refers to 'the sum of all the people with non-standard job forms that have the social standard around which collective life increasingly revolves' (Foti 2005).

The origins of a body of work theorising the precariat can be traced back to Pierre Bourdieu, who used the notion of 'précarité' in the late 1990s to describe a new mode of dominance resulting from the restructuring of economy that forced workers into submission. His book *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time* (1998) speaks out against the dismantling of public welfare in the name of private enterprise, flexible markets and global competitiveness that is increasing the misery of those who suffer most. In a chapter titled 'Job Insecurity is Everywhere Now,' Bourdieu defines the 'génération précaire' as a generation for whom risk is taken for granted and uncertainty is a given. Stressing the disillusionment of educated young people from developing European countries, who are trapped in temporary jobs and unable to make plans for the future, Bourdieu feared that collective resistance in the context of precarity would become impossible (Bourdieu 1998, 95-101).

A decade later, Guy Standing argued that precarious workers form a distinct social category with separate conditions and interests from other workers. Influenced by post-Autonomist theories of the multitude, the general intellect and the cognitariat, he defined the precariat as 'the new dangerous class' (Standing 2011). Anticipating the emergence of a new and disobedient form of self-government, Standing articulates a threatening subjectivity emergent from the changing relations of

production in post-Fordist capitalism (Standing 2011, 7-8). As the labour force transformed from a highly organised industrial working class, agglomerated in large production facilities, to a fragmented, mobile and educated workforce in the emerging service sectors as well as creative and knowledge industries, he identified the birth of an 'incipient political monster' (Standing 2011, 1).[10] Investigating the ways this monstrous crowd of dispersed flexible workers can be turned into an effective political agent, Standing affirms the precariat's potential for multiple and unexpected alliances. Here precarity is presented as something that is not merely paralysing and demoralising, but also unifying, empowering, and potentially revolutionary.

For Standing, nevertheless, it is up to the protocols of governance to nurture and guide the 'virtuous' characteristics of the precariat while keeping its more disruptive temptations at bay (Barchiesi 2012). As such precarisation remains an object of concern and a problem to be solved by the state that is – contrary to the precariat itself – in possession of agency and capability while supposedly representing social stability, inclusion and justice. In this particular discussion, the inherent relationality of the precarious is acknowledged, but the focus is on a one-sided form of dependency in which people are determined by and rely on authorities. This issue is also reflected in political struggles focused on the restoration of declining welfare systems in post-industrial economies, as discussed in chapter 3.

Problematising the hegemonic social-security logics of modern nation states, Isabell Lorey opposes the understanding of precarity as a constraint to be overcome. Building upon the sociological research of Robert Castel, she believes that a simple politics of de-precarisation, where the heavily affected social margins need to integrate into the so-called social middle, will not work (Lorey 2015, 6-7). Because increasing numbers of people find themselves in unstable, insecure and flexible conditions, the normalisation of precarisation cannot be solved by a reformulation

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[10] Gerald Raunig has described the precariat as a movement and organisation of the scattered precarious as 'a monster that knows no sleep' (Raunig 2007). Alex Foti contends 'the precariat is to post-industrialism as the proletariat was to industrialism: the non-pacified social subject.' (Foti 2005).

of traditional systems. Moreover, advancing the belief that the state can and must stabilise the precariousness of human capital ignores discussions of neoliberal governmentality. In Western post-industrial societies, the precarious indicates not so much a condition that is external to the subject – a situation deriving from a relation to an other, such as the employer, the nation state, or the neoliberal market – but an internalised process. Instead of serving the protection and security of people, the institutions of the 'precautionary state' (Lorey 2011) support economically productive and self-governing citizens who insure themselves and precarise others at the same time.

The framing of precarisation as an issue to be managed within the horizon of the existing order of things reflects a classic governance-centred meditation that Foucauldian discussions of subjectivation have incisively criticised. As Nikolas Rose has argued, rather than lamenting the ways freedom and autonomy is suppressed by the state, we need to investigate how 'subjectivity has become an essential object, target, and resource for certain strategies, tactics, and procedures of regulation' (Rose 1996, 152). For this reason, critics have moved away from analyses focused on labour markets and capitalist restructuring towards investigating the heterogeneous processes and complex practices through which individuals come to relate to themselves and others as subjects (Mansfield 2000; Blackman et al. 2008). Critical perspectives on the relation between the self and power will be extensively discussed in chapter 2, when exploring the problems and potentials of self-government in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. First, however, I will regard post-Autonomist takes on the production of subjectivity in cognitive-cultural economies.

5. Immaterial labour and the exploitation of subjectivity in the post-Fordist economy

By now there is a considerable body of research in academic, activist and artistic contexts confronting the privatisation of risks and self-responsibility in contemporary societies. Whilst referring to all possible shapes of non-guaranteed, casualised and flexible labour exploitation, these analyses extend beyond the world of work to encompass other aspects of intersubjective life, including health, education, housing, as well as the ability to build affective social relations.

Theoretical work on this topic continues to proliferate, encompassing sociological and ethnographic studies of everyday life in neoliberalism as well as post-structuralist and neo-Marxist writings on the contingency of capital. The emergence of precarisation as a term of scholarly meditation is inseparable from its politicisation on the streets. Many conceptual analyses produced in the last two decades are linked to activist practices, such as the transnational EuroMayDay mobilisations held between 2001 and 2006, the Intermittents du Spectacle in France and Precarias a la Deriva in Spain in 2003. Sidestepping the seemingly disparate fields of the political and the cultural, these social and political movements have tested new forms of struggle and developed novel perspectives on the structural uncertainty of income and livelihood in the 21st century. These will be extensively discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

Notably, conversations concerning the knowledge of the precarious have taken place increasingly in artistic realms. As art comes to be seen as an intrinsic part of the current economic regime, artists recognise themselves as labouring subjects, whose work is precisely shaped and conditioned by such economic regimes (Bloois 2011). Speculating on the paradoxical role of the artist-subject in the cognitive-cultural economy, numerous investigative, textual, audio-visual and curatorial practices have provided a polemical ground for rethinking the politics of art and creative work in Europe and beyond.[11] Many of these investigations draw upon the writings of post-Autonomist intellectuals in Italy and France, who regard contemporary processes of precarisation to be a consequence of the post-Fordist economy that emphasises the immaterial production of information and services. Following their analyses of subjectivation in 'semiocapitalism' (Berardi 2010), surplus value is no longer extracted from labour materialised as a product. Instead, it resides in the discrepancy between paid and unpaid work – 'the idle time of the mind that keeps enriching, unacknowledged, the fruits of immaterial labour.' (Virno

[11] See research and exhibition projects such as *Be Creative! The Creative Imperative* at the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich in 2002; *Atelier Europa* at the Kunstverein Munich in 2004; *Klartext! The Status of the Political in Contemporary Art and Culture* at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien and the Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz in Berlin in 2005; and *Former West* organised and coordinated by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht between 2008 and 2016. Also consider curatorial practices such as *Post-Office* at ARTSPACE in Auckland in 2010; *Informality: Art, Economics, Precarity* in the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam in 2011; and *The Workers: Precarity/Invisibility/Mobility* shown at MASS MoCA in North Adams in 2012.

2004, 12). This type of labour does not so much produce physical objects but rather ideas, states of being and relations.

Maurizio Lazzarato's discussion of immaterial labour was the first extended treatment of the topic to appear in English. Part of an anthology of Italian texts on radical democratic politics published in 1996, his article defined immaterial labour as labour that produces the informational and cultural content of commodities (Lazzarato 1996, 133). The informational form of production refers directly to changes taking place in the labour processes of large companies in the industrial and tertiary sectors. Here skills involved in direct labour have increasingly become those of cybernetics and computer control. Subsequently, cultural forms of production refer to activities that are not normally recognised as "work", such as 'defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and more strategically, public opinion.' (Lazzarato 1996, 133). These post-Fordist forms of production bring a creative element to the labour process. Workers need to develop their imaginative capacities in order to come up with ideas that are new, surprising, innovative and thus valuable. Furthermore, immaterial labour is dependent upon and productive of communication and cooperation (Lazzarato 1996, 135). Because this economy stands or falls with the sharing of knowledge, relational and intersubjective competences are crucial. Rhetorical abilities and skills such as negotiation and persuasion are also important; someone with linguistic expertise is likely to get more done than someone without.

In his book *A Grammar of the Multitude* (2004), Paolo Virno states that post-Fordist production is developing towards a virtuosic performance. Because virtuosity finds its fulfilment as an activity only in itself, it creates its own value. As it lacks a specific extrinsic product, the virtuoso worker has to rely on witnesses (Virno 2004, 52). Due to its performative characteristics, this type of labour requires a social space that is structured like the public sphere. It demands the presence of others; it demands that one exposes oneself to the gaze of others. In this situation, there is no production of labour independent from activity itself. Workers are no longer defined by what they produce but by the extent to which they produce and reproduce themselves (Virno 2004, 12). Consequently, informational and cultural forms of production draw extensively on people's attitudes as well as their affects. In his

article 'Affective Labour' (1999), Michael Hardt addresses the activities that create and manipulate feelings of 'ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion – even a sense of connectedness or community' (Hardt 1999, 96). Described as a form of "living" labour, requiring human contact and proximity, this production involves more than labour in the traditional sense. The entire person, including one's thoughts, perceptions, expressions, experiences and relationships become part of the production process. As Franco Berardi puts it: 'the soul and its affective, linguistic and cognitive powers are put to work' (Berardi 2009, 11).

It follows that the primary function of immaterial labour is not so much the creation of value but the fabrication of subjectivities. Here subjectivity – the condition of being a subject – refers to the personal beliefs and cultural understandings specific to an individual. According to Lazzarato this is 'the single largest commodity we produce, because it goes into the production of all other commodities' (Lazzarato and Cvejić 2010, 14). Whereas in Fordist systems subjectivity was considered to be external to the concerns of the economy, in post-Fordism it becomes capital. Because today's generation of wealth is founded on the production of knowledge, culture, communication, creativity and affect, this form of capitalist accumulation goes beyond the subsumption of work to subsuming life directly. When subjectivity becomes an instrument of labour exploitation, it is difficult for workers to distinguish between work and life, between production and reproduction. Divisions between private selves and public personas, between creativity and its virtuosic performance are breaking down and actively producing new forms of precarious labour.

As traditional forms of employment have lost their centrality in the production of value, the demand for work as a means of personal development has been transformed into the idea that even one's personality can be put to work and monetised. Before people used to work in servile conditions, leaving them just enough time to replenish. Now their entire life has become 'an invisible and indivisible commodity' (Virno 2004, 12). In other words, the relationship has shifted from capital/labour to capital/life. Subsequently, discussions around precarity cannot be limited to the world of employment. Instead, they need to include analyses of how processes of exploitation impact subjectivity, social relations and

human creativity. It is for this reason that many cultural theorists turn to post-Autonomist discourses emphasising the rise of immaterial production in Western post-industrial economies. Observing how cultural forms of production organise and legitimise capitalist accumulation, they argue that the exploitation of subjectivity can be connected to the expansion and development of the creative industries in neoliberalism (Gill and Pratt 2008; Rossiter and Lovink 2007).

6. Cultural producers as model entrepreneurs: The rise of the creative industries

Building on Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's critique of the commodification of culture and the manipulation of society into passive audiences of mass culture (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997), numerous cultural critics have investigated the ways in which human creativity has become an integral part of today's capitalist infrastructure while shaping and conditioning working subjects. They state that values like independence, authenticity and idiosyncrasy – originally proclaimed as anti-establishment and anti-capitalist forms of life – are now used in order to promote the conditions required by the self-regulating markets of cognitive-cultural economies (Gielen and Bruyne 2009). Following Pascal Gielen's analysis of the globalised art world, since the 1980s art production has served as a kind of laboratory of post-Fordist working practices, from which models based on project work with short term contracts and no job security have been outwardly expanded and applied to all other aspects of working and non-working lives (Gielen 2009).

In their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2007), Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello posit that the critiques emerging from the artistic and intellectual avant-gardes and various social movements of the post-war era have been absorbed into the workings of capital. They believe that it is precisely capitalism's adaptation to artistic and social critiques that corrodes the politicisation of life, paving the way for neoliberal subjectivation (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007, 39). Starting with the rejection of Fordist modes of regulation by artists, Boltanski and Chiapello explore how demands for more autonomy and the desire to find alternatives to alienating and "boring" labour eventually became assets for the strategies of business administration. Dissecting corporate culture and management literature, they notice

an injunction to see employees as free, independent and dynamic individuals that are, in principle, alone responsible for their success or failure (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007, 154). In this context, artists become perfect role models insofar as they are used to adapting flexibly to new working conditions in the absence of the risk-minimising function of long-term institutional work (Dockx and Gielen 2015, 182).

While these authors rightly observe the ways in which artistic practice and cultural production organise and legitimise capital accumulation, others stress that the benefits of artistic and cultural critique should not be ignored. Maurizio Lazzarato emphasises the inventiveness and dynamic social criticism of creative workers (Lazzarato 2011). By building their own infrastructures and working collectively, they incubate subject positions and social relations that are not nearly as susceptible to the sophisticated operations of capital. Likewise, Stefan Nowotny points to the immanent effects of creativity in terms of its ability to 'take a distance' from what is actual and even from what is desirable (Nowotny 2011, 12-13). Here the social critique of creative workers not only serves capitalist valorisation and the commodification of culture but is also a site for subverting regimes of control and transforming existing conditions.

Furthermore, artistic networks have the potential to function according to their own concerns, instead of those associated to the cultural politics of cognitive capitalism. Drawing together years of conversations with artists about the nature and conditions of collaborative practice, Stevphen Shukaitis finds that there are numerous creative interventions keeping 'the grammar of self-organisation unfettered by the fixed forms of capital's continued accumulation demands' (Shukaitis 2019, 2). While gathering together and setting up common spaces for collaboration, artists create resilient bases for agency and autonomy as well as the production of shareable things that will help people to gain a footing in the world and determine their own experience and destiny (Shukaitis 2019, 14). This is echoed by Pascal Gielen, who, while searching for the ingredients that the 'murmuring' art world needs in order to preserve its own dynamic and freedom, stumbles upon places of intimacy and 'slowability' in the hectic global flow of artistic events (Gielen 2009).

Taking these arguments into account, forms of labour based on creativity, communication, virtuosity and affect are by no means exclusively productive for a new phase of capitalist accumulation. Because the value produced by this work cannot be entirely calculated and measured – it is difficult to monetise – cultural production can go beyond the terms required by the new economic system. Subject positions and social relationships arise that do not entirely correspond to the neoliberal logic of valorisation. Such positions can subvert capitalist work discipline and the supposedly emancipative horizons of entrepreneurial practices. As such creative labour can be conceptualised not only as a reality of insecure employment that contributes to the normalisation of precarisation but also as a condition that exceeds and disrupts governmental control and regulation. It follows that cognitive-cultural economies may operate according to a dominant logic, but the operations of this logic cannot exclude all possibilities for resistance. As Gene Ray observes: 'The culture industry is not utterly monolithic, any more than the capitalist state is' (Ray 2011, 175). This means that the degree to which neoliberal institutions rely on creative forces in order to function makes them at the same time vulnerable to those forces.

However, although the exploitation of creative subjectivity is not as determined, decisive and resolute as it would appear, the far-reaching consequences of the expansion and development of the so-called "creative industries" in Western post-industrial economies cannot be neglected. The concept of creative industries was initiated by the British Labour party in the late 1990s in order to revitalise de-industrialised urban zones. In 2001, the Blair government published a cultural policy green paper, in which creativity was considered crucial for a 'successful economic life in an advanced knowledge-based economy' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2001, 5). Building on innovation advisor Charles Leadbeater's idea that 'everyone is creative', the paper suggests the arts, and the new patterns of freelance work and self-employment associated with being an artist, become a model for the generation of new jobs and an engine for economic growth (McRobbie 2001).

This particular understanding of the creative industries gathered momentum after being celebrated in Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002). In the

early 2000s, this bestselling book was mobilised around the world as the zeitgeist of urban policymakers and 'culturpreneurs' (Loacker 2013). Emphasising the transformative power of cognitive-cultural economies, Florida regards the increase of 'human creativity as the key factor in our economy and society' (Florida 2002, 4). Boosting energy and enthusiasm for creative self-expression and independent cultural dynamics, the social effects of these changes and emerging inequities were swept aside. In the book there is not much attention paid to the proliferation of insecure and less regulated forms of employment, gentrification of neighbourhoods, rising income inequalities, growth of a flexible and mobile work force, and high levels of exploitation. Florida's optimistic tale gives little time and space to grasp the foundation of the economic and political climate, and fails to correctly assess and describe the exclusionary and discriminating mechanisms involved (Dockx and Gielen 2015, 182).

Despite the fact that his cheering assertions neglect the ramifications of the new centrality of creativity in post-industrial economies, Florida rightly anticipated the spreading of the term to the level of national policies. Around the turn of the 21st century, social-democratic governments across Europe set in motion a transformative shift towards a culturalisation of the economy and a corresponding economisation of culture. This is exemplified in the structural adjustment plans of the German labour market in which self-employed and freelance professionals working in the creative sectors are presented as self-motivated sources of productivity. In 2003, the German chancellor Gerhard Schröder asked Volkswagen's human resources director Peter Hartz to lead a commission on reform in the national labour market. As a result, the "Ich-AG" ("Me Inc.") scheme was introduced. This new public subsidy for business start-ups and one-person companies was intended to reduce Germany's unemployment rate, combat illegal employment, and offer unemployed people a way out of undeclared work (von Osten and Grammel 2004). The idea was that instead of claiming unemployment benefits whilst looking for a job, people would set up their own business and receive financial benefits to help them kick-start limited companies.

The introduction of the Ich-AG scheme in Germany demonstrates how independent forms of work have become increasingly attached to the goals of regeneration and

employment creation (Hesmondhalgh 2008). In many Western European nations, unemployment has become another terrain for market expansion and financial accumulation. In the era of local and regional development policy, not having a job still means working. In other words, searching for a job is now part of the new economy. The monetisation of unemployment and non-work has far reaching consequences. For example, if people are unable to self-invest and enhance their future value (Feher 2009), they are only themselves to blame. This logic of individual responsibility rests upon an image of the autarkic self that is economically independent and self-sufficient. "Me Inc." models maintain that people, even when unemployed, should remain continuously engaged in at least that one enterprise, contributing to 'the continuous business of living to make adequate provision for the preservation, reproduction and reconstruction of one's own human capital' (Gordon 1991, 44).

Similar to its British counterpart, the German regeneration program of government subsidised "self-employment-for-the-unemployed" hailed cultural producers as model entrepreneurs. As subjects positioned outside the mainstream labour force, they were celebrated as passionately committed creators of new, subversive ideas, innovative lifestyles and ways of working. Within this framework, cultural producers embody the successful combination of an unlimited diversity of ideas, creativity-on-call and smart self-marketing that today is demanded of everyone (von Osten 2011b, 137). The view that independent cultural production might be connected to movements for progressive social change, is being neglected in favour of a view more compatible with contemporary capitalism.

As the creative processes and affective relations characterising alternative forms of production were increasingly conventionalised into models of economic privatisation, the working and living conditions of cultural producers became more precarious. Their desires for self-determination were appropriated, and free and autonomous self-activities intertwined with new forms of exploitation. Around the year 2000, cultural producers who were critical of these developments started to engage in collaborative forms of research in order to confront the new realities of their production. They were devoted to their creative work but increasingly aware that this very dynamic was what was being relied upon by the state, employers and

policymakers concerned with rationalising both labour markets and welfare costs. They also realised that the international push to develop so-called "creative cities" more readily supported a tourist and service economy, and real-estate developments, than it instantiated the creative autonomy of those working in the arts, media, design and cultural sectors (Neilson and Rossiter 2005).

Concerned by the ideological restructuring of cultural forms of labour in an age of creative industries and urban development policy, cultural producers in Berlin began dealing with the new economically and socially conditioned mechanisms of exclusion that they experienced daily in the spheres of work and private life (von Osten and Grammel 2004). While engaging with the everyday lived experiences of cultural producers working in the city, they explored problems associated with flexible labour and project work, the spread of entrepreneurial self-practices, and increased individualisation in creative workplaces. Looking for new ways to interpret and shape the paradoxical status of cultural production in the neoliberal economy, they considered possibilities for critical agency and collective organisation under the precarisation of creative labour.

One of these initiatives was the Berlin-based group kleines postfordistisches Drama (kpD). Comprised of Brigitta Kuster, Isabell Lorey, Marion von Osten and Katja Reichard, kpD investigated the social context within which cultural producers working and living in Berlin have to position themselves. Coupling the sociological analysis of cultural production with questions of governmental precarisation, subjectivation and resistance, the group troubled the regulatory mechanisms through which cultural producers are produced and maintained as entrepreneurial subjects. The next chapter will take a closer look at kpD's practice to analyse the ways their 2004 video project *Kamera Läuft!* debates and negotiates the notion of self-precarisation in the context of cultural production.

Chapter 2 – Re-articulating self-precarisation: Cultural production, subjectivation and resistance in kleines postfordistisches Drama

1. Cultural production and self-precarisation in kleines postfordistisches Drama's *Kamera Läuft!*

> Two hundred years of capitalism went by, before a worker's movement as such could develop. So, I hope that it goes a little faster this time, otherwise things are looking really shitty (kpD 2004).

Around the turn of the 21st century, artists and social theorists concerned by the ideological restructuring of cultural forms of labour, in an age of creative industries and urban development policy, started to engage in collaborative forms of research in order to develop new perspectives on creative labour. As previously stated, the Berlin-based group kleines postfordistisches Drama (kpD) was one of these initiatives. Focussing on their video project *Kamera Läuft!* from 2004, this chapter examines how kpD's artistic practice debates and negotiates the conscious and voluntary acceptance of insecure work and life. The group explores the potential for a critical reformation of precarious subjectivity by problematising strong desires for freedom, autonomy and self-determination in the context of cultural production. Considered as a viable site of re-articulation, I argue the work of kpD is part of the urgent, fundamental and politically indispensable task of developing new practices of the self – the formation of an ethics, "an art of living", or in this case, an art of cultural production.

Notably, kpD locates personal narratives and exchanges – including their own – at the heart of their artistic, cultural, social and political strategies. By taking the subjective experience of self-precarisation as a starting point, the group attends to the immediacy of everyday life in post-Fordism – hence the enigmatic name of the group: "small post-Fordist drama". Referring to the "chamber tragedies" of cultural producers living and working in Berlin in the early 2000s, kpD's name self-ironically alludes to the futile attempts to unravel the intersections of creativity, cognitive labour, social reproduction and insecure employment. Their awareness of the conditions of their own labour, as well as their desire to theorise these, was

instrumental in the development of a new politics of precarity in the context of creative labour around the turn of the 21st century (McRobbie 2017, 184). Anticipating the normalisation of governmental precarisation in the early 2000s, the group put forward new ways of articulating the widespread adaptation to flexible and unstable circumstances and its effects on creative workers. Now the state of conditioning through insecurity has gained real hegemonic sense, this chapter will critically appraise kpD's artistic practice and discursive strategies with the aim to comprehend the continued, and in many ways intensified, mechanisms of labour exploitation in Western Europe.

1.1. kleines postfordistisches Drama's cultural production: Artistic, theoretical and socio-political interventions

kpD comprises Brigitta Kuster, Isabell Lorey, Marion von Osten and Katja Reichard. Kuster works as a filmmaker, artist and researcher; Lorey is a political theorist and lecturer; von Osten works as an artist, curator and researcher; Reichard is an artist-researcher, and she co-runs the thematic bookshop Pro qm in Berlin. Engaged in various forms of artistic production, theoretical research and socio-political practices, the four women came together in the early 2000s through a shared desire to engage with the critique of neoliberal economisation from the perspective of cultural production. In doing so, they reflected on their own participation as actors in this discourse. Whilst critically thinking about the expansion and development of the creative industries, they embarked on a collaborative investigation to uncover the extent to which their autonomous modes of living and working – formerly perceived as dissident – had become co-opted by hegemonic, governmental functions. Collectively thinking through the consequences of the rise of a new type of freelance worker, they were keen to understand why cultural production seemed to have lost its potential for counter-behaviour in neoliberal capitalism.

kpD was developed in the framework of the research and exhibition project *Atelier Europa* at Kunstverein München in 2003, and has founding connections with the *Be Creative! The Creative Imperative* exhibition and conference at Museum für Gestaltung in Zurich in 2002, and the *Falsches-Leben-Show* at Prater der Volksbühne in Berlin in 2001. The establishment of the group was marked in 2003, when Kuster,

Lorey and Reichard were invited by von Osten to contribute to a project she initiated with Pauline Boudry, Søren Grammel and Angela McRobbie for Kunstverein München. Named *Atelier Europa,* this research and exhibition project aimed to discuss the changing perceptions and practices of cultural production amidst the process of adapting to a post-industrial information and service society (von Osten and Grammel 2004). Developed and organised in cooperation with theorists, activists, curators, artists and designers from Austria, France, Germany, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom[12], its research program was dedicated to thinking about how, alongside self-organising abilities and flexibility, creativity was increasingly considered a professional and productive asset or requirement. The main aim was to investigate the implications this had for models of working as well as for the lived experiences of cultural producers in Europe.

Bringing together 'transversally-minded art-activists projects' (Vishmidt 2017, 224-225), *Atelier Europa* was developed as a 'project exhibition' (Zolghadr 2017, 245). Transdisciplinary, transinstitutional and transnational in outlook, it enabled the pursuit of collaborative, research-driven, discursively ambitious questions around cultural production. According to Tom Holert, its program attempted to 'align the logics of various knowledge milieus, research agendas, styles of thinking and practices of making things public' (Holert 2017, 119). The idea was that whilst negotiating different interests, demands and expectations, unexpected and experimental commonalities might appear around shared urgencies in the creative sector. For the artists, activists and researchers involved in *Atelier Europa*, one of these urgencies was to challenge the individualised experience of precarity among cultural producers. This was also the objective of kpD: 'to look for the lines capable of collectivity' as to subvert 'the disciplining of flexibilisation' (kpD 2005c).

In line with the politics of the framework in which their practice was developed, Kuster, Lorey, von Osten and Reichard used the term "cultural producer" – "Kulturarbeiter" in German – in a strategic manner. They did not speak of a certain

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[12] Participants included Claudia Blum, Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, Armin Chodzinski, El Sueño Colectivo, Julian Göthe, Carles Guerra, Brian Holmes, Justin Hoffmann, Judith Hopf, Michaela Melián, René Pollesch, Précaires Associés de Paris, Precarias a la Deriva, Katharina Püh, Christiane Rösinger, Maria Ruido, Mladen Stilinovic, TeamPingPong, Ingo Vetter, Antek Walczak and others.

sector or social category, but of practices traversing different fields: 'theory production, design, political and cultural self-organisation, forms of collaboration, paid, underpaid and unpaid jobs, informal and formal economies, temporary alliances, project-related working and living' (kpD 2005c). Here cultural production is understood as a type of 'thinking-making' (Holert 2017, 106) informed by various economies and ecologies, which can be libidinal, financial, social, political, epistemic, cognitive, cultural, artistic, and so on. kpD's deliberate use of the term "cultural producer" can be regarded as a rebellious act against existing forms of address and given subjectivities of contemporary artists, exhibition makers and researchers on the one side, and the subjectivities of creative workers on the other. Referring to a moment of self-definition of artists and theorists working in new discursive constellations, von Osten stresses its open-endedness in terms of a resistance to subscribing to an ascertainable social category, or a professional self-conception, associated to a sector or discipline (von Osten 2018, 198).

Moving beyond any kind of reductionist approach towards the notion of cultural production, kpD employed a process-based, collaborative and trans-disciplinary way of working, with a strong dedication to 'research as permanent incompletion' (Vishmidt 2017, 234-235). That is to say, their contribution to *Atelier Europa* was not well defined from the beginning, but conceived as an open-ended procedure, exposed to improvisation and spontaneity. The women did not have a rigorous formalised plan with predetermined limits. Letting continuous trial and error, feedback and fine-tuning take place, kpD's methodology can be described as organic. Characterised by "natural" development, their work progressed very much in sync with its constant re-planning, re-discussing, reconsidering, revisiting, reproducing, reinstalling.

From the outset, kpD's research project was explicitly structured as a collective effort, whether in terms of conceptualisation, production, execution, distribution, or all of these. For Kuster, Lorey, von Osten and Reichard, working collectively was important practically as well as politically. Their deliberate involvement in all aspects of the creation process constitutes an intervention into the isolated situations of creative practitioners in the 21st century. Motivated by the wish to challenge the mythology of the solo artist – independent, male, ingenious – their

collaboration can be seen as an interruption of the individual artist's signature. While acknowledging each contributor's role at every stage of the process, there is no distinctive pattern, product or characteristic that makes the final versions and presentations of their work identifiable.

The outcome of their research for *Atelier Europa* was initially presented as a multi-channel video installation in the exhibition at Kunstverein München. As a site-specific work, it was created to exist in a certain space; incorporated in a sculptural mock-monumental installation of decommissioned office furniture (Holert 2017, 107). After this presentation, kpD changed how audiences encounter, participate and perceive *Kamera Läuft!*. As the video travelled across Europe, it was put on display in various art and project exhibitions.[13] On each occasion, the specific location was taken into account while re-planning, re-designing and re-creating its installation. As such, multiple versions of *Kamera Läuft!* exist, but a single screen 35-minute edit of the video has been most widely circulated. It is also this version that I came across during the workshop on the self-precarisation of cultural producers organised by Isabell Lorey for the fourth Former West Research Congress at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin in 2013.

Since its initial presentation in Munich, *Kamera Läuft!* has been screened and discussed in various academic and non-academic settings in Europe and beyond. Besides exhibiting the work as an aesthetic product in artistic environments, kpD has used *Kamera Läuft!* as a target group style video in seminars and public programs addressing questions around freedom and autonomy in cognitive-cultural economies.[14] In these contexts, the work operates as a tool for cultural producers to raise self-awareness of their own oppression, 'in order to promote a political

[13] Other than *Atelier Europa* at Kunstverein München, kpD has presented their work at *Klartext! The Status of the Political in Contemporary Art and Culture* at Künstlerhaus Bethanien and Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz in Berlin, Kollektive Kreativität at Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel, and Kunstraum Lakeside in Klagenfurt in 2005; *13th International Festival of Contemporary Arts* at Skuc Gallery in Ljubljana in 2007; *The Grand Domestic Revolution* at Casco in Utrecht in 2011; *The Grand Domestic Revolution Goes On* at The Showroom in London in 2012 and at CCA Centre for Contemporary Art in Derry-Londonderry in 2013; and *Economize! On the Relationship of Art and Economy* at the Ludwig Museum in Budapest in 2018.
[14] As part of my PhD research on kpD, I hosted a screening of *Kamera Läuft!* and moderated a conversation with Isabell Lorey on autonomy and precarisation as part of the *Culture Industry Now!* event series organised by the Centre for Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London in April 2016.

reinterpretation of their own life and establish bases for its transformation' (Malo de Molina 2004a). By watching *Kamera Läuft!* together and collectively discussing its resonances, viewers become active participants in the creation of meaning around self-precarisation in the creative sector. Multiplying the acts of sharing and communication, the work might also generate a space for self-organisation.

To a certain extent, kpD's video can be analysed as a form of militant cinema (Eshun and Gray 2011). As stated by Argentine film director and writer Octavio Getino, militant cinema is that which is taken as instrument, complement, or support of a specific political goal, and of the organisations that carry out any number of the diverse objectives that it seeks: counter-information, raising consciousness, agitation, training of cadres, etc. (Getino 2011, 41). Employing *Kamera Läuft!* as a target group video, kpD arguably builds on such militant cinema strategies.[15] Through the translation of a socio-political analysis into moving images, viewers are given tools with which to understand and discuss situations of oppression in cognitive-cultural economies. As such, kpD not only developed an aesthetic product but also a theoretical discourse and socio-political field of action.

1.2. A workers'-inquiry-without-a-workplace

While constructing the concept of cultural production as an analytical tool for theoretical, artistic and socio-political intervention, kpD started their research by examining the lived experiences of those whose workday is extremely flexible and largely autonomous. Coupling the sociological analysis of cultural forms of production with questions of self-precarisation, subjectivation and resistance, the group interviewed fifteen cultural producers living and working in Berlin – including themselves – about their autonomous labour practices. Amongst those interviewed were political scientist and documentary filmmaker Dario Azzelini; artist Pauline Boudry; music journalist and cultural critic Diedrich Diederichsen; researcher and lecturer Katja Diefenbach, who also runs the bookshop and

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[15] It is worth mentioning the militant cinema Getino alludes to was mostly shown in clandestine and censored ways. Moreover, these films were used to actively prepare for political struggle, usually in collaboration with existing political movements. As I will demonstrate in the second half of this chapter, this does not so much apply to kpD's work.

publishing house b_books in Berlin; art historian, art critic and teacher Tom Holert; and artist, costume and stage designer Mona Kuschel. kpD approached these people to learn about the everyday lives, desires and perspectives of those whose workday is extremely flexible and largely autonomous.

In order not to fall into the trap of displacement that avoids questioning the conditions of one's own life and work, kpD's research was accompanied by self-analysis. Dissolving the asymmetrical relationship between researcher and researched, between "them" and "us", the members of the group addressed their own implications as cultural producers in the process. As such their investigation is formulated from the specific context – the field of cultural production – in which it aims to fulfil its effective practice as a consciousness-raising tool. By incorporating elements of their own personal situations into the work, it can be argued the group generates knowledge that is situated and embodied, rather than neutral and distanced.[16]

Kuster, Lorey, von Osten and Reichard used the mechanism of the interview as an "excuse" to talk among themselves and others about the increasingly conventionalised social context in which cultural producers position themselves as role models of economic privatisation. Here, kpD invoked a space where singular threads of everyday lived experiences running between cultural producers can be articulated and related to one another. Helping people to realise common conditions and empowering them to take action, their investigation is inscribed in traditions of consciousness-raising groups deriving from second-wave feminism. Constituting a strategy for liberation, feminist consciousness-raising asserts that the only way to build a radical movement is by starting from the self (Hanisch 1970; Firestone 1971; Sarachild 1978). By beginning at a private level, in facing one's own struggles and to start changing one's own conditions, it becomes possible to identify with the struggles of others.

By trying to connect individualised problems to structural changes happening in society, kpD used consciousness-raising to share personal experiences of cultural

[16] This approach can be analysed through Donna Haraway's notion of situated knowledges and feminist embodiment, which I will extensively discuss in chapter 4.

production in such a way as to bring out their political implications and develop a strategy for change. In doing so they hoped to detect the conditions out of which a radical transformation of post-Fordist capitalism could emerge. Notably, kpD's line of inquiry combined general questions about everyday working conditions with explicitly political questions about oppression and resistance. Besides focussing on macro-social issues considering the rise of the creative class, the group specifically concentrated on the micro-politics of cultural labour in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. Questions asked during the interviews included: 'How would you describe your work life? What do you like about it and what should change? When and why does it all become too much and what do you do then? What do you consider a 'good life'? Due to their social function as role models, should cultural producers combine with other social movements to work on new concepts of organisation?' (kpD 2005a).

kpD's survey is based on the method of militant inquiry, a research praxis developed by Potere Operaio (Workers' Power), a radical left-wing political group from Italy active between 1968 and 1973 (Lotringer and Marazzi 2007). Led by Antonio Negri, this group was part of the "workerist" movement which led to the development of the Autonomist movement. Potere Operaio's main sphere of operations was in big factories in the industrial north of Italy. Those involved believed an emphasis on sociological research would help understand the composition of the working class and help a movement emerge. Opposing the idea that working class opinion could be prefabricated in the laboratories of ideology, and seeking out the views of those who had never been at the forefront of struggle, they saw inquiry as a specific form of political practice. Taking into account the idea of 'learning from the working class itself', the group took inspiration from Marx's empirical studies of French workers in 1880 (Price 1997). While examining personal accounts and 'autobiographies' of workers – including their own – Potere Operaio asked questions like: 'What are the steps through which the [working] class can once more render its own material composition politically subversive?' (Wright 2002, 218).

The practice of militant inquiry – also referred to as militant research, movement research, research militancy, co-research or workers' inquiry – supposes that the knowledge needed to change production methods and lifestyles is inherent in the

conditions of production themselves and articulated in the desire for change felt by those working in this particular sphere (Bookchin et al. 2013). Rather than using research as a tool to categorise and separate knowledge from practice, militant inquiry operates transversally. It involves becoming part of the process that organises relationships between bodies, knowledges, social practices and fields of political action (Colectivo Situaciones 2007). As such, militant inquiry cannot be separated from concrete struggle; rather it is embedded within it. It is a process that involves actual or everyday encounters between diverse parties, searching for an understanding of their own situations, developing together a collective language, and naming problems in order to fight them (Producciones Translocales of the Counter-Cartographies Collective 2008).

Following Stevphen Shukaitis, workers' inquiry is less about trying to create any fixed idea of class or labour processes than it is about trying to map out the forces at play within a given situation in such a way that they can be utilised to further develop political and social antagonisms (Shukaitis et al. 2007). This specific understanding of workers' inquiry resonates with kpD's use of the practice. For the group, the initial purpose of collecting testimonies of cultural producers was to build a picture of what was going on, how oppression was operating, and in what ways agency was constituted. In their interviews, there was an emphasis on social-sciences methods and approaches in the service of political struggle, but kpD adapted their inquiry to investigate conditions of creative and cognitive labour, particularly as they depart from celebrated positions within cultural policy and some social theory.

Rather than focusing on Fordist workplaces in industrial areas, kpD's conversations evolved around post-Fordist forms of production in Berlin's creative sectors. Whereas the transformation of work towards less regulated and more mobile forms of employment is traceable in many branches of the economy, high levels of flexible labour are particularly prevalent in creative cities like Berlin (McRobbie 2015; Isar and Anheier 2012; Banks eds. 2013). Through urban policies promoting the creative sector as an engine for economic growth, independent forms of cultural production have exponentially grown. The activities of creative workers in Berlin are no longer confined to particular spaces or times – such as the bounded walls of the factory or

the regular workday – but rather flow through the entire space of the city and its sociality (Shukaitis and Figiel 2015). As Michael Hardt and Toni Negri explain:

> The factory constituted in the previous era the primary site and posed the conditions for three central activities of the industrial working class: its production; its internal encounters and organisation; and its expressions of antagonism and rebellion. The contemporary productive activities of the multitude, however, overflow the factory walls to permeate the entire metropolis, and in the process the qualities and potential of those activities are transformed fundamentally (Hardt and Negri 2009, 250).

On the one hand this situation allows for the development of new forms of resistance and the chance of newly forming as "multitude". On the other hand, the dispersion of activities makes it harder for people to mobilise and organise concrete struggle. Acknowledging the difficulties of social and political self-organisation in post-Fordist conditions, kpD tried to find ways to somehow bring together the accounts of the scattered cultural producers they interviewed. Eventually the group translated the results of their 'workers'-inquiry-without-a-workplace' (Vishmidt 2017, 225) into a script, hybridising the personal testimonies of the interviewees into composite dramatised identities. Subsequently they hired nine professional actors to play out the small work/life dramas that occur in cultural contexts. The result is a 35-minute fictional "sociological" documentary depicting creative workers as they describe the productive cycles within their labour practices, as well as the levels of exploitation, and the ability of cultural producers to react in relation to their awareness of self-precarisation.

1.3. Performativity and small work/life dramas in *Kamera Läuft!*

Throughout the video we see cultural producers waiting, rehearsing, preparing and performing auditions in a fictional production setting. This setting – somewhere between a casting stage, a dressing room, a rehearsal space, a chill-out lounge and a bar – is used to re-contextualise the edited interview material in a mediated social space (kpD 2005c). Everything in this space is arranged for viewing and being viewed, as in a film set or studio television drama, where scenes are arranged to hold the performer before the eye of the camera. Stressing the performative elements of cultural labour, the narrative of *Kamera Läuft!* revolves around a casting

process, including a series of "interviews" in which we see the candidates performing monologues about their working and living conditions. Hence the title of the video referring to the traditional cue at the beginning of a take – in English "Kamera läuft!" means "roll camera!".

kpD's work evolves a performative aesthetic where the characters' monologues are put in a special relation to the material situation of their video project. By including and making visible the production setting of *Kamera Läuft!*, kpD evokes a simultaneous and multi-perspectival form of perceiving the disposition of cultural production. As such the notion of performance has multiple functions in the project. It refers to the actors playing the protagonists, the framework of the casting audition as well as the emphasis on performative virtuosic labour in creative contexts. To reiterate Paolo Virno's analysis of post-Fordist production, because virtuosity finds its fulfilment as an activity only in itself, the virtuoso worker has to rely on witnesses (Virno 2004, 52). Due to its performative characteristics, cultural production requires a social space that is structured like the public sphere. It demands that workers expose themselves to the gaze of others – to witnesses.

While performing their monologues in front of rolling cameras, the actors in *Kamera Läuft!* seem less concerned with representing people, action and places, but more with assuming the role of text bearer. While posturing and gesturing, their language feels stylised. Taking into account that their texts are based on the transcripts of kpD's interviews with cultural producers working and living in Berlin, the speech of the actors is put into semi-metaphorical quotation marks, signalling a sense that what they say is a quotation in itself. Rather than aspiring to naturalist documentary modes, through these registers the acting in *Kamera Läuft!* stresses the performativity and theatricality of cultural production.

The characters in the video reveal their "personalities" and their small work/life dramas within the strictures of kpD's casting process. As viewers, we are made aware of the impinging effects of confinement on the cultural producers, whose private testimonies we have access to through confessional speeches facing the camera, and whose communal interactions are shown through intercutting shots depicting simultaneous activities in different parts of kpD's production setting.

These activities range from eating apples, chatting over a cup of tea, and arguing over a glass of wine, to pacing up and down in exasperation and folding clothes. Depicting all kinds of banalities taking place in the everyday "domestic" sphere of kpD's constructed casting setting, the video resembles a reality television program. Since the early 1990s, quotidian events – both mundane and idiosyncratic – have formed a large part of the success and fascination with reality television (Dovey 2000, 138). The second part of this chapter will extensively discuss this format and its relation to neoliberal ideologies of the self.

Through its emphasis on liveness, frontality, evocations of theatrical space and temporality, and the manner in which the characters perform their identities, *Kamera Läuft!* can be conceived as an episode of a pseudo-reality sitcom or a docu-soap opera. Focussing on the activities of cultural producers in a popular ethnography of the everyday, kpD exposes the constructed artificiality of the production setting. By stressing the "showing" that is shown in the showing, kpD plays with various forms of distancing and breaks down the conventional borders between fiction, reality and documentary. This technique ensures that the viewer will have to construct the video actively from its parts.[17]

Mimicking sitcom or soap opera structuring, an important feature of *Kamera Läuft!* is the non-linear and open-ended nature of the narrative. Although edited in serial form, the story does not seem to go anywhere in particular. Rather than telling a tale of cultural production leading to an ending or resolution, *Kamera Läuft!* consists of a collage of accounts tied together through multiple interweaving plot lines, presented without voice-over narration. The continuous storyline, involving fragmentation, interruption, false endings, reversals and new beginnings, implies the integration of the viewer into the meaning-making process. Because there is no orientation

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[17] The disposition employed for *Kamera Läuft!* might be in some ways reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's deployment of the alienation effect (Brecht 2003). Brecht attempted to activate estrangement positively in order to provoke critical thought that might lead to actions of resistance and change. He wanted his audiences to adopt a critical perspective in order to recognise social injustice and exploitation and to be moved to go forth from the theatre and effect change in the world outside (Martin 2013). It has been argued that by suggesting that spectators are passive in the first place and need to be activated Brecht's deployment of alienation does not address forms of socio-political organisation or mobilisation already present amongst viewers. See Jacques Rancière's work on the emancipated spectator and the militant critique of the consumption of images and commodities (Rancière 2011).

provided by a recognisable plot line or narrator, viewers have to negotiate the small work/life dramas presented in the video themselves.[18]

The consequences of this orientation will be further explored in the fourth part of this chapter, where I analyse kpD's work as a tool for consciousness-raising in creative contexts. The next section turns to the content of the video in order to establish a framework for understanding the social space in which the scripted testimonies of kpD's interviewees are played out. First, however, I will briefly identify the characters in *Kamera Läuft!*. Amongst the protagonists are a self-employed publisher and journalist who works night shifts to make ends meet, and a freelance costume designer who, as a single parent, receives benefits from the government to cover her costs of living. There is also an independent music journalist who works as a lecturer at a university, a former information technology specialist who wants to become a performing actor, and an artist who gave up her job at a cinema box office to start a bookshop co-operative. Most of the characters have pulled away from guaranteed waged labour, preferring the freedom of self-employment over a possibly more comfortable but passive life in "normal" nine to five employment.

The cultural producers featured in kpD's project can be seen as survivors of the early 1990s Berlin bohemia. During the heyday of artistic critique – when Berlin was still "Berlin" – there was a strong belief that creativity had a radical social and political potentiality. According to Marina Vishmidt, it was a time when cultural production was still open to experiment and art projects identified with 'the pedagogy and conviviality of subcultures' (Vishmidt 2017, 224). With affordable living and working spaces, as well as abundant space for artistic expression, Berlin had the reputation of offering freedom. For the local bohemia there was plenty of

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[18] This orientation is connected with a movement away from interpretation to the presentation of linguistic and gestural material. Here, the performances in *Kamera Läuft!* can be analysed as a form of post-dramatic theatre. This notion was established by German theatre researcher Hans-Thies Lehmann in 1999, in order to summarise a number of tendencies and stylistic traits occurring in avant-garde theatre since the end of the 1960s. According to Andrew Haydon, post-dramatic theatre occurs 'when the progression of a story with its internal logic no longer forms the centre, and when composition is no longer experienced as an organising quality but as an artificially imposed "manufacture".' (Haydon 2008).

time to develop commentative 'non-productive attitudes' (Vishmidt 2017, 224), and to cultivate persona and community over professional ambition.

This view of Berlin in the 1990s is closely connected to the geopolitical situation of the city during the Cold War. In the decade before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, critical subjectivities were no longer committed to "world revolution" but intent on realising alternative ways of life – squatting, being gay/lesbian, feminist, punk, new wave, etc. The renouncement of normality was expressed in aesthetic experiments as well as 'the refusal of many practitioners to adhere to a self-contained narration' (Schulte-Strathaus and Wüst 2008). This attitude is also reflected in Helke Sander's semi-autobiographical feature film *Die allseitig reduzierte Persönlichkeit: Redupers* (*The All-round Reduced Personality: Redupers*) from 1977. Focused on the networked and self-organising conditions of a freelance female photographer living and working in West Berlin in the 1970s, *Redupers* considers ideals of freedom, autonomy and self-determination.[19] A product of emancipatory demands and neoliberal impositions, the protagonist has pulled away from wage labour and its regulatory apparatus in the factory or in the office, as the Autonomists called for. At the same time, she is presented as a figure who cannot be located biographically, and instead requires a new form of subjectivity (von Osten 2011a).

Representing a historical starting point for current investigations into the critical potential of creative work in post-industrial cities, *Redupers* has been an important reference for kpD. Already in 1977, Sander's film was able to capture the extent to which paradoxical demands were becoming dominant labour market politics in Western Europe. *Redupers* illustrates that even in the upheaval of changes in the capitalist order that took place in the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism,

[19] Revolving around the protagonist's attempts to balance her commitments as a mother and a member of a women's photography collective with the need to earn a living, *Redupers* confronts the gendered division of labour in patriarchal capitalist societies. Through a female voiceover narrating from both inside (first person) and outside (third person), shifting between objective and subjective accounts, the film emphasises the plurality and partiality of possible perspectives in the context of self-precarisation. Provocative in style and subject matter, Sander's self-reflexive explorations of women's experiences reveal the ambition to politicise the personal and challenge habitual ways of seeing. Her work exposes the asymmetrical power structures that disadvantage women and the general resistance to an analysis of gendered relations. For my PhD research I have conducted extensive research into this film. Inevitably, due to limitations of space, I had to omit my findings from this thesis. Current debates around the problems and potentials of precarious work in relation to gendered divisions of labour will be dealt with in chapter 4.

there was a close connection between collective resistance and new forms of production. These conditions continued to be analysed by feminists in the 1980s, including Sander herself, who was a central figure in Germany's second wave women's movement. Arguably this demonstrates kpD's practice does not come out of nowhere but is in line with a trajectory of feminist political filmmaking in Berlin.

However, working and living conditions in the city changed drastically after the fall of Berlin Wall in 1989. Compared with today, property prices were still affordable, social safety nets relatively functioning, and personal debt burdens significantly lower. From the mid-1990s into the early 2000s, the landscape in Berlin started to change. Following the expansion of the European Union and a new turn in globalised capital, neoliberal policies crept into the city. Strategies for urban development, aimed at revitalisation, caused Berlin to become a business and a brand, rather than a local community.[20] As investors sold large parts of the city, the early 1990s idea of limitless opportunity and freedom turned into an illusion. With neoliberalism becoming a normative mode of reason, creative self-expression and the independent cultural dynamics that drove it forward were replaced by entrepreneurial attitudes. By the time kpD began to pay attention to the appropriation of desires for freedom and autonomy, the potentials of flexibility and mobility were already creating new limitations for cultural producers. These limitations are reflected in *Kamera Läuft!*. Through a close analysis of the testimonies of the cultural producers in kpD's video, the following section will focus on issues associated to the rise of a new type of freelance worker.

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[20] This process manifested in the "Be Berlin" marketing campaign launched in 2008. The adopted slogan illustrates how urban space in Berlin is no longer a place composed of markets; instead, the city itself is marketed (Halle 2013). The consequences of these developments are reflected in Tatjana Turanskyj's experimental fiction film *Eine flexible Frau* (*The Drifters*) from 2010. This film follows an unemployed female architect navigating through precarious working and living conditions in contemporary and rapidly gentrifying Berlin. It chronicles the scenes of a woman's fragile existence, who takes to drink as an antidote to her despair in the world of the talent-led economy. Again, due to limitations of space, I had to leave out my reflections on this film from this thesis.

1.4. Contradictory testimonies: The problems and potentials of self-chosen precarious labour

For many of the cultural producers interviewed by kpD, the social, cultural and economic cease to be clearly distinguishable categories. Processes of production and reproduction permeate one another, causing both working and living conditions to become precarious. Problems associated with structural insecurity and continually changing demands are reflected in *Kamera Läuft!*.

Many of the protagonists in the video need more than one job to make ends meet: 'I work three jobs: I am a publisher, meaning that I have all the publishing house jobs, like layout and editing – I have a night job and I work as a journalist. That's how I make my living. I write for three different newspapers.' The multiple occupations and projects they are involved in lead to a constant overtaxing of time and capacity. Juggling numerous activities changes the quality of work and life, as well as the borders separating these spheres. If work can be done in non-standardised hours, it becomes difficult to stop working at all. Every last bit of personal freedom can be taken over by work, resulting in the feeling that each minute must be devoted to something productive. As one character says: 'I find if work seeps into your life[21], it's really totally stressful to take free time because you always have to demand it of yourself.' Another expresses:

> You make your own pressure above all – and work is, for me, very threatening. I don't think of spare time as free time. But I'm always thinking: "Shit, then you've got to do this, then you still have to do that"... I thread my way through the day captured like this.

Following these statements, the issue of balancing work and life commitments comes with numerous constraints and difficulties. When the spheres of leisure and labour are hybridising, the responsibility for setting boundaries between them is placed entirely on the shoulders of the individual worker. Most cultural producers are always available for work. Subsequently they regard life outside work as a time of preparation for and readiness to work. Mental flexibility and constant

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[21] *Arbeit sickert in mein Leben* (*Work seeps into my life*) was the first working title of kpD's project (kpD 2005b).

communication via networks are vital for their survival. They internalise the expectation that they must always be open to new circumstances and new ideas, in order to put them to work for creative processes.

Despite their highly collaborative and networked practices based on communicative abilities and social relations, many cultural producers experience feelings of isolation. One character in *Kamera Läuft!* says: 'Everyone is totally interconnected nowadays, but nonetheless sits alone in the office.' Another describes: 'I am on the road as an individual with a laptop and telephone'. A third explains: 'Usually I'm three days there, three days here, three days there. Everything depends very much on how I am merged into whichever institutional conditions.' Because they are physically mobile – cultural producers can be "plugged in" anywhere and anytime. For many rhythms of labour are intermittent, fluid and discontinuous. Longing for a more regulated work schedule, one character pacing up and down a rehearsal room in kpD's fictional production setting envisions:

> Over and over again, I imagine being carried through the day with the help of a reliable and obligatory timetable, secured by personnel and a well-organised household run by relatives, just like the regularity-possessed famous writers describe in their autobiographies. 7 am: Desk, 9 am: Breakfast, 10 am: Desk, Noon: Walking the dog, 1 pm: Lunch Break, 2 pm: Correspondence. 4 pm: Desk – editing of the writing from the previous morning, 7 pm: Dinner, 8 pm: Walking the dog, 11 pm: Bedtime. – Instead of a lot of irregularities and unimaginable things.

Having to show great flexibility when undertaking work, many cultural producers find that, due to ever-changing workloads, rigid schemes can rarely be adhered to. Stop-and-go "bulimic" patterns of working, characterised by periods with no work giving way to periods that require intense activity and round the clock working, have major impacts on sleep, diet and health. One of the protagonists complains: 'My arm's been hurting for months now. It's the computer arm that's gone on strike: I don't want to do it anymore.' This comment shows how, despite the supposedly "immaterial" and non-repetitive nature of their work, post-Fordist production can have real effects on the body, potentially leading to physical exhaustion, aches and pains, up to the impairment of corporeal functions in the nervous system.

For many freelance workers it is impossible to build for the long term on their jobs, professions or even their abilities. There is always the risk that their job might be cut, their profession might change, their skills might no longer be in demand. The interminable lack of certainty and stability on which to construct a life is connected to experiences of fear, anxiety and a loss of control. Feelings of insecurity may be channelled into fuelling securitisation, leading to obsessive struggles to reclaim control by micro-managing whatever one can control. Following this chain of events, self-precarisation not only stands for financial and material insecurity, but also has strong physical, psychological, emotional, and affective dimensions. People are continuously questioned in their mode of being and continuously re-evaluated as productive or unproductive.

Nevertheless, the cultural producers in *Kamera Läuft!* also see certain possibilities within their self-chosen precarious labour. For them, working independently, rather than in a position of permanent employment, corresponds to the desire for a life that is not structured by others. Freelancers are able to organise their own time, which makes freedom and autonomy seem possible. As one character says: 'I can decide myself where the border is when I want to stop working.' And another stresses: 'It's also permitted to not come into the office for a day.' Because they can work outside of nine to five routines, many cultural producers believe they are moving towards higher levels of production: 'One can permanently get the feeling that something's happening, that you are addressed, that you're doing something.' Work and life experiences are in permanent construction, leading to an endless accumulation of diverse knowledges, skills and abilities. Involvement in on-going processes of self-forming, becoming and constituting oneself is desired; learning and being able to deal with contingency and the unforeseen are experienced as emancipatory.

For many cultural producers flexible work has become a means of freeing oneself from the boredom of a "normal" working life. One character in kpD's video states: 'For a long time I made my money at the cinema ticket office. And then I stopped, it was somehow liberating, because of the monotony.' Here, incalculability, instability and uncertainty are no longer experienced as a threat, but as a release from tedious repetition and routine. Often being paid (well) is not the main concern. Reflecting on

the decision to quit her 'Fordist' job at the cinema, the same character says: 'It's also a persistent refusal to understand work only as working for salary.' For many cultural producers fulfilment, satisfaction and happiness, resulting from the ability to fully develop their potential and follow their passions, is considered more important than earning money. As the music journalist explains:

> And if I'm sitting at home and writing a text that makes me happy and interests me and I'm listening to certain music or I'm reading about a certain subject, then it is, in the actual sense, work. But it's not at all unpleasant for me. It's no stress, and it's not in any sense I-must-do-something-because-I-must-be-able-to-use-it.

Following this comment, cultural producers seem less interested in being productive in a traditional sense, that is to say, in creating large amounts of "commodities". The remuneration for, and value of, their work is taking pleasure in their activities, and enjoying what they do. Moreover, their working relationships are often less hierarchical and more informal in tone than "normal" labour relations. Due to its communicative and affective dimensions, cultural production offers many opportunities for human contact and interaction. In this context, networking is more like hanging out with friends, co-workers, and people who share similar interests and enthusiasms. As the publisher-journalist reminisces:

> What is also really great is that you are so embedded. There was such a moment – we organised a party recently, and we only invited writers. And since at the time we were pretty strapped for cash, we only paid for the first drink, which didn't stop people from getting wasted. Anyway, later my colleague and I were stumbling around together and standing next to each other and gawking romantically and saying: Isn't that beautiful? To know all these cool people and to be allowed to know them and this is so – wow, simply wow. Yeah, that is one of these moments, which is pretty good.

Collaborative modes of production provide cultural producers opportunities for alternative forms of socialising based on non-accumulative, non-competitive and non-aggressive principles. One of the protagonists says: 'The fear that you will not meet the standard, that you are no longer a part of this productive movement, this fear, which is so projected into this neoliberal 'we have to invent ourselves' – I don't have this fear in my shop collective.'

It follows that despite struggling to make ends meet, the cultural producers interviewed for *Kamera Läuft!* believe in the liberating possibilities of their self-chosen labour practices – especially with regard to the experience of agency, that is, the degree of active involvement they have in shaping their personal experiences and social relations. While escaping the drudgery of boring routines and unfulfilling work, many feel they are developing 'the essence of their being to the maximum in a relatively free and autonomous manner' (Lorey 2008). They experience long working hours and the takeover of life by labour not necessarily as exploitative, but more as the outcome of passionate engagement, creativity and self-expression. In addition, through their reflective, connection-forming and knowledge-producing forms of work, they establish new forms of collectivity. While gathering together and collaborating on projects, they set up congenial and convivial spaces for work and employment in the spheres of art and culture. By doing so they are able to create resilient bases for agency as well as the production of shareable assets that will help people to gain a footing in the world and determine their own experience and destiny (Shukaitis 2019, 14). For all these reasons many cultural producers would not give up their relationship to their precarious work/life, even though they know that the processes they are involved in are 'self-threatening' (Ray 2011, 178).

1.5. Faustian bargains, cruel optimism and self-realisation fantasies

As kpD's video progresses, however, we start wondering if the advantage of self-determination and the rejection of the rigid orders of "normal" working regimes is still a convincing argument for precarious work and life. Counterposing the costs against the benefits, the conditions of the protagonists seem more exploitative than empowering. Marked by structural discontinuity and permanent fragility, their work/life dynamics appear more vicious than virtuous. Their desires for self-realisation come at the cost of a much higher risk that is akin to a Faustian bargain, in which 'freedom' is paid for later (Standing 2011, 78). This reference links back to the famous legend dramatised by Christopher Marlowe and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe respectively.

Faust is the erudite protagonist of the classic German myth, who is highly successful yet bored and depressed with his life as a scholar. His discontent leads him to make

a pact with the devil (or his representative Mephistopheles) in which Faust exchanges his soul for unlimited knowledge and worldly pleasures. For a set number of years Faust is able to use his magical powers but at the end of the term he is eternally enslaved. Following the myth, the adjective 'Faustian' refers to a situation where an ambitious person surrenders his or her moral integrity in order to achieve power and success for a fixed term. As a cultural motif, the figure of Faust can be read through the idea of the irrational spirit of Western creativity. In *The Decline of the West* (1926), German historian Oswald Spengler sees in the Faustian soul a primeval-irrational will to power, characterised as a highly energetic, goal-oriented desire to break through the unknown, supersede the norm, and achieve mastery:

> The Faustian soul – whose being consists in the overcoming of presence, whose feeling is loneliness and whose yearning is infinity – puts its need of solitude, distance and abstraction into all its actualities, into its public life, its spiritual and its artistic form-worlds alike (Spengler 1926, 185-186).

Connecting Spengler's analysis to Joseph Schumpeter's concept of creative destruction, Ricardo Duchesne captures the Faustian personality in his description of the early neoliberal market, where 'true capitalist entrepreneurs employed their rationality for the joy of creation, to fight off competitors and conquer markets' (Duchesne 2017, 401). With regards to contemporary cultural production in post-Fordist capitalism, the idea of a Faustian subjectivity is used not so much to specify a type of personality overflowing with expansive impulses and a creative "will to power", but refers to the stereotype of the suffering genius exemplified by the artist's role in cities such as Berlin, which cashes in on the poor-but-sexy image of its artistic population (Precarious Workers Brigade 2017, 15). In this context, the cultural producer becomes the ideal worker: passionate about what they do and willing to forgo material wealth for the love of it. Problematising the glamour of being precarious, the adjective "Faustian" can also be used to explain the defence mechanisms that sacrifice elements of the self in favour of some form of survival. More concretely, the Faustian bargain refers to the relinquishing of stable or Fordist working conditions, often at the expense of quality of life, in order to gain more autonomy and agency.

At this point a pertinent question arises: why do cultural producers desire something that is potentially bad for them? In order to better understand their 'sacrificial labour' (Ross 2000, 28), and its mechanisms of self-exploitation, we need to look at the desires and fantasies at play in cultural producers' own politics of power and control. Here, Lauren Berlant's notion of cruel optimism might provide a starting point. Her book *Cruel Optimism* (2011) discusses the myriad ways in which neoliberal capitalism sustains itself, most conspicuously by promising the "good life" while simultaneously keeping it just out of reach. She confronts the optimism and desire for something that is withheld, the fantasy of a better life that becomes unattainable. This relation of optimism becomes cruel when something desired is actually an obstacle to one's flourishing, or when the desired object 'actively impedes' (Berlant 2011, 1) in achieving the aim that initiated the desire. This leads to what Berlant describes as a bad life: 'a life dedicated to moving toward the good life's normative/utopian zone but actually stuck in what we might call survival time, the time of struggling, drowning, holding onto the ledge, treading water – the time of not-stopping.' (Berlant 2011, 169).

This description could be applied to the situations of the cultural producers in *Kamera Läuft!*. Revealing their small work/life dramas within the strictures of kpD's casting process, they appear to be stuck in a condition without perspective, for which they nevertheless continue to yearn. While constantly seeking to adjust to current pressures in their lives, the characters persist in becoming attached to normative paradigms even when these normativities do them harm. Bound to a situation of threat, which is at the same time confirming, the protagonists project a future for themselves. This projection of 'sustaining but unworkable fantasy' (Berlant 2011, 188) does not allow for feeling defeated under conditions of relentless social and economic insecurity. Therefore, despite struggling to make ends meet, they keep working the way they do – unwaged, voluntary or for free[22] – in the hope for potential reward. In a situation in which the investment of unpaid or underpaid labour in the past and present pays out at some point in the future, the

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[22] As Tiziana Terranova has illustrated, unwaged, voluntary and free labour are all traits of the cultural economy at large (Terranova 2000, 33). See also Hans Abbing's book *Why Are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts* (2002) and Pierre-Michel Menger's article 'Artistic Labor Markets and Careers' (1999).

promise of potentiality remains, partly underpinned by the success stories of a few individuals who have made it within the art world or creative industries.

It follows that many cultural producers remain attached to their good life fantasies, even though the evidence of their instability and fragility proliferates. This attachment can be connected to strong feelings towards creative occupations requiring dedication. Through the idea of vocation, creative labour becomes something intrinsic to the cultural producer's subjectivity and therefore not definable within the terms of wage relations. At the same time, the bohemian sensibility of 'free-spirited defiance and non-conformity' encourages them to reject both traditional working-class labour conditions and what might be seen as 'bourgeois materialism' (Standing 2011, 9). Many critics condemn this ideology considering that, for cultural producers, work is often bound up with more than the immediate need for food and rent, incorporating beliefs in creativity, ego, authorship and individual performance instead (Precarious Workers Brigade 2017, 16).

The idea that autonomous cultural production thrives on hardship conflates desires for freedom and choice over working conditions with a desire for precarious living conditions. This leads to a process of subjectivation that Isabell Lorey calls "self-precarisation". In her article 'Governmentality and Self-Precarisation' (2006), Lorey scrutinises the condition of free and autonomous self-activity in the increasingly exploitative dynamics of neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. She states that especially those who work freelance can be subjected easily, because they seem to continually bear their self-chosen, flexible, unstable, and insecure situations (Lorey 2006). Due to strong self-realisation fantasies they are exploitable to such an extreme that the state even presents them as entrepreneurial role models.

Following Lorey, the conscious and voluntary acceptance of precarious labour is an expression of the wish to subvert modern, patriarchal divisions of reproduction and wage labour existing within "normal" work conditions (Lorey 2006). This is exemplified by the cultural producers in *Kamera Läuft!*, who all seem to have entered into precarious situations of their own accord. They believe they have chosen their own living and working conditions, thinking these can be arranged

relatively freely and autonomously. But they have also chosen the uncertainties and lack of continuities under these conditions (Lorey 2006). As the video progresses, their autonomy and self-determination seem to rest mainly in the free decision for precarisation, therefore, self-precarisation.

Contrary to what neoliberal ideologies suggest, this choice is not really founded on free will. Rather, it operates within and reproduces governmental techniques that only make them believe that they act freely (Lorey 2006). And as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote: 'None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free' (Goethe 2005, 195). Yet the point is not to argue that the experience, however ambivalent, of greater flexibility and control over working conditions described by cultural producers is a fantasy or some form of false consciousness. It does mean, however, that the conditions of creative work are more complicated and contradictory than one might expect given the celebration of creative work within debates found in cultural policy (Shukaitis and Figiel 2015, 548). This ambivalence is precisely what the notion of self-precarisation is able to address. The second section of this chapter will further explore the paradox inherent in this concept.

2. The ambivalence of self-government and individualising technologies of the self in *Kamera Läuft!*

2.1. Precarious freedoms and the paradox of self-conduct

In 'Governmentality and Self-Precarisation' (2006), Isabell Lorey is concerned with the ways that ideas of sovereignty and bourgeois self-relations become socially dominant in Western capitalist societies. She differentiates between precarisation as deviance – and therefore as a contradiction of liberal governmentality – and precarisation as a hegemonic function of neoliberal governmentality (Lorey 2006). Lorey clarifies the relation between these two understandings of precarisation through the example of the 'free' decision for precarious living and working. Her analysis draws heavily on Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, which designates the structural entanglement between the government of a state and the techniques of self-government in modern Western societies (Foucault 1991). It

encompasses the multiple strategies, tactics, calculations through which diverse authorities – political, military, economic, theological, medical, and so forth – have sought to 'conduct the conduct' of human beings. Notably, the governability of individuals is always also made possible by the way they govern themselves. This means that through self-conduct people can become socially, politically and economically controllable (Foucault 2007a, 389).

Self-government presents a process of subjectivation[23] that is contradictory in itself. Instead of suppressing the vitality and capacities of individuals, it creates, shapes and utilises human beings as subjects. As such, the art of governing can be regarded as a power relation that works *through* and not necessarily *against* subjectivity. For decades, subjectivation – the formation of the subject – has incited controversy within theoretical debates. It has been promoted by some as a necessary precondition for, and instrument of, human agency and demoted by others as a sign of domination that needs to be refused. If we follow Foucault, however, submission and mastery take place at the same time within subjectivity. Power not only unilaterally acts on individuals as a form of subjugation but also activates and constructs them as subjects. It is precisely this paradoxical simultaneity that constitutes the ambivalence of self-precarisation.

In her article, Lorey explores the double aspect of self-conduct in relation to the construction of sovereign and free subjects in bourgeois liberal societies. Unpacking the complex interactions between instruments of governing and the conditions of exploitation, as well as modes of subjectivation in their ambivalence between subjugation and self-empowerment in Western modernity, she writes:

> Governing, controlling, disciplining, and regulating one's self means, at the same time, fashioning and forming one's self, empowering one's self, which in this sense, is what it means to be free. Only through this paradox can sovereign subjects be governed. Precisely because techniques of governing one's self arise from the simultaneity of subjugation and empowerment, the simultaneity

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[23] In his earlier work Foucault uses the term *assujetissement*, which can be translated as "subjection". After turning to ethics in the early 1980s, he posits that self-government may not mean "subjected" but "free". Subsequently he introduces the term "subjectivation". The latter is used in this thesis, in a Foucauldian vein, to loosen the connections between the three axes of subjection – power, truth and ethics – while holding the possibility of freedom in the ways in which subjects are conditioned (Falzon et al. 2013, 313).

of compulsion and freedom, in this paradoxical movement, the individual not only becomes a subject, but a certain, modern 'free' subject. Subjectivated in this way, this subject continually participates in (re)producing the conditions for governmentality (Lorey 2006).

Lorey constitutively connects bourgeois ideas of autonomy and freedom with hegemonic modes of subjectivation in Western capitalist societies. Accordingly, her focus is on the extent to which self-precarisation contributes to producing the conditions for becoming an active part of neoliberal political and economic relations. Considering the example of the "free" decision for precarious working and living conditions, she regards self-precarisation as a contemporary form of governmentality. Notably, self-precarisation can be understood as a power relation that consists in an inwardly held self-discipline. As a mode of exploitation, it is not easy to discern, because, like governmentality, it works through subjectivity. Therefore, self-precarisation happens in a paradoxical way; it entails precarising through the aspirations and desires of subjects rather than in spite of them. Because subjects internalise abilities in order to precarise themselves and be subjects of precarisation, it is a form of governance that happens through a process of privatisation and individualisation.

The consequences of this process are exemplified in kpD's video project. Auditioning in front of rolling cameras, the cultural producers in *Kamera Läuft!* produce and reproduce the very precarious conditions in which they suffer. Instead of emancipated subjectivities, the characters are enacted as self-exploitative agents who perpetuate the very systems that seek to oppress and limit their autonomy and freedom. Here self-precarisation becomes like a nervous system, an embodied and biopolitical form of subjectivation that is almost impossible to escape. What are the possibilities for struggle and resistance, when power is not exercised "from above" but rather through individual self-governing and exercising modes of behaviour? Is there any potential for critical agency when desire for autonomy and the ideals of self-determination are used in order to promote the conditions required by current modes of capitalist regulation? Before investigating the ways dominant and internalised discourses and practices of governance can be opposed, it is necessary to further unpack the paradox through which "free" individuals can be governed in contemporary societies.

Following Lorey's analysis, governmental precarisation is a historical form of regulation that develops in a specific way under neoliberal, post-Fordist capitalism. As a result of the dismantling of state responsibility and the promotion of individual self-optimisation, working and living conditions in Western post-industrial economies have become increasingly unstable, insecure and flexible. Modes of subjectivation, ambivalently positioned between self-determination and obedience, are no longer perceived as a phenomenon of exception but are instead in the midst of a process of normalisation. Such normalisation enables governing through the privatisation of risk and self-responsibility (Lorey 2010). This means that today everyone is required to account for their own potential and development. Subsequently, all workers – whether they wear white, blue, green or pink collars – have to deal with permanent exposure and adaptation to the risks and perils of the self-regulating market. So much for the "free" decision for precarious living and working conditions in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism.

Building on Foucault's idea that power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are 'free' (Foucault 1982, 790), many critics have analysed contemporary forms of labour exploitation in terms of compulsory freedom. In his book *Inventing our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood* (1996), Nikolas Rose states that the forms of freedom people inhabit today are intrinsically bound to a regime of subjectivation 'in which subjects are not merely "free to choose" but obliged to be free' (Rose 1996, 17). In a similar way, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim argue that the 'precarious freedoms' taking hold of life have become imperative (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 23). Following these arguments, freedom is no longer a choice or aspiration, but a fate or destiny.[24]

Notably, the enactment of regulative practices of freedom has normalised entrepreneurial values. In contemporary society, people are encouraged to live as entrepreneurs, shaping themselves in order to become that which they wish to be. As Nikolas Rose states, the enterprising self is 'both an active self and a calculating self, a self that calculates about itself and that acts upon itself in order to better

[24] Questions about the fates and destinies of precarious workers, and how to subvert these, will be further discussed in chapter 3 through 'La Precariomanzia' cards and other examples of *détournement* emerging in the context of Italian EuroMayDay mobilisations in the 2000s.

itself' (Rose 1996, 154). In a Foucauldian vein, Rose argues that this form of subjectivation happens in a paradoxical way. It entails governing through the desires of subjects rather than in spite of them. At the same time, neoliberal techniques of self-management actively seek to produce individuals of a certain type, equipped with a psychology aspiring to self-actualisation and self-fulfilment (Rose 1996, 33).

This is also reflected in Michel Feher's analysis of self-appreciation and the aspirations of human capital. Feher argues that the promotion of human capital – the presentation of the individual as 'investor in himself or herself' (Feher 2009, 33) – is precisely a consequence of the desire to overcome the divide between the intimate man and the entrepreneur. Understood as the predominant neoliberal subjective norm, human capital implies the drive to constantly value or appreciate oneself and thus taking the practical attitude that 'everything I earn – be it salary, returns on investments, booty, or favours I may have incurred – can be understood as the return on the human capital that constitutes me' (Feher 2009, 26). Consequently, domains such as health, education and culture are no longer conceived as "external" conditions necessary for the reproduction of individuals but have become sectors of the valorisation of the self. Rendered and constructed as private enterprises and required to self-invest in ways that enhance their future value, people have to continually understand, think, calculate, design, plan, adjust, negotiate, define, revoke themselves in order to act independently. This form of self-shaping can be analysed through Foucault's notion of technologies of the self, the self-steering mechanisms that permit individuals to experience, understand, judge, and conduct themselves (Foucault 1988).

2.2. Neoliberal technologies of the self: Aspirational normativity and missing the "good life"

In his article 'Technologies of the Self', Michel Foucault writes that through specific strategies and tactics individuals seek to act upon their own lives, in order to ward off evils and achieve desirable states such as health, happiness, wealth, and tranquillity (Foucault 1988, 18). Therefore, modern "free" individuals must learn to develop a relationship with themselves that is creative and productive, a

relationship in which it is possible to shape and fashion their very own body. When individuals are constituted as subjects by way of self-practices, they can also shape and influence their own precariousness. Through what kind of technologies does this happen? What are the practical instruments and intellectual devices that shape and guide being human – or in kpD's case, being a cultural producer – and what role do they play in *Kamera Läuft!*?

Throughout the video we notice kpD's fictional production setting is inhabited by props such as woollen socks, yoga mats, cushions, blankets, herbal teas, and bottles of spring water. These objects refer to the countless technologies overtaxed individuals seek, find and produce in order to enhance their quality of life in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. They also signify contemporary therapeutic practices such as yoga meditation, mindfulness exercises and positive psychologies (Binkley 2011). Demonstrating how cultural producers employ such strategies to intervene in their overtaxed psychic lives, kpD draws attention to desires to improve precarious existence through forms of aesthetic self-stylisation.

Since the turn of the 21st century, the wish for self-improvement has created a market for the so-called 'answer factories', the psycho-boom as well as advice and self-help literature (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 7). These technologies intend to drown out the tyranny of working autonomously and alleviate the stress of precarity but in fact only reinforce its cruel and oppressive governmentality. People are made to believe practices of self-care are personalised solutions that will make them happier, healthier, more fulfilled, empowered, and improve their self-esteem (Ahmed 2010). This is nourished by the idea of being able to design subjectivity freely and according to one's own decisions: 'Become whole, become what you want, become yourself' (Rose 1996, 158). Constituting oneself by way of (imaginary) self-practices is based on the idea of having an inner nature, an inner essence that ultimately makes up one's unique being and individuality.[25]

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[25] The concept of one true and complete self will be challenged in the third part of this chapter through Michel Foucault's idea of dissociation (1977) and Donna Haraway's notion of splitting (1988).

The immense spread of self-esteem practices and self-help discourses in contemporary society illustrates how struggles around precarisation are viewed as a private problem. Mark Fisher argues that there is a growing tendency to associate psychological effects such as stress and anxiety with personal failure (Fisher 2012). People are told to seek individual ways of dealing with systemic contradictions. The reality is that personalised solutions are not designed and produced to meet individual needs, rather it is the requirement of contemporary capitalism to stay as productive as possible. Precisely because self-help technologies are the product of neoliberal governmentality, people are repeatedly failed by those discourses and practices that promise them a better life. This might be true especially in the case of cultural producers who believe they have freely chosen their own working and living conditions, and thus also believe they freely select ways of coping with these. Alluding to the tactics of neoliberal privatisation, the therapeutic props in kpD's video affirm the underlying conviction of contemporary capitalist society that individuals are uniquely responsible for their own precarisation and 'therefore deserve it' (Fisher 2014).

According to Lauren Berlant, the affective conditions of precarity can result in an 'aspirational normativity', which can be described as the state of trying to construct 'a less-bad' precarious life (Berlant 2007, 291). This might explain why contemporary technologies of the self supply little critical agency in situations where 'dissatisfaction leads to reinvestment in the normative promises of capital' (Berlant 2007, 281). Further unpacking the on-going drama of optimism and disappointment in post-Fordism, Berlant writes:

> The quality of that reinvestment is not political in any of the normative senses, though – it's a feeling of aspirational normalcy, the desire to feel normal, and to feel normalcy as a ground of dependable life, a life that does not have to keep being reinvented. That feeling does not require any particular forms of living to stimulate it; nor does it depend on the flourishing of the forms of living to which it attaches. Optimism attaches to their mere existence. The will to feel that feeling again becomes the first order object of desire (Berlant 2011, 170).

Responding to the problem of aspirational normalcy, Berlant calls for a remediation of a political subjectivity in order to interrupt 'normative strategies of affective orchestration' (Berlant 2011, 238). Such remediation might also need to take place

with regards to creative subjectivity. For cultural producers to intervene in processes of self-precarisation, a new approach to living a "good life" has to be developed. This approach would not reproduce governing techniques of subordination and obedience but have transgressive and subversive aspects.

A first step away from governmental forms of precarisation would be to define what a good life would look like, hence kpD's militant question: What do you consider a 'good life'?[26] Notably, while the cultural producers surveyed for *Kamera Läuft!* acknowledged that there are not enough notions of a good life seeping into work, they had no answers when asked what a "good" life would entail. As kpD writes in their article 'The Precarisation of Cultural Producers and the Missing "Good Life"':

> what was perplexing was that none of those interviewed could really express what a "good life" would look like, or what would distinguish a life that would consist not only of a constant appeal from others or from oneself to be, paid or unpaid, productive and creative (kpD 2005c).

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why, even though the characters are aware of the exploitation mechanisms at play in their work, any counter-behaviour with the view to a better or more liveable life, with less of a governmental function, seems to be missing in *Kamera Läuft!*. As such, kpD's project underlines the difficulties associated with actualising the political potentials of self-chosen precarious work and life. The problematisation of possibilities for social transformation in the cultural sector will be further discussed in the following section.

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[26] The concept of a good life goes back to the Greek word "eudaimonia". In Aristotelian ethics and subsequent Hellenistic philosophy, the term refers to a form of happiness, as in 'doing well and living well' (Hursthouse and Pettigrove 2018). As a virtue it can also be related to the idea of "buen vivir", a central principle of the worldview and the way of life of indigenous groups from the Andes region in Latin America. Buen vivir – "sumak kawsay" in Quechuan – strives towards a good and fulfilled life for the people in their community and living together in diversity and harmony with nature. This idea has been inspiring to many people in Germany and the rest of Europe, for it fuses a profound criticism of capitalist growth-driven society with inspiring ideas for a sustainable world, while stressing the right to a good life for everyone, beyond growth consumption and competition. In English the term loosely translates as "good living" or "well living". Yet Eduardo Gudynas, a leading scholar on the subject, argues both translations sit too close to western notions of wellbeing or welfare: 'These are not equivalents at all. With buen vivir, the subject of wellbeing is not [about the] individual, but the individual in the social context of their community and in a unique environmental situation' (Balch 2013). The issue of collectivity with regards to better living for all will be taken up in chapter 4 through Precarias a la Deriva's notion of common care and care for the common.

2.3. Together alone: The shared experience of individualisation

In her book *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious* (2015), Isabell Lorey explores possibilities for organisation and resistance under the becoming-normal of precarisation. Combatting the false promises of security and its managerial tactics, she anticipates the emergence of a new and disobedient self-government of the precarious. The fifth chapter entitled 'Virtuosity and the Post-Fordist Public Sphere' regards the ways in which performative-virtuoso workers can become political actors. After a brief evaluation of Paolo Virno's work on the interlocking of production and sociality in post-Fordist labour, Lorey turns to Hanna Arendt's concept of "freedom of action" as a political practice that is connected to risk, danger and insecurity. In the article 'What is Freedom?' (2006), Arendt compares freedom of action to freedom of thought and will. Whereas freedom of action is political because it entails the virtuosity of acting together with others, she regards freedom of thought and will as egocentric and thus non-political, because it is experienced 'in intercourse with oneself' and 'independent from others' (Arendt 2006, 163). Arendt contends: 'If men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce' (Arendt 2006, 165).

This declaration has been taken up by numerous contemporary thinkers who look to affirm freedom as an important feminist goal. Their understanding of freedom goes beyond the liberal model of an individual possession or something that emanates from the sovereign will and guards its independence. Instead, freedom is seen as a relational practice. For example, Linda Zerilli describes freedom as a creative and collective practice of world building that requires plurality (Zerilli 2005, 20). Wendy Brown characterises freedom as a desire to participate in shaping the conditions and terms of life, 'a longing to share in power rather than be protected from its excesses, to generate futures together rather than navigate or survive them' (Brown 1995, 4). Taking into account Arendt's ideals of freedom, Isabell Lorey argues that contemporary political action involves dealing with the contingency of precariousness, but without the desires of individualistic private protection (Lorey 2015, 79). Here freedom becomes an anti-disciplinary practice, a struggle against the normalisation of self-precarisation. Following these arguments,

a disobedience or the rejection of capitalisable self-government can only happen through non-individualistic forms of production.

However, cultural production in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism is not necessarily non-individualistic, and cannot be immediately linked with political freedom as a relational practice. Even though it is carried out in the presence of others, often involves cooperation, and is situated amid the materialisation of the social, performative-virtuoso labour is mostly concentrated on itself, thus hindering collective political action (Lorey 2015, 87). In his book *Combination Acts: Notes on Collective Practice in the Undercommons* (2019), Stevphen Shukaitis argues the forming of collectivities that animate and are animated by struggles over common conditions in cultural contexts are pre-empted by the internalisation of a perverse and highly individualised neoliberal logic. When he interviewed creative workers operating in the Old Truman Brewery in East London in the early 2010s, he discovered that cultural producers, rather than developing forms of collectivity or the basis of a new kind of commoning[27], were establishing more and more individualised forms of investment in work: 'Here's my practice, this is what I do.' (Shukaitis 2019, 14). Concerned with the value of their own cultural capital, as well as with very real questions of surviving within the precarious conditions of the creative industries, they were holding off discussions of common struggles.

Kirsten Forkert finds this is also the case with cultural producers working in Berlin's start-up economy, which is based on the marketing of creativity. Drawing on interviews with artists based in the German capital around 2010, she notes that because of the fragmented experience of space and time, many artists find it difficult to build communities. Due to high levels of unemployment, it is hard to find work in Berlin.[28] Subsequently the possession of contacts, resources and in some cases

[27] The notion of the commons and "commoning" will be further discussed in chapter 3.
[28] It is worth noting that within the Western European context, Berlin represents a different socio-economic condition to London. In comparison to the UK capital – with its high living costs, deregulated property market and spatialised inequality – Berlin was still relatively inexpensive in 2010. This was due to very specific historical circumstances following the German re-unification, which led to residential and commercial space becoming available, and rent being quite cheap compared to other European cities. While this enabled certain lifestyles and creative practices which were not possible in London at the time, Berlin had high levels of unemployment. While the city's cultural economy was expanding because of the presence of more and more participants and greater levels of activity, this expansion did not necessarily result in better conditions for artists (Forkert 2013, 120).

independence from the local economy become necessary to mitigate the worst aspects of precarity, with particular implications for artists and creative workers (Forkert 2013, 7). With less money and increased impediments to earning a living, their social relations are placed within a competitive logic. Connections between cultural producers working in the city operate primarily in the service of economic valorisation, which reduces basic forms of mutual solidarity.

To a degree Forkert's more recent evaluation of collectivity in the context of creative work in Berlin could be applied to the situations of the cultural producers in kpD's project. While they narrate personal experiences of self-chosen working conditions in the early 2000s, the characters in *Kamera Läuft!* are mostly oriented to themselves and their own milieu. When speaking to each other, they talk at cross purposes or past one another. As such their dialogues do not seem to lead anywhere; they just talk for the sake of it. Even though the protagonists are located in the same physical space, they do not seem to "sense" each other's struggles. Attempts to discuss the common dimensions of their precarious situations lead to confrontations in which different points of view – pragmatic, activist, scholarly, artistic, affective, political – are not linked. There is one moment in *Kamera Läuft!*, however, where the cultural producers seem to acknowledge that they are part of the same continuum. Halfway through the 35-minute video, a group of protagonists is seen hanging out in the lounge. They are relaxing on comfortable sofas while reading tabloid magazines, playing video games, throwing darts, polishing nails, etc.

In the first place this situation can be interpreted as a form of refusal of work. Understood principally in opposition to the glorification of wage labour, the refusal of work has endured as a popular tool of protest in Autonomous Marxist traditions. For the Italian radical workers of the 1970s, a refusal of work did not mean any sort of liberation *of* work but rather a liberation *from* work. Antonio Negri has described it as a political and potentially revolutionary act: 'The refusal of work does not negate one nexus of capitalist society, one aspect of capital's process of production or reproduction. Rather, with all its radicality, it negates the whole of capitalist society' (Negri 1979, 124). Others have characterised this as "exit" or "exodus", in a similar manner highlighting 'the capacity to reinvent the rules of the game and disorient the enemy' (Virno 1996, 199). Concerned with the political imperative of

the working class emancipating itself from regulatory norms, Autonomists developed a theory of self-organised labour representation, whereby workers were seen as free agents with the power to bring about change (Gill and Pratt 2008, 7). Seeking to help people break free of socio-political structures and behaviour patterns imposed from the outside, their bottom-up theories draw attention to everyday resistance to exploitation, such as absenteeism, slow working, socialisation in the workplace, sabotage, and other subversive activities (Wright 2002; Lotringer and Marazzi 2007).

Kathi Weeks posits that many types of Marxism confine their critique of capitalism to the exploitation and alienation of labour power without attending to its overvaluation. She argues that Autonomist Marxism offers a more expansive model of critique that seeks to simultaneously interrogate capitalist production and capitalist productivism (Weeks 2011, 13). While ceasing to consider work as the defining factor of human life, the idea of the refusal of work should not be confused with a denial of one's own creative and productive powers. Rather, it is a refusal of the capitalist command that structures the relations of production and binds and distorts those powers. Regarding creative labour in cognitive-cultural economies, the refusal of work refers to a negation of the neoliberal command to continuously provide for the 'preservation, reproduction and reconstruction of one's own human capital' (Gordon 1991, 44).

In his book *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation*, Franco Berardi states that informational and cultural forms of production lead to constant 'excitations without release' (Berardi 2010, 90). Consequently, workers are over-stimulated by information and sensory input leading to a competitive pressure, acceleration of stimuli and constant attentive stress (Berardi 2010, 34). The socially imposed impossibility of relaxation is challenged by the sequence in *Kamera Läuft!* that shows cultural producers reclining on comfortable couches. While resting from their performative work in front of the cameras, they engage in enjoyable activities – reading, playing games, grooming – attempting to feel less stressed and anxious. This is in direct contrast to the "healthy" self-practices represented by the yoga props, herbal teas and bottles of spring water displayed elsewhere in kpD's production setting. The guilty pleasures

depicted in this scene allude instead to a potential subversion of the demand to be as creative, innovative and highly regarded as possible. As such this moment of non-productivity opposes the glorification of unstoppable productivity in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism.

In the second place, the sequence suggests that there is a sense of collectivity amongst the cultural producers. While unwinding in the lounge, the protagonists behave like likeminded people, in some respect even like friends, expressing and defining themselves from the perceived common ground of self-precarisation. As we watch them hanging out together and discussing their working conditions in a convivial way, we get a sense that spending time together in a relaxed manner – sitting back, slowing down, talking and listening to each other – might provide routes out of the impasse of the precarious present, or at least some sense of recognition of the experiences cultural producers have in common. Paradoxically, as the scene progresses, it is the process of individualisation that turns out to be their collective experience.

While critiquing the normalisation of self-sufficiency and self-responsibility in cognitive-cultural economies, the characters speak about the weakening of collective bonds and the proliferation of feelings of isolation. One cultural producer condemns: 'This whole I-must-can-do-everything-myself.' They also suggest that within the entrepreneurial labour market of the creative industries, sociality and relationality are placed in the service of financial valorisation, even when regarded as a form of critique. As one character states: 'And your critical production? It's a commodity with libidinous connotations, in your connections, where your friends are your special private clients. It's like a kind of economic circulation.' Addressing the implication of such exchanges, another character says: 'As soon as a relationship leaves the realm of economy, you don't know what you've got left.' Following the cultural producers' conversations in *Kamera Läuft!*, it seems that everything in their everyday lives teaches them that they are on their own. The sole advantage the company of others may bring, is a reassurance that fighting problems alone is what everyone does on a daily basis. In some cases cultural producers might learn from each other how to survive but what they come to know in the first place is that the only service companionship can render is advice about how to survive in your own

solitude, and that everyone's life is full of risks which need to be confronted and fought alone. The fact that a better life cannot be an individual matter is highly obscured in this scenario.

According to Zygmunt Bauman, objectively shared conditions in the flexible economy come to be progressively perceived as individualised, undermining the foundations of collective action. In this context, the sharing of personal experiences of precarity produces 'communities' that are:

> only as fragile and short-lived, scattered and wandering emotions, shifting erratically from one target to another and drifting in the forever inconclusive search for a secure haven; communities of shared worries, shared anxieties or shared hatreds – but in each case a 'peg' community, a momentary gathering around a nail on which many solitary individuals hang their solitary individual fears (Bauman 2002, xviii).

We could apply this description to the 'atomised but genial' (Vishmidt 2017, 233) community of cultural producers in kpD's video. The protagonists perceive certain forms of injustice that puts them collectively in an exploitable position. They do not, however, develop the collective strategies necessary to counteract individualising forms of cultural production. Whilst they critically interpret their everyday experiences of isolation and loneliness – sometimes even in political terms – there is no explicit process of mobilisation around self-precarisation in the video.

The lack of social and political organisation in *Kamera Läuft!* is connected to the kind of responses kpD gathered when interviewing cultural producers. According to Kuster, Lorey, von Osten and Reichard, those surveyed for their project answered questions about individual strategies of dealing with their self-chosen precarious working and living conditions. But the interviewees barely responded to queries around collective tactics of politicisation and self-organisation (kpD 2005c). This could be one of the reasons why the characters in *Kamera Läuft!* seem mostly oriented to their own practices – after all, their personalities were based on the testimonies of the interviewees.

While kpD's project acknowledges and demonstrates to some extent the critical agency of creative workers, it does not propose a political practice that can lead to

social transformation in the cultural industries. This is not because the group is more interested in individual rebellion than in shared practices of disobedient self-government – kpD explicitly aimed to look for commonalities around shared urgencies in the creative sector (kpD 2005c). Instead, it is because the neoliberal logic of privatisation prevents their subjects from finding collective forms of action in order to politicise self-precarisation. The dynamics that produce and reproduce the individualised positions of cultural producers is further troubled through the environment in which the characters in *Kamera Läuft!* are situated. How the format of kpD's video undercuts the possibility of creating bonds between cultural producers will be discussed below.

2.4. Broadcast yourself: Performativity, virtuosity and self-promotion in *Kamera Läuft!*

By now we know the narrative of *Kamera Läuft!* revolves around a casting process. It consists of a series of auditions in which we see the protagonists performing monologues about their working and living conditions in front of cameras. These monologues can be regarded as sales pitches where cultural producers present themselves in order to ensure their survival in the creative industries, as if to promote themselves as the most competent contestants in a creative rat race. kpD chose this format for their video project during a time when television talent shows were becoming popular in Germany, such as RTL's *Deutschland sucht den Superstar* (*Germany Seeks the Superstar*) aired in 2002 and *Fame Academy* broadcast in 2003. These programs, in which candidates are called upon to demonstrate their talents, can be regarded as the ultimate example of the neoliberal economising of creative subjectivity.

According to Guy Redden, television talent shows enact and depict the labour required to create symbolic commodities (Redden 2010, 136). The process engendered is both the creation and representation of specific interactions of capital and cultural production, in which issues of performativity, virtuosity and self-promotion are taken to extremes. Depending on the perceived quality of their performances, contestants are put into either "safe" or "danger" zones. Often, they need to undergo a system of voting by a jury panel, sometimes composed of other

participants or members of the audience, in order to determine who will be forced to leave the competition. This process illustrates how the competitive structure of contemporary society relies on a theatrical exhibition of individuality. By encouraging participants to "be themselves" on camera – often without payment – television talent shows provide a template for a form of profit-generating performance of personality, in which creative, innovative and entrepreneurial subjects generate their own self-brand (Hearn 2011, 317).

Building the narrative of their video project around a casting competition, kpD draws attention to the performativity inherent in the processes of creative labour. As traditional forms of employment lose their centrality in the production of value, the demand for work as a means of personal development has been transformed into the idea that even one's personality can be put to work and monetised. Stressing how this involves a degree of theatricality, one of the characters auditioning for *Kamera Läuft!* says:

> In relation to institutions there is such a thing as an acting element, because there is something like a latent assumption that I do nothing and that I am occupied with other things. So that people notice that I do something at all, I have to communicate it. The work becomes an act of speech, the representation of itself.

This comment resonates with post-Autonomist analyses of the public performance of creative subjectivity as a central feature of the 21st century workplace. Following Paolo Virno's study of virtuosity in the post-Fordist public sphere, performative labour requires the presence of others and relies on the 'production of communication by means of communication' (Virno 2004, 56).

In his book *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*, Jon McKenzie identifies a constitutive paradox in the word "performance", in the sense that it can be read as both experimentation and normativity (McKenzie 2001, ix). This ambiguity emerges throughout the 20th century in two separate spheres: organisational performance – linked to the implementation of 'efficiencies' in state, institutional, corporate and industrial environments – and cultural performances – denoting those that 'foreground and resist dominant norms of social control' (McKenzie 2001, 9). Following Andre Lepecki's analysis of the production of performance in the 21st

century, these two spheres have fused (Lepecki 2016). In neoliberal societies, performance has become a crucial element for technologies of the self; self-awareness, self-realisation, self-presentation. Through performance, subjects learn how to permanently be on self-display – an ongoing process where the subject can only find self-realisation, emotional self-assurance, and social integration through endless re-presentations of self-performances (Lepecki 2016, 17). Given the emphasis on self-praise in neoliberal subjectivity, as well as the 'compulsive social-networking of narcissist self-investment' (Lepecki 2016, 19), it becomes difficult for creative subjects to remain critical, especially with regards to the celebration of artists and cultural producers as role models in entrepreneurial labour markets across Europe.

Drawing attention to the public performance of virtuosity, kpD's project underlines the current implacable precarisation of creative work and life in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. While trying to come across the "right" way, the cultural producers in *Kamera Läuft!* are continuously evaluating themselves. In between their auditions, we see protagonists considerately rehearsing their monologues and mentally preparing for their casting calls. They recite from scripts as well as from memory, while recording their voices or filming themselves with handheld cameras. In doing so, they are turned into viewers of themselves. This illustrates that in order to improve their performances, cultural producers need to objectify themselves. It is through this process of objectification, however, that they become subjects of self-precarisation.

Bringing into play the matter and the making of precarious subjectivity, kpD presents cultural producers as both objects and subjects *in* and *of Kamera Läuft!*. While documenting themselves during rehearsals, the characters are also being filmed by others, who are in turn captured on camera. Instead of face-to-face communication, there is a lot of face-to-camera mediation in kpD's video project. The distinct presence of cameras as well as the title of *Kamera Läuft!* – "Roll camera!" – point to the fact that nowadays the post-Fordist public sphere is increasingly becoming a construction of mediated performances in which self-reflexivity plays an important role. kpD's camera-mediated production setting, in which cultural producers are forced to produce and reproduce virtuosic self-images,

creates a dynamic that prevents individuated understandings and subjectivities from finding commonality. As the characters are competing to sell themselves and their performative labour in front of cameras, basic forms of solidarity are reduced, and mutual ties are weakened. To the extent that their livelihood depends upon theatricalised sales pitches of creative subjectivity, anything like a politicised community of cultural producers becomes unlikely.

2.5. Reality television as a regime of control and responsibilisation

Significantly, kpD turned the casting competition, with its individualising mechanisms, into a media spectacle. Besides fragments of the auditions, *Kamera Läuft!* consists of behind-the-scenes-like segments of its actual production setting. Exposing the constructed artificiality of their video, kpD brings into action the so-called 'dispositif' (Foucault 1980, 194) of their project. This refers to the framework in which the knowledge generated by *Kamera Läuft!* is organised. For example, in the video the production setting is not just rendered as a backdrop but can be regarded as another protagonist. In this sense, kpD's casting competition becomes an intellectual disposition, framing the problem of self-precarisation in creative contexts. At the same time, this framework is committed to redressing the realities of contemporary cultural production. As such, kpD constructs an apparatus that can be critical of its own processes and organisation. The disposition of their project can also be employed to deconstruct its own sense of reality.

Notably, a kind of re-theatricalisation of the audition process is taking place in *Kamera Läuft!*. While the contestants perform their monologues in front of rolling cameras, they are being filmed by others, who are in turn captured on camera. As a self-reflexive form of mimesis, 'a mise en abyme of performance' (Martin 2010, 28), kpD's project provides evidence of a society that understands itself through dramaturgical structures. Through the emphasis on liveness and frontality, and the ways in which the protagonists perform their artificial identities, kpD stresses the "representation" that is presented in the representation of cultural production. Insisting upon a certain sort of presence, the project depends on cultural producers "being there", in terms of the live presence of the actors, the production crew as well as the viewer. In this sense *Kamera Läuft!* shares something with reality television.

Cultural theorists have long drawn links between reality television and neoliberal ideologies in post-socialist states. In their book *Better Living Through Reality TV,* Laurie Ouellette and James Hay argue that the reality television format functions as a cultural technology or resource that cultivates good citizenship through self-conduct (Ouellette and Hay 2008, 16). They posit that programs such as *Big Brother*[29] support a neoliberal ideology that emphasises individual responsibility. A common thread through many reality television programs is the need to exercise self-discipline, self-sufficiency and self-management. Through biopolitically-oriented modes of understanding its format, some scholars regard reality television as not merely a representation of but also a mode of enforcing neoliberal modes of power. Drawing on Foucault's writings on governmentality, Andreas Fejes and Magnus Dahlstedt argue that in this regime, it is not just the case that 'big brother is watching us', but that we allow big brother to reside inside of us, because we are convinced that with his help we will become emancipated from the limitations of our very human condition (Fejes and Dahlstedt 2013).

Understood in terms of a process of internalisation, the reality television format can be seen as a governmental technology of the self, a regime of control through which subjects can create, adapt, customise and re-evaluate their subjectivity in the dynamic flux of the neoliberal consumer market. The reality television show itself takes on the authoritative role in this process: contestants undergo a rigid screening process, must comply to strict standards, and may have little input into the changes that are actually made in their lives. They are often harshly criticised, belittled and subjected to constant supervision. This process is depicted as solely for the purpose of helping these individuals improve themselves and achieve independence. Contestants often portray their problems as the result of personal choices rather than economic or social issues.

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[29] *Big Brother* is a Dutch reality competition television franchise, first broadcast in the Netherlands in 1999 and subsequently syndicated internationally. The show features contestants who live together in a specifically constructed house that is isolated from the outside world. The contestants are continuously monitored by live television cameras as well as personal audio microphones. Throughout the course of the competition, they are voted out – usually on a weekly basis – until only one contestant remains and wins a (cash) prize. The culture and politics of surveillance in *Big Brother* have been extensively analysed through Michel Foucault's well-known example of disciplinary power, that is Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. See James Wong, 'Here's Looking at You: Reality TV, Big Brother, and Foucault' (2001) and Gareth Palmer, 'Big Brother: An Experiment in Governance' (2002).

As the quintessential example of privatisation and individualisation, reality television affirms the underlying conviction of contemporary capitalist society that people are uniquely responsible for their own misery and therefore deserve it. Mark Fisher has described this as a tactic of responsibilisation (Fisher 2014). Drawing upon the work of psychologist David Smail, Fisher understands this notion as a seductive form of voluntarism:

> Individuals will blame themselves rather than social structures, which in any case they have been induced into believing do not really exist (they are just excuses, called upon by the weak). What Smail calls 'magical voluntarism' – the belief that it is within every individual's power to make themselves whatever they want to be – is the dominant ideology and unofficial religion of contemporary capitalist society, pushed by reality TV 'experts' (Fisher 2014).

Magical voluntarism and responsibilisation have the effect of stifling debates about self-precarisation. While disavowing the socio-political context in which individuals are struggling, it promotes a model of active citizenship that limits the ways in which subjectivity can be expressed. These limits are made visible in kpD's constructed and mediated social space. While rehearsing and auditioning for *Kamera Läuft!*, the cultural producers must conform to specific norms of behaviour. Throughout the casting process, we witness candidates self-consciously seeking approval from the directors. For example, while waiting for the "right" moment to start her monologue, one of the cultural producers nervously asks: 'Is it good like this?' Desperately trying to conform to the rules of kpD's audition process, this remark demonstrates that strong beliefs in the promise of success may lead to virtuosic performances of selfhood that are dictated by external disciplinary structures.

The distinct presence of cameras in *Kamera Läuft!* shows that in order to be "good" cultural producers, the protagonists must allow themselves to be watched as they watch themselves and those around them, and then modify their conduct and behaviour accordingly. Alluding to the disparaging of participants in reality television programs as merely "passive", kpD's video seems to suggest that little, if any, agency can be ascribed to precarious subjectivities in post-Fordist public spheres. Yet some media theorists argue that reality television can be regarded not only as a technology for self-exploitation but also as a practice and discourse of

empowerment. They believe its interactive and participatory format is able to foreground authentic fears and anxieties, and, as such, allows for new formulations of social subjectivity where what was formerly private becomes an essential component of public speech (Dovey 2000, 86). The problems and potentials of formulating and publicising precarious subjectivity as a staple of kpD's video project will be dealt with in the third part of this chapter.

3. Confession as a practice of freedom and the critical reformation of precarious subjectivity

For *Kamera Läuft!* cultural producers are asked to "come out" and openly express private thoughts, feelings and beliefs about their self-chosen working and living conditions. As viewers of kpD's video, we witness them reflecting on their creative biographies, successes and failures, working routines, intentions and plans for the future. While "confessing" their personal evaluations in performed monologues, the candidates talk straight to camera. They speak directly to the viewer in a similar fashion to a reality television confessional interview. In reality television shows "diary cam" sequences are used to heighten the desired affect of intimacy and authenticity (King 2005, 69). Predicated upon the operator being alone with a camera, the format provides for those moments when emotions run free and a person's "true" self may appear. Through confessional interview techniques, the audience is provided with direct access to the experience of the observed subject, effectively bolstering some of reality television's claims to "the real" (Ouellette and Murray 2009, 7).

In *Kamera Läuft!* we see cultural producers talking about their situations, insecurities and desires in an open manner. To a certain extent, their talking heads emerge as an empowering tool for those who express themselves in front of the camera. While being filmed, they enact their right to appear as political subjects in the post-Fordist public sphere. As such, kpD's project may be understood as an attempt to identify cultural producers as active, speaking subjects. However, as stated before, through the constant face-to-camera mediation they are also objectified. In a way, the characters in *Kamera Läuft!* embody the double function of subject and object. This simultaneity creates a complex but compelling self-reflexive

practice. While playing with the dualism of the object/subject divide, kpD advances a subjectivity that might be ideologically complicit with neoliberalism, but also embodies an internal self-criticism. In order to further explore this tentative hypothesis, the following discusses kpD's use of in-camera testimonies as a means to challenge governmental modes of precarisation.

3.1. Remediating performed and non-performed selves in *Kamera Läuft!*

In reality television programs like *Big Brother*, contestants find themselves permanently forced into verbalisation in a confessional manner. They are compelled to talk about themselves, reveal what they aspire to, and uncover their shortcomings. The obligation to disclose oneself comes with a particular vocabulary of emotions and feelings. With the public display of private affairs on television, it is usually: the more intimate the better. Yet intimate personal revelations – in reality television programs often presented in sensationalised forms – tend to be divorced from broader social conditions and contingencies (Corner 2009, 45). Because narratives of localised feelings and experiences are rarely presented against the background of a macro-social setting, it becomes difficult to produce critical subjectivity.

This problem is also addressed in *Kamera Läuft!*. Reworking the testimonial mode, kpD transform the act of being listened to into a media spectacle. Notably, the "coming out" of the cultural producers is filmed and turned into a performance itself. kpD's theatricalisation of the confessional format corresponds to a growing obsession with the self and its sensations and emotions in contemporary society. In today's confessional culture, private feelings are put under a magnifying glass, prepared for careful examination and publicly displayed (Fejes and Dahlstedt 2013). The preoccupation with the internal lives of individuals leads to representations and mediations of the self in terms of 'emotional determinism', which celebrates the public display of feelings as a means of therapeutic disclosure and regarding one's feelings as a foundation of authenticity for 'the true self' (Aslama and Pantti 2006, 181).

In *Kamera Läuft!* there is of course the question as to what degree the emotions, interactions and confessions displayed can be understood as true or as mediated constructions. From the start of the video, the viewer is made aware that the staged monologues are acted out by professional actors and are thus not authentic as such.[30] kpD's scripted or structured reality format does not try to hide the fact that the authenticity of the cultural producers is performed. For this reason, *Kamera Läuft!* can be described as a pseudo-reality television show. If reality television mediates and performs reality, pseudo-reality television re-mediates and "performs" this reality.

However, there are several scenes in which the actors seem to appear as their "real" selves, for example when they are waiting in between auditions or rehearsing their monologues. Moreover, the directors – kpD members Kuster, von Osten and Reichard – and the team working on set and behind the scenes are also visible on screen. We do not just see those who are inscribed in *Kamera Läuft!* – the actors – but also those who are producing it – camera operators, sound and lighting technicians, set dressers, costume designers, hair and makeup artists, and so on. In other words, we see cultural producers working *in* and *for* the project at the same time. Breaking the fourth wall of the precarisation of cultural producers seems to be goal. Besides giving account of real events within an artificial format, kpD highlights the laborious production processes involved in making the video. As such their project is simultaneously about the reality of cultural production as well as the cultural production of this reality. While moving between different functions and activities on set, those involved in the production of *Kamera Läuft!* appear as versatile, multi-tasking and permanently engaged individuals. Like the flexible and mobile identities working in the creative industries, they navigate different commitments and sometimes contradictory demands on set.

The activities taking place in *Kamera Läuft!* are expressed by means of on-camera/off-camera intercutting. Consequently, it is not always clear whether the video is documenting a scripted situation or an actual occurrence. We do not always know if we are looking at a rehearsal, a casting audition or a production setting. The

[30] The beginning titles of *Kamera Läuft!* read: 'In February 2004 the results of the interviews were recreated in a rehearsal room.'

interplay between observed action, in-camera testimony and behind-the-scenes fragments is further complicated through the mixing of roles between authors, directors, producers and actors. For example, the character of the single mother and costume designer is partly based on the testimonies of set dresser Mona Kuschel, who runs the Berlin based textile workshop *Couturereal*. Kuschel was interviewed by kpD but she also designed the costumes for *Kamera Läuft!*. On top of that she is visible on screen, whilst looking after clothing in the dressing room.

Another example is the woman who gave up her job in the cinema to become part of a bookshop collective. This character is partly based on kpD member Katja Reichard's experiences running the thematic bookshop Pro QM in Berlin. Reichard appears in the video too, playing the character that is polishing her nails in the lounge. But she also makes an appearance behind the scenes, sitting behind a camera and looking at a monitor. Here she does not seem to perform a fictional role but appears as herself; as a member of kpD and one of the actual directors of the project. As such, the "real" cultural producers working on the actual production set of *Kamera Läuft!* could be, at the same time, actors performing in a fictional setting.

The narrative layers of kpD's video are further troubled by the role of the hired actors. They represent characters based on the testimonies of interviewed cultural producers, but they also appear as their authentic selves. Before their auditions we see them waiting and rehearsing texts – as actors naturally do. During the casting calls, we see them acting out scripts based on the statements of real life cultural producers, but we do not know whether they are just acting up in front of the camera or actually auditioning for *Kamera Läuft!*. For instance, there is a moment in which the character of the woman from the bookshop collective is performing her monologue in front of a casting panel. During the audition, her behaviour is affected by the presence of the cameras, directors and production team. She has difficulty concentrating and fails to reproduce her text. Feeling frustrated and irritated, she interrupts her speech and says: 'Don't walk around please.' And later: 'Can you leave the room, you're totally annoying me.' In this case it is unclear whether we are looking at an actor playing a nervous character, or someone who is hired to act out a script but struggles to perform it.

Blending the realms of front stage, backstage, and off-stage, kpD's pseudo-reality format brings to mind Erving Goffman's idea that all human activity is to some degree the performance of a self. In his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956) Goffman uses the metaphor of theatrical production to offer a way of understanding social interaction and behaviour. Within his dramaturgical perspective, social life is seen as a performance carried out by participants in two places: front stage and backstage. Front stage behaviour is what people do when they know that others are watching or aware of them (Goffman 1956, 13-14). In other words, it is how they behave and interact when they have an audience. Front stage behaviour reflects internalised norms and expectations that are shaped by the setting and the particular role people play within it. Crucially, Goffman stresses how front stage behaviour typically follows a routine and learned social script shaped by cultural norms (Goffman 1956, 81).

Backstage behaviour refers to what people do when no one is looking, or when they think no one is looking. According to Goffman, the way people behave backstage is free from the expectations and norms that shape their behaviour when they are front stage (Goffman 1956, 69-70). Being at home instead of at work would be the clearest demarcation of the difference between front and backstage in social life. As exemplified in *Kamera Läuft!*, the cultural producers seem more relaxed and comfortable when backstage, as they let their guard down. Hanging out in the lounge while reclining on coaches, they might achieve what can be considered their uninhibited or "true" selves. Consequently, they might cast off elements required for front stage performances, such as changing appearance, speaking differently, conducting their bodies in a different way. In Goffman's view, however, when subjects are backstage, they often rehearse certain behaviours or interactions, while preparing themselves for upcoming front stage performances (Goffman 1956, 152). So even when people are supposedly not performing, they are aware of norms and expectations, and these influence what they think and do backstage.

Thus, in contemporary society performances typically reserved for one area often make their way into another. In the post-Fordist public sphere boundaries between back and front stage behaviour, between public persona and private self, between interiority and exteriority are continually blurred. kpD demonstrates that it has

become increasingly difficult to separate these realms from one another. Their video consists of an ambiguous interaction of the pre-scripted and non-scripted, the performed and the non-performed, fiction and non-fiction. Undermining the split between the lived and performed lives of cultural producers, *Kamera Läuft!* provides a multi-layered viewing experience that depends on culturally, socially and politically complex notions of what is real and what is not.

Yet the point is not to look for authentic moments when cultural producers seem to reveal their real selves. What matters is that in kpD's video a continuous process of "selving" seems to take place, whereby "true selves" are seen to emerge via "social selves" and are developed through the "performed selves" projected for the viewer. When watching *Kamera Läuft!*, we cannot rely on a stable relationship or clear distinction between an actual event and its mediated representation. For this reason, the analysis of kpD's project cannot be based on the idea that the "real" is more important, significant, or even more true than the representation.[31] Their video is not a mere representation of cultural production but should be regarded as having its own truth. In this reality it is more about remediating self-conscious performance and exhibition than about the revelation of natural behaviour. Consequently, the point is neither to find out to what extent *Kamera Läuft!*'s testimonial format can be used as a truth-sign of direct access to the "real". Rather, we need to analyse how the production of truth through confession can be related to the internalisation of governmental technologies such as self-precarisation. Here it seems necessary to return to Michel Foucault.

3.2. Confession and the production of truth: From self-sacrifice to a practice of freedom

In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (1998), Foucault analyses how Western societies have established the practice of confession as one of the main rituals subjects rely on for the production of truth. He speaks of 'acts of truth' that require 'not just that the subject tell the truth but that he tell the truth about himself, his faults, his

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[31] This idea resonates with the semiotic concept of "hyperreality" coined by French sociologist Jean Baudrillard. In his book *Simulacra and Simulation*, he defined hyperreality as 'the generation by models of a real without origin or reality' (Baudrillard 1994, 2)

desires, the state of his soul, and so on' (Foucault 1998, 81). The practice of confession, then, can be described as a means of establishing a relationship of oneself with oneself, withdrawing into oneself, getting in touch with oneself and one's interiority (Foucault 1998, 211). At the same time, this process of internalisation involves a process of externalisation through verbalisation. Putting the contents and condition of one's soul into words also involves explaining oneself and revealing what one is. As such, the practice of confession performs 'a check on self-examination' (Taylor 2011, 175). Moreover, through disclosure, one's acts – and those thoughts, sensations, motivations and desires that accompany those acts – are expressed to another person or entity that has the authority to interpret them. In other words, the practice of confession is always practiced under the authority, whether actual or imagined, of some system of truth.

Looking at ways of conducting the examination of one's own conscience and the obligation to describe one's mental impulses, Foucault studies the practice of confession as it was carried out in religious institutions in the beginning of the 4th century. In monastic life, the verbal manifestation of the "truth" that hides in the depths of oneself appears as an indispensable component of the government of men by each other (Foucault 1998, 84). As a purifying and liberating act as well as a form of disciplinary power and securitisation, the practice of confession can be understood as a technology of the self. Notably, this practice has become one of the most valued techniques for producing truth in Western societies. Foucault states: 'Western man has become a confessing animal.' (Foucault 1978, 59). Stressing the widespread normalisation of confessional practices, he writes: 'The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us' (Foucault 1978, 60).

Indeed, exemplified by the extensive use of confessional formats in contemporary reality television and therapeutic practices, self-examination has become widely dispersed and activity embedded within multiple sites of Western everyday life. Today individuals are continuously invited to explore who they are, what is happening within them, the faults they may have committed, and the temptations to which they are exposed. Additionally, they are encouraged to tell these things to

others, and thus to bear witness against themselves. As Franco Berardi states, the prevailing pathology of the present is a product of 'the generalised compulsion to expression' (Berardi 2010, 108). Be yourself, express yourself, disclose yourself, judge yourself, improve yourself, and thereby achieve a happier and better functioning life. Confession, then, can be seen as a powerful technology for creating, shaping and fostering "good", in other words, servile and productive citizens.

As I have argued in the previous section, the production of obedient selfhood is also taking place in the camera mediated social space of *Kamera Läuft!*. Through confessional monologues the protagonists are rendered and constructed as subjects of governance. In order to be "good" cultural producers, they must allow themselves to be watched as they watch themselves and those around them, and then modify their conduct and behaviour accordingly. However, *Kamera Läuft!* also challenges the obedient mode of confession and its claim to truth, as well as the ways cultural producers are bound to this format through certain deployments of truth. The following explores the extent to which it is possible to interpret kpD's use of confessional monologues as a critical reformation of precarious subjectivity. In order to do so I continue to draw upon the work of Michel Foucault.

In his survey of confessional practices in the context of monastic rule, Foucault emphasises that its manifestation in the 4th century was not just for the purpose of establishing one's sovereign mastery over oneself. What was expected, instead, was humility and mortification, detachment toward oneself and the constitution of a relation with oneself that tends toward the destruction of the very form of the self (Foucault 1998, 84). However personal they may have been, religious confessions were not intended to be understood as intimate journals or diaries. They did not constitute any accounts or narratives of the self as such. Instead of pursuing the unspeakable, revealing the hidden or saying the unsaid, the aim was to capture the already-said, to recollect what one had heard or read under religious vows (Foucault 1998, 273). Here, acts of verbalisation become simultaneously acts of self-sacrifice. Considering the correlation between disclosure and surrender, Foucault writes that verbalisation is a mode of 'the rupture of the self,' or 'a renunciation of oneself' (Foucault 2007b, 186).

In order to subvert regulatory mechanisms that capitalise upon subjectivity, it seems necessary to move away from technologies that are linked to self-sacrifice. Not because they violate the subject's independence, freedom or autonomy, but rather because self-sacrifice cultivates a destructive and therefore harmful relationship of the self to itself. Instead of employing a form of confession that is aimed at renouncing or rupturing subjectivity, it is necessary to look for a practice that destabilises and deconstructs specific understandings of "truth". As a means of resisting taken-for-granted explanations (Fejes and Dahlstedt 2013, 101) such practice may be able to challenge dominant discourses around self-precarisation in cultural contexts, and offer a new understanding of its reality.

Looking to shift the perspective on confession, in the early 1980s Foucault turned to the self-practices of ancient Greeks like those of the Pythagoreans, Stoics, and Epicureans. Unlike their Christian variants, these technologies of the self were not complicit with the functioning of pastoral power and domination. In *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault investigates the ancient practice of "parrhesia" as 'the act of telling all (frankness, open-heartedness, plain speaking, speaking openly, speaking freely)' (Foucault 2005, 366). Notably, parrhesia does not involve a destructive self-sacrifice. As Foucault explains, the purpose of this examination is not 'to discover one's own guilt, down to its most trifling forms' (Foucault 1986, 62). Rather, it concerns a practice that can freely constitute one's subjectivity, in which individuals are free to describe their experiences in their own way, and that allows them to reorganise themselves and their lives after their own manners. As such, parrhesia can be seen as a practice of freedom.[32]

To what extent is this practice of freedom taking place in kpD's video project? Earlier I have described the confessional monologues in *Kamera Läuft!* as sales pitches. The protagonists present themselves as if to ensure their survival in the

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[32] It is worth stressing that Foucault's analysis of parrhesia does not equate to ancient Greek philosophers advocating contemporary forms of self-help. When Plato, Socrates and Aristotle spoke about the "good life", they were not referring to a work/life balance, but engaging questions around eternity, virtue and ethics. For them, achieving "eudaimonia" – human flourishing or prosperity – was not about indulging in self-help or pampering oneself. Instead, it was connected to a life of sparse and frugal asceticism and severe self-discipline. So much for the contemporary self-improvement market promising to generate wealth and happiness by distorting ancient ideas around the "good life" or Foucauldian notions of self-care.

cultural industries by promoting themselves as the most competent contestants in a creative rat race. However, taking into account the content of their monologues – that is, *what* they are saying – the cultural producers do not aim to sell, but to tell. Instead of convincing others of the merits of their labour, persuading people to support them or win approval, they "come-out" and talk openly about their self-chosen precarious conditions. Honestly speaking about the difficulties that come with working freely and autonomously, their performed monologues are acts of "telling all", in order words, acts of parrhesia.

Remarkably, this form of truth-telling may also result in untruthfulness. As one of the characters confesses: 'Before, if someone asked me how I was, I always thought about it. One shouldn't do that. One should say: I'm great!' Here "not telling the truth" becomes a non-normative practice of truth-telling that manifests itself through the 'relationship between the speaker and what he says' (Foucault 2001, 12). On the one hand it can be argued that this cultural producer sacrifices a part of herself and her subjectivity, by "lying" about how things really are. On the other hand, this particular statement – 'I'm great!' – can be seen as a refusal of the neoliberal command to speak the truth about oneself as a form of self-government. Exposing "telling all" as an exploitative construct, this cultural producer undoes the work of confession as a form of domination. Her self-disclosure informs a rejection of the creative imperative to reveal oneself and "come out".

Following Foucault, by confronting and challenging established truths, confession can potentially subvert and disrupt the exploitative mechanisms at play within capitalist society. In this particular instance, parrhesia becomes a technology of the self that functions as a point of resistance to power that operates internally, that is, self-precarisation. Taking this into account, the practice of self-disclosure can be understood as a form of critique, one that is aimed not only at challenging power's claim to legitimacy and truth, but also at questioning the various ways subjects are bound to power and regimes of governmentality through certain deployments of truth. As Foucault writes: 'critique is the movement through which the subject gives itself the right to question truth concerning its power effects and to question power about its discourses of truth' (Ball 2016, 1136).

Crucially, Foucault's understanding of critique reflects a concern with the question of 'how not to be governed' (Foucault 2007b, 46). Rather than presenting itself as a simple opposition to the "art" of governing, this question reflects a concern with how to navigate a context characterised by governmentality in ways that expand the field of possible courses of action and modes of thought. Notably, the aim is not to move outside of control, but to navigate power relations differently. Critique, then, can be conceptualised as a different kind of art, which Foucault refers to as the art of not being governed '*like that*, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them' (Foucault 2007b, 44). More specifically, he describes it as the 'art of not being governed quite so much' (Foucault 2007b, 45). In a similar fashion we can think about the confessional mode in *Kamera Läuft!* as a practice of not being precarised quite so much. Further exploring what such practice involves, I turn to Judith Butler and her insistence on the dual possibility of being both constituted by power and an effect of resistance to power.

3.3. Turning on and stalking the self: The critical reformation of precarious subjectivity

In order to move away from a practice of confession that aims to dominate subjectivity, and for truth-telling to become a practice of freedom, it should entail a form of self-transformation. Further exploring what such a transformation of subjectivity involves, I turn to Judith Butler's study of the figure of a psyche that turns against itself. In her book *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997), Butler interrogates Western accounts of subjectivity that seem to be based on a double bind of self-punishment and failure before the law. Among other examples, she considers Sigmund Freud's argument that a subject turning on its own self is permitted to practice a kind of sadism or hate (Butler 1997, 188). Butler proposes a different interpretation of the formation of the subject as the movement of external power toward internalisation. Introducing a Foucauldian analysis of power, she interprets subjectivation as a reflective and reflexive turning on the self.

A figure turning on itself assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity (Butler 1997, 3). Butler argues that this dimension of the subject can

explain not only the passionate attachments to power and the modes of subjectivation and regulatory behaviours that power imposes, but also resistance to them (Butler 1997, 86). When analysing the movement of the subject turning back upon itself, we cannot escape a certain contradiction in this process. Drawing upon Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's account for the fabrication of conscience as the effect of an internalised prohibition, Butler states: 'the subject engages in its own self-thwarting, accomplishes its own subjection, desires and crafts its own shackles, and so turns against a desire that it knows to be – or knew to be – its own' (Butler 1997, 24). This peculiar turning of a subject against itself cultivates a destructive and therefore harmful relationship of the self to itself. But it also entails a form of liberation, or a practice of freedom. That is to say, a turning *on* the self can be translated into a turning *within* the self. This is a non-sacrificial and constituting practice of self-examination through which one gains a different perspective on oneself. In doing so, the subject engages self-transformation, in other words, a critical reformation of one's subjectivity.

This effect can also be found in kpD's project. Through their confessional monologues, the characters in *Kamera Läuft!* establish themselves as self-reflective and self-reflexive beings. They are constantly thinking about who they are, what they are becoming, and how they potentially could be different. As such, they seem willing to test and transgress the limits of who they are able to be. They are actively engaging with what it would mean to exceed or go beyond themselves and their ways of being, thinking, feeling, doing. By filming themselves and recording their own voices, the cultural producers take an active role in their own self-examination, functioning at once as the watcher and the watched; the perceiver and the perceived; the analyst and the analysand; the judge and the judged. This paradoxical process not only operates as a form of governmental subjugation, but also activates and constructs a type of agency or empowerment. By giving and receiving their own

testimonies, the cultural producers in *Kamera Läuft!* constitute a resurgent practice of self-recognition.[33]

As figures that turn on themselves, the characters in *Kamera Läuft!* seem to shift between interior and exterior discourses. This movement can also be described as a tactic of 'stalking the self' (Rich 1983, 159). If stalking is a hunting strategy which consists of using a prey's own habits and routines to catch it, stalking the self can be regarded as a practice of stealthily approaching oneself in order to "seize" one's own subjectivation. kpD engages the tactic as a strategy for cultural producers to become active agents in the process of subverting self-precarisation. In their video, the cultural producers are self-stalking by performing confessional monologues though constant face-to-camera mediation. While observing and listening to themselves, they engage in a process that hunts them out of their own precarious existence. In doing so, they confront their individualised sense of self-worth and self-importance – elements vital for economic survival within the entrepreneurial labour market of post-Fordist capitalism. The art of self-stalking, then, can be regarded as a way to destabilise the self-enclosed frameworks and "Me Inc." models upon which ego-centred neoliberal identities are based.

As one would expect, self-stalking and turning within oneself can be brutal. Because it deals with aspects of subjectivity that people tend to hold on to in order to protect themselves in a highly competitive world, stalking the self requires a certain amount of ruthlessness. It is not, however, an act of aggressiveness. For it to produce critical subjectivity in cognitive-cultural industries, self-stalking requires care and understanding. It is precisely these kinds of traits that challenge the individualising mechanisms of self-precarisation. Therefore, a critical reformation of creative subjectivity is not a matter of self-sacrifice – renouncing or even rupturing oneself –

[33] In a different context, Sean Coulthard has analysed the process of self-recognition as a praxis undertaken by the slave in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Drawing upon the work of Frantz Fanon, Coulthard stresses the necessity on the part of the oppressed to 'turn away' from their other-oriented master-dependency, and to instead struggle for freedom on their own terms and in accordance with their own values (Coulthard 2014, 43). The idea of starting from one's own oppression will be further explored in the last section of this chapter as well as in chapter 4, when I investigate the potential of self-definition and self-representation to create space for precarious subjectivities to speak of their experiences on their own terms.

but entails a patient and compassionate turning within the self in order to explore other ways of thinking, acting and being.

To a certain extent this practice is also what we see in *Kamera Läuft!*. In evaluating themselves, the protagonists are cunning, but not cruel. At times they may be cynical, but they never lose their sense of kindness and congeniality. Moreover, in their companionableness they are not afraid of being foolish. They are able to laugh at culturpreneurial[34] forms of behaviour and the professional ambitions of creative personas.[35] By not taking themselves too seriously as survivors of the early 1990s Berlin bohemia, the cultural producers in *Kamera Läuft!* create a space in which a "turning within" can take place, so as to expose the constraints imposed by the neoliberal injunction that personal empowerment, self-optimisation and entrepreneurial attitudes will lead to success. With a healthy dose of self-irony, kpD's project advances a self-reflective and self-reflexive mode of being able to challenge normalising celebrations of precarious work and life in the 21st century.

Finally, in the course of producing their own alterity, cultural producers can furnish a perspective in the effort of critiquing themselves as well as that which is outside of them. Here the practice of confession, of self-examination and self-expression, of turning on and stalking the self, becomes a practice of critical introspection, which is at the same time attuned to a critique of the world outside (Ball 2016, 1136). This might begin to reveal the potential of kpD's project, where *Kamera Läuft!* is itself a

[34] In the article 'Becoming "culturpreneur": How the "neoliberal regime of truth" affects and redefines artistic subject positions' (2013), Bernadette Loacker relates the concept of creative industries to the strengthening of certain neoliberal orders and cultural-entrepreneurial subject ideals of flexible capitalism.
[35] A similar atmosphere can be found in Helke Sander's 1977 film *Redupers* mentioned earlier. Even though reconciliatory moments are scarce in this film, there is a natural sense of community amongst its female characters, which can be compared to the 'atomised but genial' (Vishmidt 2017, 233) community of cultural producers in *Kamera Läuft!*. Ruminating upon the respective perceptions of the shared experience of individualisation, both films can be assessed in terms of their potential for thinking collective forms of action in order to (re-)politicise cultural production. In exploring how self-precarisation can function as a mode of resistance to dominant and internalised discourses and practices of governance, Tatjana Turanskyj's more recent experimental fiction film *Eine flexible Frau* (2010) offers an interesting case in point. Echoing Sander's cinematic exploration of female subjectivity, this film investigates contemporary experiences of Berlin's urban environment as shaped by gendered subject positions. Confronting 'good life' fantasies and forms of 'conservative emancipation' in post-feminist societies, Turanskyj not only reinforces the feeling of a restricted scope of action. By incorporating (performative) dance moves and chance encounters with strangers, her film shows there are momentary zones of freedom and potentiality, even in the most controlled situations. Again, due to limitations of space, I had to omit my evaluation of this film from this thesis.

vital form of self-transformation, a turning within the self, a critical reformation of subjectivity, and, as such, a form of resistance within the governmental regime of self-precarisation.

3.4. Dissociating and splitting creative subjectivity: Self-precarisation as resistance

It is important to underscore that, like the practice of self-transformation, kpD's video is not so much about a liberation from external authorities, but more about interrogating the regulatory mechanisms through which cultural producers are constructed and maintained as subjects. What emerges is not the unshackled will or a "beyond" to power, but, as Judith Butler says, 'another direction for what is most formative in passion, a formative power which is at once the condition of its violence against itself, its status as a necessary fiction, and the site of its enabling possibilities' (Butler 1997, 66). Following Michel Foucault's formulation of an ethics of subjectivity, this other direction can be found within the governmental relationship of the subject to itself. For 'there is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than in the relationship one has to oneself' (Foucault 2005, 252). Therefore, rather than involving a struggle against an outside instance, a subversion of self-precarisation begins with a struggle against one's own self.

Exploring the practice of "not being precarised quite so much", kpD is making a case for looking at internalised dispositions of power cultivated by neoliberal rationality, in order to address external forms of control attributed to the nation state, employers and the creative industries. When strong desires for autonomy and ideals of self-determination are used in order to promote the conditions required by current modes of capitalist regulation, it is through the hunting down and confronting of these desires that cultural producers can start opposing the conditions that produce precarity in the first place. Subsequently, it is in the posture of a self bending against itself – a posture which is generated as an ambivalent effect of self-precarisation – that creative subjectivity can be reconstituted in the 21st century. This is precisely what kpD's video project seems to suggest. By turning on and within their precarised selves, cultural producers can counter dominant discourses and practices of governance, in the attempt to enable the imagination

and production of different politics, lives and subjectivities in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism.

While deconstructing specific understandings of truth that produce self-precarisation, kpD's work also questions the concept of one true and complete self. In order to better understand this, I return to Foucault, who in his text 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1977) stresses the need to analyse the systemic dissociation of identity. He writes: 'This is necessary because this rather weak identity, which we attempt to support and to unify under a mask, is in itself only a parody: it is plural; countless spirits dispute its possession; numerous systems intersect and compete.' (Foucault 1977, 94). Confronting the illusion of identity as a substantial unity, Foucault further remarks that the subject appears as 'a self in perpetual disintegration' (Foucault 1977, 83). Therefore, rather than fabricating a coherent identity, he argues for a dissociating view that is 'capable of decomposing itself, capable of shattering the unity of man's being through which it was thought that he could extend his sovereignty' (Foucault 1977, 87). Echoing Hanna Arendt's claim that 'if men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce' (Arendt 2006, 165), Foucault's critique of identity challenges the understanding of freedom as individual possession and something that emanates from independence.

Taking on the proposal for a dissociating view of the self, numerous post-structuralist and feminist thinkers have emphasised the inherent multiplicity and plurality of identity and its contradictory nature. Through a radical deconstruction of the Western liberal notion of sovereign subjectivity, some have insisted on a kind of disjointedness or lack of integration, a struggle within the process of turning within the self. One example can be found in the work of Donna Haraway, who employs optical and biological metaphors such as diffraction, double vision and non-isomorphic subjectivity, that is, a self split from itself.[36] While dropping the metaphysics of identity, Haraway uses the notion of splitting to explore the ways in which subjects may refuse the categories and norms that seek to represent them.

[36] I expand on Haraway's notion of double vision in chapter 4, when examining PalD's militant research through her theory and politics of situated knowledges and partial perspectives. Here I employ the notion of a split subjectivity to advance non-identitarian forms of social and political organisation in neo-patriarchal and neo-colonial capitalism.

Stressing the split and fragmentary aspects of subjectivity, she insists on the implicit relationality of selves. In her seminal article 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective' she writes: 'The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another' (Haraway 1988, 586). Similar to Foucault's dissociation of identity, Haraway's non-isomorphic subjectivity can be understood as a rejection of the autological and self-contained individuality cultivated by neoliberal rationality. At the same time, the idea of a self split from itself imagines an entity that is capable of connecting and relating to others.

Arguably, these conceptions can also be found in kpD's project, in the first place through an analysis of the characters in *Kamera Läuft!*. By dramaturgically reworking and scripting personal accounts of "real" cultural producers into sample performances played out by actors, kpD persistently depersonalises creative subjectivity and resists engaging in any celebration of "authentic" or veritable individuality. Rather than remaining "truthful" to the source (Heddon 2008, 135), Kuster, Lorey, von Osten and Reichard turned living cultural producers into stage characters. While placing theatricality and performativity at the centre of their project, they do not assume the existence of some "original" self that can be enacted. Working with interviews in an explicitly fictional manner signals a distance from modalities of subjectivity based on true selves.

Another important feature is the playfulness with which kpD handles the idea of self-representation. For *Kamera Läuft!*, the women hybridised and synthesised the personal testimonies of cultural producers – including their own – into composite dramatised identities. Transcriptions of the fifteen interviews conducted were cut up, blended and merged to form the nine monologues recited by the candidates auditioning for kpD's project. Literally 'constructed and stitched together imperfectly' (Haraway 1988, 586), the characters in *Kamera Läuft!* can be regarded as discursive collages that are multiple, shifting and relational. Instead of whole and coherent subjects, they represent what Haraway would call the cyborg self: 'a disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self.' (Haraway 1991, 163). As combined fictional figures of shredded identities, incorporating

different parts and pieces of creative subjectivity, they embody 'a network ideological image, suggesting the profusion of spaces and identities and the permeability of boundaries in the personal body and in the body-politic' (Haraway 1991, 170). Following Haraway, the partiality[37] of kpD's characters can be the source of their strength and ability to make a difference, even if only symbolically, within the framework of dominant narratives around self-precarisation.

Conceived as plural selves possessed by multiple spirits, the protagonists in *Kamera Läuft!* are able to take on multiple perspectives at the same time. Through 'a splitting of senses, a confusion of voice and sight' (Haraway 1988, 590), they adopt Foucault's dissociating view to decompose their precarised selves. While recording and filming themselves in kpD's pseudo-fictional casting setting, the characters appear as self-reflexive "subject-objects", crossing boundaries of the inside and the outside, the natural and the constructed, the real and the imaginary. Not least through the constant face-to-camera mediation, they are also able to challenge dichotomous distinctions between self and other. This means that when cultural producers understand themselves as partial, split and never complete selves, they can join with others and dissent against individualistic notions of freedom and autonomy in cognitive-cultural economies.

Finally, by foregrounding creative subjectivities that are unavoidably fragmented into distributed components, kpD challenges identitarian representations of cultural producers. The composite characters inhabiting *Kamera Läuft!* destabilise the self-enclosed frameworks upon which ego-centred neoliberal identities are based. By engaging in their own self-thwarting, cultural producers can revolt and rebel against their own entrepreneurial selves, or, as Bracha Ettinger writes, against their own 'narcissistic' selves (Ettinger 2010, 19).[38] This also allows them to explore alternative modes of collectivity, such as those informed by trans-individuality or intersubjectivity. It is here that we begin to see the transformative potential of kpD's project.

[37] The notion of partiality will be further unpacked in chapter 4.
[38] For more on resistance to narcissistic subjectivity, see Bracha Ettinger's work on matrixial thinking and her idea of self-fragilisation, whereby a subject makes itself fragile 'in order to join different strings between several human entities' (Ettinger 2009, 9).

Aimed at constructing subjects that are critical of their own processes and organisation, *Kamera Läuft!* encourages an "uncomfortable" relation with oneself, one's sense of reality, one's truths, and even the very ground upon which one's consciousness emerges (Sawicki 1991,107). Bringing cultural producers face to face with internalised ideologies of self-containment and self-importance, those watching *Kamera Läuft!* might be able to distance themselves from the imperatives of the creative industries. By destabilising and unsettling entrepreneurial values of freedom and autonomy, they can refuse to pose and present themselves as subjects in privatised and individualistic ways. The final part of this chapter will discuss how *Kamera Läuft!* can be used as an instrument for the opening of the self towards others in the attempt to collectively shape the conditions and terms of work and life in post-Fordist capitalism.

4. Re-articulating self-precarisation: *Kamera Läuft!* as a tool for consciousness-raising and becoming common

4.1. Feminist consciousness-raising as a practice of self-transformation

By re-articulating personal testimonies of cultural producers working and living in Berlin in the early 2000s, kpD has created a body of knowledge that others might use in order to recognise how neoliberal discourses of creative labour feed on people's desires and affect their minds and bodies. Forwarding new perspectives on the entanglements of governmental precarisation in Western Europe and the appropriation of strong beliefs in self-determination and independence, their work plays an important role in countering widespread discourses blaming cultural producers themselves for their precarious working and living conditions. By disseminating experiences of self-precarisation, *Kamera Läuft!* provides a starting point from which individuals can begin to overcome the personalisation of oppression and create new forms of sociality through the realisation of common conditions.

Notably, kpD locates personal narratives and exchanges – including their own – at the heart of their artistic, cultural, social and political strategies. While attending to the immediacy of everyday work and life in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism, the

group takes the subjective experience self-precarisation as a starting point for politicisation. In doing so they inscribe their practice within traditions of women's consciousness-raising groups deriving from second-wave feminism, who believed that the only way to build a radical movement is by starting from the self (Hanisch 1970; Firestone 1971; Irigaray 1985). Constituting a new strategy for feminist liberation, women used consciousness-raising to share their experiences in such a way that they 'bring out their political implications and develop a strategy for change' (Bryson 1992, 165)

Original documents portray feminist consciousness-raising groups as safe and supportive environments in which it was possible for women to openly express themselves, in the most honest way possible (Sarachild 1973).[39] As a tool it was adopted from the civil rights movement in the United States between 1954 and 1968, where consciousness-raising was known as 'telling it like it is' (Farinati and Firth 2017, 40). In this context, consciousness-raising was regarded as a means to reveal otherwise invisible lives, and to allow those who had been silenced, or not able to speak, to say the unsaid. By constructing a voice and 'testifying' (Steinem 1995, 21), oppressed people could deconstruct their muted conditions and name problems that they did not have the language for before. As such consciousness-raising provided ways to talk out, talk back, talk otherwise.[40] The goal was to resist marginalisation and objectification, and to become, instead, speaking subjects with self-agency (Heddon 2008, 3). It was precisely the lack of voice that prompted many women during the second wave feminist movement in the United States and other Western countries to embrace consciousness-raising as a political tool.

[39] This appeal will be problematised in chapter 4, which addresses structures of power and issues around privilege within feminist consciousness-raising groups.
[40] Other, similar methods through which awareness of oppression can be raised include critical pedagogy in Latin America, *autocoscienza* ("self-consciousness") in Italy, and "speaking bitterness" in revolutionary China (Institute for Precarious Consciousness 2014, 278). Comparable to 'telling it like it is' these techniques can be analysed as ways of externalising internalised modes of control. Rather than a turning within as described earlier, this entails turning oneself out as a mode of resistance. A recent example can be found in the use of open mics by the Black Lives Matter movement responding to the murder of George Floyd on the 25 May 2020 in Minneapolis, United States. Rather than having a speaker addressing an audience, the protesters have sounds systems dotted within the crowd so that people can express themselves and talk about their own experiences within a non-hierarchical structure where the movement is owned and linguistically produced by the participants themselves.

The late 1960s saw a proliferation of specific female-only spaces organised to articulate and explore experiences related to sexism. Many women in the early days of the women's liberation movement felt bewildered about what it meant to be a woman, what they were doing with their lives and why. Feminist consciousness-raising groups allowed them to discuss these feelings, needs and desires, including those perceived as private, taboo or shameful.[41] In this context, the sharing of experiences through personal testimony operated as a strategy for women's emancipation. By speaking in first person and saying "I", women could struggle for freedom on their own terms and in accordance with their own values. Because women were accustomed to speaking in the voice of a male syntax, many feminist consciousness-raising groups employed self-narration as a tool for political struggle to reclaim language.

In a similar way, kpD's project can be regarded as an instrument to reclaim the syntax of self-chosen precarious working and living conditions in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. By scripting personal testimonies of cultural producers into confessional monologues, and staging these in a pseudo-fictional casting setting, kpD created a tool to find a new language to think and talk through the experience of self-precarisation. In order to unfold awareness of its structuring role in Western European labour markets, the group has used *Kamera Läuft!* as a target group video in workshops and seminars addressing flexible and insecure labour exploitation in cognitive-cultural economies. In this context, the video should not be seen as a route into a "factual" truth about cultural producers' experiences, but rather as an opportunity for those working in highly individualised sectors to discursively reconstruct their own subjective realities, and perhaps talk about their experiences in ways that differ from how they had done so before.

Notably, the term "raised consciousness" refers to becoming aware of something which one did not perceive before, of something being migrated from the unconscious to the conscious mind. Yet consciousness should not be perceived as a

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[41] In second wave feminist consciousness-raising groups women explored topics such as abortion, childbirth, feminine appearance and behaviour, sexuality and intimacy, the institution of marriage and being a wife, coming out of relationships with men, monogamy and non-monogamy, lesbianism, alternatives to the nuclear family – often for the first time.

pre-existing object but rather as something to be generated. This is why the practice of self-narration is so important in consciousness-raising groups. One of its functions is to construct a perspective from which one can interpret a situation. It is not so much about pulling facts out from people's direct experiences, but rather oriented to make them think critically about their concrete realities (Malo de Molina 2004a). While telling stories of their own oppression, they might ask themselves: why did I accept this situation? So rather than producing general truths about subjectivation, self-narration facilitates the inhabiting of a critical stance in relation to some of the dominant assumptions individuals might hold about their immediate social environment and its impact on their everyday life. This is also how I conceive of kpD's video project.

4.2. Reciprocal narrations of self-precarisation: *Kamera Läuft!* as a tool for raising awareness and becoming common

As I explained in the preface of this PhD, I came across *Kamera Läuft!* when I attended Isabell Lorey's workshop on cultural production and self-precarisation at the fourth Former West Research Congress in Berlin in March 2013. In this particular context, the video functioned as a vehicle for discussion amongst students, artists and creative workers participating in an educational program called 'The Learning Place: Is There a Life Beyond CV?'. While raising awareness of the oppressive mechanisms of the creative industries in Western Europe, Lorey used *Kamera Läuft!* to create a space of encounter among those whose workdays are extremely flexible.

By staging cultural producers coming out and openly expressing private thoughts and feelings about their working conditions, kpD's video provides access to the contradictions and ambivalences inherent to autonomous labour practices. Notably, these conflicts are not often spoken about in creative contexts. For me, watching *Kamera Läuft!* validated the reality and the political nature of my own desires as a freelance graphic designer and art history student. While the protagonists articulated emotions I experienced myself, I realised the impact my self-chosen working conditions have on the ways in which I conducted myself and my life. Learning about the small post-Fordist dramas occurring for creative workers living

and working in Berlin in the early 2000s, kpD's project advanced a political interpretation of my own situation living and working in Amsterdam in the early 2010s. Moreover, it established a basis for its transformation.

Besides providing the underpinnings for a politicisation of my own work/life problems, the recognition of the validity of self-precarisation was important in breaking down the personalisation of oppression. Like many of my peers, I faced difficulties acknowledging my own realities and struggles in a world in which everything must be communicated and mediatised to be validated as real. Rather than speaking from experience as it is encouraged and commanded within neoliberalism, *Kamera Läuft!* invited me to break the silence around self-precarisation, and speak about its psychological and affective dimensions in a non-performative way. Finally, the video encouraged me to start naming a problem that I did not have the language for before. As such, watching *Kamera Läuft!* was an important consciousness-raising moment for me. Crucially, it informed the development of further explorations into the complexities of precarisation in the cultural sector and beyond, eventually leading me to write this PhD.

Nevertheless, encountering kpD's video in Lorey's workshop entailed more than just an individual consciousness-raising moment. Starting from a deconstruction of the everyday lived realities of cultural producers working and living in Berlin, *Kamera Läuft!* functioned as a target group video to raise awareness of sacrificial labour in artistic and creative contexts. By watching the video together with others, those attending the workshop became critical observers and active participants in a shared creation of meaning around self-precarisation. To establish a temporary community of militant researchers, Lorey's workshop involved a collective reflection on the problems and potentials of self-chosen working and living conditions in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism.

After we watched *Kamera Läuft!*, Lorey asked us to form groups of three people to discuss the video and share our own experiences of free and autonomous labour practices. In my group we went around and took turns to speak, without interruption. The three of us spoke about our occupations and how to make ends meet in today's cognitive-cultural sector. We also talked about the insecurity, misery

and suffering connected to a life without money, without rights, without community. While we voiced feelings, needs and desires that resonated with each other, a shared sense of value was established. This resonance seemed to go alongside the recognition of individuals as part of the group. It helped us to realise our common conditions – stress, isolation, alienation – as well as our collective beliefs in creativity, personal development and sociality.

According to Adriana Cavarero, the reciprocal narrations of consciousness-raising groups are one scene in which the self is constitutively exposed to the other – an exposure that makes this a political scene, that is, a shared and interactive one (Cavarero 2000, 59). In her book *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Cavarero argues that what makes a narration a political act is not simply that it invokes the struggle of a collective subjectivity, but rather that it makes clear the fragility of the unique:

> The uniqueness and the unity of a self, which is disclosed through that self's actions and words, and which is then narrated as a unique and unified life-story, does not display any of the general characteristics of traditional subjectivity: interiority, psychology, agency, self-presence, mastery and so forth. Rather, the 'narratable self is a unique *existent*, 'who' someone is. Also this 'narratable self is constitutively *in relation* with others (Cavarero 2000, x).

Following this statement, giving account of one's own experiences is not about hearing oneself speak in order to "confirm" the self, but about communicating with and relating to others. It is a process of building narrative together that respects the separateness of each voice but at the same time tries to allow something bigger. Here, the work of self-narration can be understood as a way to explore the relationship between the personal and the political.[42]

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[42] In a society which predominantly focuses on the individual, this feminist slogan has become admittedly little more than a cliched soundbite, with the repetition of "the personal is political" in some ways emptying the relationship between the individual and the social (Heddon 2008, 162). But in a time when the personal seems ubiquitous, it is easy to forget just how radical that early feminist gesture of publishing the personal was. In the face of critiques of cultural producers and the frequently applied labels of self-indulgent, egotistical and solipsistic, I found it helpful to return to second wave feminism in order to re-examine the relationship of the personal to the political. Chapter 4 will further elaborate on this when discussing PalD's practice of consciousness-raising in the context of care.

In our small group discussion during Lorey's workshop, the reciprocal narrations of self-precarisation became political precisely because they established a form of relationality. Beginning at a private level, by facing our own struggles, it became possible to identify with the struggles of others. Moreover, in connecting our personal post-Fordist work/life dramas, we discovered that what appeared to be an isolated and individual problem actually reflected a common condition faced by many others. This became even more apparent during the larger group discussion Lorey facilitated after the small group activity. While creating space for everyone to give an account, Lorey asked us to not only tell stories about ourselves but, instead, use details of our own life to illuminate and explore something more systemic. This prompted many participants to voice concerns about the transformation of creative subjectivity into a commodity to be manufactured and sold. Because this concern was shared amongst many of us present in the room, a feeling of closeness was established during this plenary session. Through a collective analysis of the capitalist appropriation of free and autonomous self-activities, we came to understand some of the systemic issues that underlined and pulled together our supposedly personal experiences. For me, it was in this moment that the personal became political, in the sense that our individual conditions turned out to have structural roots that relate to a common struggle, rather than to personal adjustive strategies (Institute for Precarious Consciousness 2014, 282).

4.3. It's basically is just us and the market

Following my own experience of encountering *Kamera Läuft!* as a consciousness-raising tool, kpD's work mitigates the isolation and individualisation of cultural producers working in the art world and creative industries. The project uncovers and underscores hidden aspects of their lives, including the psychic dimensions of self-precarisation. While self-precarisation happens through an action of the subject upon itself, we have to understand that it is a process of subjectivation that takes place within a system that people have not consciously chosen. To reiterate Foucault's idea that power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are 'free' (Foucault 1982, 790), their exploitation can be analysed in terms of compulsory freedom. This means that the forms of freedom cultural producers inhabit are intrinsically bound to a regime of power in which they are not merely

"free to choose" but obliged to be free. In other words, their freedom is not so much a choice or aspiration, but a fate or destiny. Their subjection consists precisely in the fundamental dependency on a discourse people never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains their autonomy (Butler 1997, 2).

The problems around this 'slave morality' (Butler 1997, 130)[43] are also reflected in kpD's project. Throughout *Kamera Läuft!*, the cultural producers remain captives as employees of their own micro-enterprises caught up in a competitive struggle for survival in the creative industries. Caught up in performative self-relations, structured by kpD's pseudo-fictional casting setting, the protagonists are rendered as narcissistic subjects unable to move away from self-preservation. Whilst striving against each other to sell their virtuosic labour, basic forms of solidarity are reduced and processes that could lead to a politicised community of cultural producers are obstructed. Even though they are located in the same physical space, the characters in *Kamera Läuft!* do not seem to 'sense' each other's struggles. The mediated public sphere in which they are forced to produce and reproduce themselves creates a dynamic that prevents their individuated understandings and isolated subjectivities finding commonality. Although they perceive certain forms of injustice that collectively put them in an exploitable position, they do not develop collective strategies in order to counteract precarious forms of production.

On balance, kpD's project suggests cultural producers are not able to break free from the exploitative mechanisms of self-precarisation. As long as they maintain the idea that "it's basically just me and the market" they will remain embedded in a social structure which they are not in control of. Continually seeking to adjust to current pressures in their lives, the characters *Kamera Läuft!* persist in attaching to normative paradigms, even when these normativities do them harm. The pressures of creative work and the attachment to good-life fantasies lead to repeated episodes of what Lauren Berlant has called "situation tragedy", where people are 'fated to

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[43] In a Nietzschean vein, Judith Butler regards this morality as predicated upon the sober calculation that it is better to "be" enslaved through self-negation than not to "be" at all (Butler 1997, 130). This also resonates with Karl Marx's idea that under capitalism, the only thing worse than being exploited is not being exploited (Denning 2010, 79). Arguably there are some issues with the use of the term "slave" in the context of governmental precarisation in Western Europe. As stated in chapter 1, it is a mode of subjectivation that is based on an economy of exhaustion that started with the mining of racialised bodies in the colonies (Vergès 2019).

express their flaws episodically, over and over, without learning, changing, being relieved, becoming better' (Berlant 2011, 156). Instead of anticipating the emergence of a new and disobedient self-government of precarious subjectivities, kpD's project further underlines the practical and conceptual difficulties associated with actualising the political potentials of self-chosen precarious work and life. Recognising the challenges in using the assumed experience of a shared space, time or framework, the group seems careful to acknowledge that gaps and openings for collective resistance exist within the virtuosic and performative processes of cultural production. Centred around the difficult but necessary effort of self-definition and self-construction, *Kamera Läuft!* itself does not seem to offer an outside to the mechanisms of privatisation and individualisation in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. It is more in the encounter with the viewer that the video starts to provide a less constrained experience of self-precarisation.

Through a re-articulation of everyday lived experiences of exploitation in the cognitive-cultural labour market, kpD's project offers a potent artistic-investigative and socio-political strategy for addressing the problems and potentials of self-chosen working and living conditions in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. As a site of re-negotiation, the work is part of the urgent, fundamental and politically indispensable task of developing new practices of the self – the formation of an ethics, "an art of living", or in this case, an art of cultural production. Used as a target group video in workshops and seminars on creative labour and individualisation, *Kamera Läuft!* invites those who identify with the protagonists to transform their lives by altering their sense of self in relation to the social world.

Moreover, the video prompts viewers to question the production of the desire to imagine oneself as a solitary agent who can and must live the good life promised by capitalist culture (Berlant 2011, 167). By connecting subjective accounts of self-precarisation in order to grasp psychological breakdowns as dimensions of a systemic problem, kpD's project is able to create a space of encounter among those whose workdays are extremely flexible and largely autonomous. As a consciousness-raising tool, their video offers the possibility for precarised cultural producers to feel themselves – at least temporarily – outside of the usual state of isolation and fragmentation. This is where the political potential of kpD's project is

manifested. Subverting the myth of the individual artistic genius, it accommodates a shift from 'it's basically just *me* and the market' towards 'it's basically is just *us* and the market'.

However, the realisation of common conditions does not automatically empower people to take action and make change. Watching *Kamera Läuft!* in Lorey's workshop prompted us to articulate personal narratives in a way that brings out their political implications. It did not, however, facilitate a networking process to increase chances of finding possible sites of intervention. After the conference, our temporary community of militant researchers simply dispersed. So much for exploring the potential of social transformation and 'lines capable of collectivity' (kpD 2005c) amidst pervasive individualisation in the creative sector. Even though *Kamera Läuft!* altered the ways in which we thought about our own situations, it did not help us create anything like a sustainable community of cultural producers.

In order to explore possibilities for struggle and resistance under the exploitative mechanisms of neoliberal self-government, it is necessary to work out if, and when, new collective forms of action take shape, and which forms they are, or could be. Taking into account Hannah Arendt's idea that freedom of action entails the virtuosity of acting together with others, the next chapter explores ways to create conditions for social and political organisation under governmental precarisation in post-Fordist capitalism. Focussing on activist-research practices that create new ways of relating to others in the context of precarity, I take the next step to explore possibilities for struggle and resistance under the individualising dynamics of neoliberal self-government.

Chapter 3 – New perspectives on precarity: Socio-political confrontations and the question of commonality

1. Mobilising the precariat: Social and political movements in the early 2000s

> We are the women of Europe in a feminised workforce and economy that nevertheless reserves to xx people more discriminatory pay and roles than to domineering xy people. We are the consumerised younger generation left out of the political and social design of a gerontocratic and technocratic Europe. We are the first-generation Europeans coming from the five continents and, most crucially, the seven seas. We are the middle-aged being laid off from once secure jobs in industry and services. We are the people that don't have (and mostly don't want) long-term jobs, and so are deprived of basic social rights such as maternity or sick leave or the luxury of paid holidays. We are hirable on demand, available on call, exploitable at will, and fireable at whim. We are the precariat (Foti 2005).

Engaging the expansion and development of the creative industries in the early 2000s, the previous chapter of my PhD problematised the regulatory mechanisms through which cultural producers in Western Europe are created and maintained as entrepreneurial subjects. I have demonstrated that if creative subjectivity has become a key site of neoliberal government, then it is also there, in their relation to themselves, that cultural producers might begin to think about themselves differently. From this position it becomes possible to subvert self-precarisation and its mechanisms of control in post-Fordist capitalism. In order to challenge the production of a particular sort of "free" subject – striving, enterprising, competitive – creative practitioners need to produce critical subjectivity. I argued that one way of doing this is through the practice of consciousness-raising.

Consciousness-raising, however, is not just about developing 'critical capabilities' (Institute for Precarious Consciousness 2014, 287). It also makes it possible to understand what is common in governmental precarisation and what it means to become common in the present and in the future. In order to overcome the distances between individuals within a hyper-segmented social space that multiplies everywhere, communication – exchanging experiences and reflecting together – is essential. Not only as a tool for diffusion but also as a new place, a new competence and primary material for the political. At the same time, we need to

actively oppose portrayals of social life in terms of atomisation or unconnectedness. There is no point talking about common conditions, let alone trying to change them, when it has been accepted that everyone is an entrepreneur of the self reduced to seeking the maximisation of their own self-interests (Shukaitis 2019, 3).

Figuring out when and how individuals are enabled and constrained is crucial, but it is also necessary to determine strategies that have the potential to *collectively* loosen constraints and resist the normalisation of precarisation. In doing so one cannot avoid the reproduction of exploitation and exclusory mechanisms inherent in post-Fordist production. While those who self-precarise may develop awareness of how they are subjected, there is also the need to create ways of relating to "others" in the context of insecure work and life. It is precisely this issue that the third chapter of my thesis will address. Focussing on activist practices that transcend mere reflexivity and interventionist critique, I regard the ways in which those identified as precarious have mobilised in Europe since the turn of the 21st century. In doing so, I am taking up the last question of kpD's workers'-inquiry-without-a-workplace: 'Due to their social function as role models, should cultural producers combine with other social movements to work on new concepts of organisation?' (kpD 2005a).

In the early 2000s, activists involved with anti-globalisation and unemployment movements started to explore possibilities of organising under the becoming-normal of governmental precarisation in Europe. Claiming precarity as their rallying cry, the goal was to represent, unite and empower those who, by the precarious nature of their mode of being, were isolated and often invisible. Responding to the gradual loss of democratic rights and agency of citizens in post-industrial societies, they proposed new models of political thinking about structural insecurity in Western Europe. Some of their ideas built on anarchist, activist, and ultra-left discourses around novel forms of Marxist communisation. These discussions suggest that the increasing exploitation of workers resulting from the programmed and scrupulous dismantlement of any protective screen between the atomised individual and the market, also allows for the mobilisation of contemporary subjects (Bloois 2014, 140).

This idea is taken up by political thinkers who consider precarisation not only in its repressive, striating forms, but also in its ambivalently productive moments. This productivity, in spite of precarisation, emerges by way of self-government. Drawing upon Deleuzian theory, Isabell Lorey argues precarisation can cover productive ways of dealing with what is incalculable, with what cannot be measured or modularised, with what eludes government through insecurity (Lorey 2015, 14). Transgressing the biopolitics that Michel Foucault identified as 'the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life' (Foucault 1978, 140), she anticipates the emergence of a new and disobedient self-government of the precarious. In this context, structural insecurity signifies being on the brink of a new society, a new vision of ourselves, a new mode of being; one that is no longer based on the stability of identity, but on becomings and new forms of collective identities (Bloois 2011). As discussed in chapter 1, one of these new collective identities is the precariat; a threatening subjectivity emerging from the changing relations of production in neoliberal capitalism (Standing 2011, 7-8).

Concerned with the political importance of the precariat emancipating itself from regulatory norms, authors associated with the renewal of autonomist Marxism developed a radical theory of self-organised labour representation, in which post-Fordist workers could be seen as free agents with the power to bring about change (Gill and Pratt 2008, 7). Seeking to revolutionise flexible workers, they believed the precariat is able to subvert neoliberal mechanisms of control that exploit human capital. By re-appropriating precarity, people could become sensitive to the possibilities of escaping its dominant apparatus, and building new alliances in order to directly destroy capitalist relations of production. In this context, governmental precarisation functions as a site for mobilisation across a variety of issues, locations and experiences. As demonstrated by Alex Foti's declaration above, it can be used to concentrate on what different subjectivities living and working in post-industrial societies across Europe might share.

Numerous social and political movements in the early 2000s attempted to bring together antagonisms against common yet distinct forms of exploitation occurring in neoliberal capitalism. Rooted in encounters between dispersed social groups, their forms of self-organisation include the positions taken by blue-collar factory

workers, artists and freelancers in the cultural industries, affective labourers in the care sector, students, undocumented migrants, etc. Because they regard precarisation to be transversal to society, surpassing specific categories, their practices aim to go beyond the hierarchising of insecurity into both low and high sectors. Subsequently, mobilisation such as the CIP-IDF in France and the EuroMayDay movement in Italy aligned different protests emerging in various social spheres in order to turn limited collective actions into a multi-sector protest. Besides making visible and demonstrating against the exploitative mechanisms inherent in post-Fordist production, these initiatives have developed concrete social and political practices that respond to the problem of social exclusion in the 21st century. An interesting case in point is the Intermittents du Spectacle, an organisation of cultural workers in France which started in 2003. The following section analyses their demands for new collective social rights and a state-guaranteed system of security for those working in the entertainment industries and beyond.

2. Intermittents du Spectacle and CIP-IDF: That which we are defending, we are defending for everyone

Since 1968 France maintained a national unemployment insurance program specific to professionals working in the entertainment industries, classified as 'intermittent workers' (Bodnar 2006). The term "intermittent" refers to the irregular and contractual nature of work in this sector. As most activities in live entertainment, radio, television and cinema are carried out on a project-by-project basis, employment in this industry is never secure and relatively competitive. Effectively collectivising the economic risks inherent in the practices of these casualised professions, the French intermittent insurance program facilitated a redistribution of wealth between poorer and wealthier members of the working community in the entertainment industries (Gilbert 2014, 45).

During the 1990s, the number of professionals in the sector and the amount being paid out through the system rose substantially. In the early 2000s increased pressure mounted from the French government to change the intermittent's program of support. In 2003, employer organisations and labour unions negotiated

an agreement that restricted the conditions for the access to unemployment benefits and the length of compensation (Sinigaglia 2009, 295). The new policy would impose more risks onto individual workers, who would also have to compete even harder in order to make themselves attractive to potential employers. As the number of hours required to qualify for intermittent benefits increased, less workers became eligible for social security payments, leaving more in precarious situations. Antonella Corsani and Maurizio Lazzarato have pointed to these reforms in terms of establishing a flexible regime of accumulation whereby neoliberal governments 'manufacture a deficit and use the populations as the variable of adjustment' (Corsani and Lazzarato 2004).

In response to these developments, a new spirit of resistance began to emerge among intermittent workers. With specific focus on issues of casualisation in the French film, television, theatre and music industries, they named themselves 'Intermittent du Spectacle' (Corsani 2007). Significantly, the organisation of their actions took place outside the realm of traditional union activities, sometimes even in direct opposition to them. One of the reasons for this was that many intermittents had a different conceptualisation of labour than those who supposed to represent them:

> In the movement, there is a subjective conscience, implicit in the practice of our professions, that manifests itself in the fact that we are conscious of the necessity to have a revenue disconnected from salary – because we exist and produce for ourselves and for others, and not to live and work for an employer or for a finality that places us exterior [to our labour] (Bodnar 2006, 687).

For many professionals working in the entertainment industries, work is something intrinsic to their subjectivity and therefore not definable within the terms of wage relations. As such, taking direct action in the form of a strike was not as simple as (temporarily) withdrawing labour. For this reason, Intermittent du Spectacle started to think of different ways to intervene in the very context they were situated within.

In 2003, a group of protestors decided to stage a series of media-oriented protests that would paralyse film and television productions, theatre and music festivals as well as cinemas across the country. Particularly innovative were their guerrilla-style invasions of live television productions. In October, members of Intermittent du

Spectacle interrupted the live broadcast of the top-rated French reality television show *Star Academy.* While commentating on the situation of professionals working for the program, they unfurled a banner across the stage reading 'Turn off your televisions' (Bodnar 2006, 689). This action reminded the audience that entertainment is not just something on a screen for spectators to enjoy, but also a way for people to make a living. At the same time, the banner invited viewers to participate in a "public" form of protest by switching off their televisions in an act of support for the struggle of intermittent workers.

Two months later, a group of Intermittent du Spectacle protestors interrupted a live news broadcast on national television. During this intervention, representatives read out statements about the condition of casualised labour in the country whilst surrounded by activists holding signs protesting against the treatment of intermittent workers. One of these signs read: 'That which we are defending, we are defending for everyone' (Corsani 2007). The slogan signals a crucial shift in the operations of the Intermittent du Spectacle. Rather than only under the flag of "intermittent", a group of activists began organising under the category of "precarious". Building a sub-movement that was more open to alliances with other casualised workers, they set up the 'Coordination des intermittents et précaires d'Île-de-France' (CIP-IDF), which translates as 'Coordination of intermittent and precarious workers of the Paris region'.

Leaving behind the term "spectacle" referring to the entertainment sector, members of the CIP-IDF defined themselves by the way they were employed (intermittent, precarious) and by geographic region (Paris), rather than by industry. By doing so they rejected the reproduction of conventional categories and divisions between cultural workers and other precariously employed persons, such as journalists, students, migrants. Recognising that casualisation is a phenomenon that extends far beyond the entertainment industries, they believed it was necessary to broaden their base of action and actively recruit members from other sectors relying on flexible and insecure labour arrangements. Subsequently, the CIP-IDF became a project based on mobilising around the organisation of labour across the entire market economy (Bodnar 2006, 688). The goal was 'to open up a space of reflection

and discussion to everyone affected, to ensure that the voices of the precarious are heard, and to fight for new social rights together' (Lorey 2015, 56).

It is worth mentioning that the main backers of the CIP-IDF were professional activists who were politically socialised via the movements of the unemployed of the 1990s, including some who had come from the autonomous groups of the 1970s and 1980s. Those from the Précaires Associés de Paris (PAP) group brought particularly vital resources to the movement (Lazzarato 2017, 87). These activists knew how to organise general assemblies, manage protest groups, and occupy buildings. Many had valuable contacts with the press and various political, social and institutional networks. Disseminating information about precarious labour conditions, they published articles in European social movement journals such as *Multitudes*, *Posse*, *Mute*, *Green Pepper*, and *Contrapoder*. PAP activists had a firm theoretical and practical grasp of protest actions, that is to say, they had a great amount of 'activist capital' (Sinigaglia 2009, 301), which many involved in the Intermittents du Spectacle initially lacked. Crucially, they helped the CIP-IDF focus attention on the movements of the précaires, rather than just the intermittents.[44]

In order to create alliances between struggles across a range of sectors, the CIP-IDF was organised in the form of a 'coordination' (Corsani 2007). This organising structure was seen as a radical as well as practical alternative to the bureaucratic and hierarchical structures of centralised unions and political parties. Inspired by anarchist and libertarian principles, the coordination entails direct democracy under the control of a sovereign general assembly. Its internal functioning, based on autonomous committees, enables participants to find their place within a movement without necessarily giving up their individual understandings of what is at stake. For a heterogeneous group like the CIF-IDF, the coordination turned out to be a suitable structure for organisation. As 'a distributive whole' (Lazzarato 2017, 134) it allowed everyone to rally around various activities – demonstrations, occupations, strikes, campaigns – without asking anyone to subscribe to a particular position or

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[44] It can be argued that the activists involved in CIP-IDF transferred the activism of the anti-globalisation and unemployment movements into a new rhetorical framework – around precarity – without really working through the tensions and contradictions faced there. This issue will be addressed later on in this chapter, when discussing problems around commonality and difference within precarity debates.

official line. As such, the CIP-IDF was able to carry out a wide range of actions, some with radically different objectives, whilst enabling its members to protest where and whenever they saw fit.

Within the coordination different demands and approaches could exist side by side. However, this did not happen without tension or conflict.[45] While the intermittents (the 'I' in CIP-IDF) mobilised against reforms of the national unemployment insurance program, specific to professionals in the entertainment industries, the précaires (the 'P' in CIP-IDF) organised against job insecurity in general. In other words, the intermittent workers had a rather narrow focus, whilst the précaires were embedded in a wider struggle to obtain new rights for all workers in precarious situations. Eventually, these two existing frames within the CIP-IDF came to indicate contrasting conceptions of protest and disparate ways of defining the advocated cause (Sinigaglia 2009, 306). Prioritising the specific benefits system within their struggle, the intermittents demanded better and more stable employment for everyone. Rejecting work as it was currently understood, the précaires called for a different labour regime altogether, imagining non-capitalist ways of living for all workers, including those without the right papers, such as undocumented migrants.[46]

Additionally, the two groups had different understandings of, and opposing views regarding, the French cultural exception. "Cultural exception" refers to a political concept introduced in 1993 by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade – today included in the World Trade Organisation – which negotiated to treat cultural goods and services differently from other commercial products (UNESCO 2004). Defending the idea that culture encompasses values, identities and meanings that go beyond their strictly economic value, France has been especially notable in pursuing this policy. "L'exception culturelle" allowed the country to maintain quotas and subsidies to protect its cultural market from the creative products of other nations. This had

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[45] Corresponding to an experimentation with apparatuses of being-together and being-against, Maurizio Lazzarato states the process of constituting a coordination is not organic but polemical and conflictual (Lazzarato 2017, 139). The problems inherent in thinking that social power and political efficacy are dependent on the formation of a community conceptualised as being coherent and harmonious will be unpacked in chapter 4.

[46] The ways European precarity movements have made strategic links between the structural insecurity and migration will be further discussed in chapter 4.

the particular aim of aiding the production and distribution of French radio, television and cinema.[47] Within the CIP-IDF, the intermittent advocated the defence of a cultural exception. The précaires claimed that it was just a façade, masking the shared condition of the professionals employed in the entertainment industries and that of other precarious workers.

3. Opening up discussions around precarisation: The problem of cultural exception and collective action

To an extent the intermittent's celebration of cultural production might indicate a certain pragmatism in their campaign – underscoring the profitability and thus indispensability of healthy entertainment industries for France and beyond. But as discussed in chapter 1, this argument ignores the detrimental ramifications of the new centrality of creativity in European governance, such as the gentrification of neighbourhoods, rising income inequalities, growth of a flexible and mobile work force, and high levels of exploitation. Whilst cultural production is enthusiastically described as enhancing cities and work environments, by providing a model for the future organisation of labour, it nonetheless produces structural exclusion and marginalisation through advancing precarious working and living conditions. Following this, it can be argued that those struggling against precarity in the creative sector need to be careful not to divert from critiquing the idea of a cultural exception and how such an exception is maintained (Vishmidt 2005).

Taking this into account, it can be argued that kpD's *Kamera Läuft!* reflects a rather narrow discussion of post-capitalism. As we have seen, their video project primarily addresses problems in the fields of art, creative industries and knowledge sectors. There are no explicit relations to the dimensions of precarity that are shaped by class, gender, citizenship or ethnicity. This issue brings up questions around intersectionality in the context of creative labour. While cultural producers may be

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[47] This particular stance has attracted praise as well as substantial criticism, including claims that the idea of cultural exception harms global trade and is a form of protectionism that allows governments to suppress certain (minor) cultural voices. This is one of the reasons why the concept has been gradually replaced by the more consensual, although equally problematic (some argue even unethical) concept of "cultural diversity", as the adoption of the term by UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in 2005 demonstrates (Buchsbaum 2006).

able to disrupt cognitive schemas and thought processing around self-precarisation, it is not always clear how strong desires for freedom and autonomy intersect with the experiences of other workers who engage in precarious labour. If governmental precarisation is a subject that needs to be viewed through different practices and critiques, it seems necessary to think and reach beyond the field of cultural production.

As demonstrated by kpD's rendering of cultural production in *Kamera Läuft!*, many workers in the creative industries struggle to think and act together in order to challenge privatisation and individualisation. To what extent do forms of labour based on communication, knowledge, creativity and affect detract from the will and ability to take collective action against the normalisation of governmental precarisation? While pondering upon the ambivalent position and status of the artist within socio-political and organisational analysis, Stevphen Shukaitis argues that there are dynamics within the class composition of media, creative and artistic labour that tend to work against the sort of alliances and connections that could most productively be made based around a focus on capitalist exploitation (Shukaitis 2012, 241). For example, the tendency to narrate shared problems within an individualising narrative undercuts the possibility of creating bonds between different struggles. This suggests that organising against precarity requires working against certain patterns of ingrained assumptions that tend to exist within cultural contexts.

One of these assumptions is the idea that creative work contains an inherent radical political potentiality because of the way it is organised and its reliance on cooperation and networking. Refreshing as it may be for cultural production as a social movement project, the underlying emphasis on capacity and connectivity does not always address the question of unequal distribution of suffering and incapacitation in contemporary society (Barchiesi 2012). This is exemplified in overly positive celebrations of cultural labour and its potential for innovation (Florida 2002). It is important not to dismiss arguments about the democratising potential and creation of meaning and worth within creative practice, doing so would discard some of the main rationales and values that cultural producers rely on to explain the importance of what they doing, both to themselves and to others

(Shukaitis and Figiel 2015, 538). Nevertheless, cultural producers need to make sure that they continue to critique their own positionalities and how these are sustained. In doing so, they need to consider how their self-chosen working and living conditions maintain other people's oppression.

Where cultural producers have been fruitful in bringing new perspectives to the realities of freelance work, they could likewise be critiqued for lacking a degree of caution and self-reflexivity in their analyses. Whether acting individually or collectively, creative practitioners interested in political organisation have to understand that capitalist measures are pervasive and impact upon *everyone* within the stratified global field of production. Furthermore, they cannot overlook the fact that the most 'advanced' sections of the global working class – whether in terms of the level of their wage or in terms of the type of their labour – can materially reproduce themselves only on the basis of their interdependence with 'less advanced' sections (Stavrides and Angelis 2010, 12). Following this, narrowing discussions of contemporary forms of exploitation need to be challenged. After all, precarisation is a phenomenon that extends far beyond the creative industries and knowledge sectors of post-industrial economies in the West.

For this reason, activists involved in the transnational EuroMayDay mobilisations, held between 2001 and 2006, have tried to broaden the focus on structural insecurity. Confronting the prevalence of flexible and contingent employment in contemporary societies, they brought together knowledges about different forms of exploitation, as well as the practices of refusal and subversion newly emerging within them. Paying attention to the positions of lowly paid workers across the European continent, their demonstrations prompted rich debate about the changing nature of production, its effects on working conditions and the necessary rethinking of labour organisation and social rights. While sidestepping the seemingly separate fields of the political and the cultural, the movement tested new forms of struggle and developed new perspectives on critiques surrounding governmental precarisation in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism.

Notably, EuroMayDay activities ranged from syndicalist mobilisation to culture jamming, "subvertising" and media stunts. Developing a new brand of collective

activism, those involved intended to educate young people emerging forms of protest and organisation that go beyond traditional trade union schemes of representation. At the same time, they attempted to make connections between dispersed social groups, including the positions taken by temp workers in chain stores, knowledge workers and migrants working in informal sectors. In order to radicalise and unite those stuck in precarious jobs where they are denied union rights, paid vacations, maternity or sick leave, the movement actively addressed the question of how to make the theory of precarity relevant to the lives of those affected by it. In doing so they challenged the dominant discourse surrounding precarisation at the time by pointing out how it set aside differences based on gender, limited mobility, and the first and third worlds within Europe (Bardan 2013, 79).

4. Chainworkers and EuroMayDay: A multi-sector and non-representational protest

One of the earliest EuroMayDay initiatives was the Italian Chainworkers, a group of media activists based in Milan commenting on labour conflicts and corporate misdeeds in big malls, franchises, megastores and call centres in northern Italy. Chainworkers started in 1999 as a website with resources and legal advice for people working in fast-food and distribution chains. It set out to encourage a fragmented workforce abandoned by traditional unions, with almost no labour rights and no classic worker identity, to take collective action. In 2001 the group organised numerous protests in and around Milan and then across the rest of Italy, mobilising temps, part-timers, freelance and contract workers as well as researchers, teachers, and students.

> Oh, precarious mother! Young telephonist! Redundancy pay pending! Energetic salesperson! Courageous migrant! University researcher! Self-employed worker! Maybe you still don't know what's happening to you, but we do! An infection is spreading. For a long time now, the planners of the Contagion have been trying to hide it, giving it aseptic and hygienically perfect names like: flexibility, project-related contracts, fixed-term, rationalization, charity work, training, re-organization of production lines... But we recognize the real face of the Disease which is devouring your dignity. Here are the real names of the evil spirits which have wheedled their way into your bodies and ensnared your minds: flexibility which has broken down every desire,

uncoordinated and temporary project-related contracts, time determined by fate, rationalization of superfluous staff, charity work pending legal decisions, re-organization of reproduction lines, cloning of docile awareness... (De Sario 2007, 22-23).

The movement consciously deployed networked communication and graphic design as a means for making radical political activity attractive to young people who had no memory of class struggle (Neilson and Rossiter 2005). Promoting a brand of activism associated with alternative music, vintage fashion and urban lifestyles, their campaigns speak to a desire for making precarity an appealing point of departure for protest. Their colourful websites, flyers and posters, simultaneously, had the function of reclaiming the dominant marketing-based aesthetics appropriated by corporate culture. Precisely because creative design plays an important role in the neoliberal post-Fordist economy, Chainworkers thought it would offer possibilities for disrupting its exploitative dynamics. Notably, their cultural activism, visual identities, and guerrilla style communication tactics contributed to shifting the meaning of "precarious" towards a certain ambiguity, denouncing the consequences of flexible work while also showing its potentialities. Focussing on the inventiveness and dynamic social critique of precarious workers, they presented casualisation as a particular lifestyle. Rendering isolated workers without labour rights as creative and emancipated agents, the main goal was to enable a new kind of politics that could connect multiple struggles around precarisation in Italy and beyond (Foti 2005).

Aiming to update 20th century unionist traditions and institutional forms of labour organisation, Chainworkers looked for a new interpretation of the International Workers' Day on the first of May. With the adaptation of capitalist modes of exploitation, circumventing labour struggles and appropriate workers' demands for more freedom and autonomy, they believed the annual celebration and honouring of workers had lost its meaning, and had merely become another public holiday (Tarì and Vanni 2005). With the workplace no longer being a place of spontaneous encounter and aggregation, organising collective worker identity through a new rendition of May Day seemed necessary. In an attempt to re-appropriate the monotonous and homogenous marches organised by national and centralised trade unions, Chainworkers called for their own May Day parade in 2001 (Murgia 2014,

52). Without legal permission, they organised an unofficial, rave-like procession with carnivalesque floats, costumes and festival music, celebrating the aspirations and highlighting the struggles of precarious workers from different sectors. The initiative caught on and was repeated in the years after with growing numbers and increasing expressiveness across Italy, as well as other European countries such as France and Spain.

Contributing to the Europeanisation of precarity debates, the May Day parades primarily focused on making visible the consequences of flexible labour exploitation. An interesting example can be found in the occurrence of San Precario. On the 29th of February 2004[48], Chainworkers announced the birth of the patron saint of all flexible workers, as they picketed a newly opened supermarket in Milan (Tarì and Vanni 2005). With a mock procession, surreal prayers and religious saint cards, they carried a parodic statue of San Precario through the streets of the city and into the aisles of the supermarket. The blasphemous saint meant to draw attention to the erosion of time for living, as well as to the general increase in prices and fall in the purchasing value of money since the introduction of the euro. Within weeks, apparitions of San Precario started multiplying and proliferating across Italian cities. Soon after, mock statues of the protector of precarious workers were paraded through the streets during various May Day demonstrations around Europe.

Since his first apparition, the saint is often represented wearing the uniform of a supermarket employee, his head circled by a neon halo. In many instances he holds typical references to temporary work, such as the job advertisements section of a newspaper, a bag of McDonald's chips, or a call centre telephone. Sometimes he has several arms, indicating the multiplicity of casual contracts, as well as the necessary ability of precarious workers to develop multi-tasking skills. Notably, San Precario has appeared in different guises. He has appeared as a geek-like figure in anarchist bookstores, glammed up at film festivals, or on the cover of a magazine, posing as a

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[48] The chosen date for this demonstration has a double symbolic value. Occurring once every four years, the 29th of February is an irregular, in other words "intermittent" date, and as such refers to the fragmentary nature of precarious labour. Moreover, the 29th of February in 2004 was a Sunday, a day that had lost its connotations of religious worship as well as rest to become just another working day (Murgia 2014, 52).

female saint breastfeeding a child whilst working behind a computer.[49] All these manifestations function as a tactic to make visible issues arising from the increasing precarisation of surplus labour populations in Europe.

In the context of EuroMayDay mobilisations, San Precario does not privilege one category of worker over another. As Marcello Tarì and Ilaria Vanni explain in their treatise on the life and deeds of the protector of precarious workers:

> As a multi-skilled and multiply employed casualised worker, precariously teetering from one job to the next and often juggling several jobs at once, the saint has no fixed identity. San Precario is a floating signifier. Rather than being, the saint becomes, constructing lines of flight according to need, personal inclination and group affiliation (Tarì and Vanni 2005).

With his nomadic apparitions and temporary incursions, San Precario is not just a fleeting example of culture jamming, but part of a political debate that brings together diverse activist groups, networks and independent unions organising around precarity. The patron saint of precarious workers can be praised upon in order to be rescued from insecure labour contracts, as well as lack of holidays, wage freezes, unpaid maternity leave, flexible rent agreements, increasing student loan debts, drops in pensions, the elimination of union organising rights, etc. As such, the saint functions as a site for mobilisations across a variety of issues, locations and experiences.

Subverting Catholic traditions of carrying statues in processions through public spaces and worshipping religious saint cards, the cult of San Precario functions as a 'détournement' (Murgia 2014, 52). Meaning "rerouting" or "hijacking" in English, this is a technique developed by the Situationist International in the 1950s to set up subversive political pranks.[50] It consists of altering images produced by the spectacle[51] so that rather than supporting the status quo, their meaning is changed

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[49] See the cover image of the inaugural issue of Mute's *Precarious Reader* published in 2005. Yet it seems the default gender of San Precario is male, a problematic that will be addressed later on in this chapter through feminist critiques of androcentrism within precarity debates.
[50] Situationist International and their tactics of détournement will be further discussed in chapter 4 through Precarias a la Deriva's practice of drifting.
[51] Developed by Guy Debord in his book *The Society of the Spectacle*, the spectacle refers to the power of the market economy as well as the governmental technologies through which this power is maintained and reproduced, such as the mass media (Debord 1994, 24).

in order to communicate a more radical or oppositional message (Debord 1994, 144). Stressing precarity as a situation that depends entirely on future causalities, the hagiography and rituals of San Precario turn knowledge of the precarious against itself. The saint subverts the etymological association of the Latin verb "precare" with prayer in the theological sense, that is to say, subverting religious belief as 'to be rescued from the earthly hell' (Berardi 2010, 148).

Another example of détournement is "La Precariomanzia", a custom-made tarot deck published during the EuroMayDay mobilisations in Italy in 2007 (EuroMayDay 2007; Murgia 2014). Designed to predict the entire life path and destiny of a precarious worker, these cards subvert unorthodox knowledge for speculating on the future. Like an original tarot deck, each card in this make-believe system has ambivalent (i.e. positive as well as negative) meanings, reflecting the notion of fortune telling as a practice that is always multi-interpretable.[52] Offering numerous strategies to react to, and act upon, precarious situations, La Precariomanzia demonstrates that today it is up to workers themselves to decide what to do and what to avoid in order to improve their lives. In this way, it critiques the neoliberal offloading of governance functions onto private instances, which causes people to embrace an ethic of self-responsibility, as well as the elimination of collective bargaining and other forms of worker power.

A final example of subverting knowledge about precarisation in the Italian context of EuroMayDay is "Precariopoli", a board game invented by Chainworkers (Chainworkers 2004). Appropriating the well-known Monopoly game in which players engage in simulated property and financial dealings, Precariopoli involves the hurdles and challenges occurring in a precarious worker's life (Tarì and Vanni 2005). Aimlessly moving around the board while running out of cash, players start selling off the assets they acquired at a deep discount to what they paid for them. Unless they get lucky, it is only a matter of time before players go bankrupt. Precariopoli applies these lessons to the contemporary labour market. The rule is

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[52] I came across La Precariomanzia in 2016, when I attended a "job de-centre" event at The Field in New Cross. Organised by the New Cross Commoners, the job de-centre is an experimental practice that helps people de-centralise their lives from work and the alienation and exploitation that comes with it. In this context, the cards were used as a consciousness-raising tool to think and talk in unusual ways about work, unemployment and precarity (New Cross Commoners 2016).

that in order to survive in the entrepreneurial culture of neoliberal capitalism, you have to be clever, play strategic and watch your reserves – not just on one occasion, but constantly, day after day, round after round. Replacing the name "Monopoly" with "Precariopoly", the game also points to the institutional failure of Western nation states and forms of governance based on exclusive possession and control. In doing so, it draws a clear analogy between precarisation and the privatising of public services, as well as the celebration of market discipline and competition.

San Precario, La Precariomanzia and Precariopoli demonstrate that by subverting expressions of the precarious, novel meanings regarding structural insecurity can be generated. By mocking practices of securitisation in Christian pastoral power, neoliberal premises of 'cruel optimism' (Berlant 2011) as well as the institution of exclusive rights in capitalist systems, EuroMayDay activists developed creative forms of struggle around casualisation. Combining political and cultural strategies, their active and playful 'precarity survival kits' (Murgia 2014, 52) demonstrate the need for a radically different way of organising against capitalist exploitation. In doing so, they not only attempted to represent a collective subject but sought out 'non-representationist practices' (Lorey 2015, 9) in order to make visible issues around the changing nature of work and life in the early 2000s.

5. From capital/labour to capital/life and beyond binaries of production and reproduction

Besides publicly demonstrating against the normalisation of precarisation, movements connected to the transnational EuroMayDay mobilisations have developed concrete social and political practices that respond to the increasing flexibilisation of labour in post-industrial economies. As the familiar discourse about guaranteed life-long employment is unable to respond to a radically different conjuncture, activist groups and advocacy organisations called for new collective social rights offering a measure of security in an economy of precariousness. Rather than returning to the stable and reliable, although one-sided and all-consuming Fordist wage relation, these initiatives advanced an entirely different relation between life and work (Weeks 2011, 80). Some precarity movements have focused on the revamping of declining welfare systems in Western Europe. Their protests

include demands for state-guaranteed employment and sustainable social entitlements such as commonfare and universal basic income.

Commonfare is a participatory form of welfare provision based on fair governance and grassroots democracy. It entails the involvement of diverse stakeholders to facilitate the bottom-up arousal of collective practices tackling the needs of precarious workers. As an alternative welfare system, commonfare suggests a move away from workfare regimes – which require work or attendance for training from those receiving benefits – towards a more equal organisation of labour time, compensation and resources, both material and immaterial (Fumagalli 2015). Universal basic income is a system of automatic, unconditional and non-withdraw-able income to every individual citizen. This income is not means-tested. Whether someone's earnings increase, decrease or stay the same, their payment will not change. This guaranteed income would be determined according to living wage, an hourly rate based on the basic cost of living, and calculated independently of state governments, thus based on the amount people actually would need in order to get by (Casas-Cortés 2014, 212).

These reforms aim to make existing welfare provisions more accessible and share good practices among citizens across Europe. It has been pointed out, however, that authorities employ the organisation of de-centralised and self-regulated forms of social security to manage and control people, especially at times of perceived insecurity. Moreover, by actively encouraging community management of basic public functions, governments are able to normalise austerity and obscure issues around the (re)distribution of resources. It also allows them to more effectively police communities through various disciplining mechanisms tied to funding (Provisional University 2014). There is the danger that these measures, insofar as they cast the nation state as the provider of continuity and certainty, reinforce the dominant rhetoric of securitisation.

An interesting example in this case is the call for "flexicurity" as a means of reducing precarity. Originated in the Netherlands and Denmark in the mid 1990s, this involved a campaign for a new form of welfare provision to protect precarious workers without abandoning flexibility (Neilson and Rossiter 2005). Combining

desires for freedom with the need for security, flexicurity ensured access to resources whilst allowing individuals to fully develop the possibilities made possible by engaging in activities outside traditional labour regimes. The proposal inspired an international debate surrounding the fact that while many young people in Europe struggle to make a living, they accept the mobility and flexibility inherent in contemporary modes of production and do not necessarily want to go back to a 'job for life' system (Bardan 2013, 82). Presented as a policy solution adequate for the post-Fordist labour market, flexicurity would reduce unemployment, sustain growth and simultaneously reinforce the state's obligations to protect and secure the most contingent members of the workforce. At the same time, it would make provisions for the many non-remunerated activities outside of formal employment that have become essential for contemporary capitalist accumulation.

Closely aligned with post-Autonomist analyses of immaterial labour, the demand for flexicurity attempts to address, rather than ignore or deny, the realities of post-Fordist work. However, as capital continues to win lavish returns from casualisation, subcontracting and outsourcing, the European labour market is more and more awash with unregulated forms of 'flexploitation' (Ross 2008). This is a psychological strategy used by employers, which Pierre Bourdieu described as 'a mode of domination of a new kind, based on the creation of a generalised and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission, into the acceptance of exploitation.' (Bourdieu 1998, 85). As the amount of self-employed and freelance workers in the gig economy is rising, the call for flexicurity fosters the basic assumption that there is a need for increasing flexibility. With this, the understanding of security moves from social protection to self-insurance and individual responsibility. Furthermore, it ignores the contradictions between flexibility and security. By blending the two into a single notion, flexicurity depoliticises the relationship between capital and labour (Keune and Serrano 2014).

While attempting to re-politicise this relation, theorists such as Maurizio Lazzarato, Franco Berardi and Paolo Virno have pointed to the limitations of excessive analytical weight placed on wage labour within debates surrounding precarity. As discussed in chapter 1, they argue that capitalist accumulation is no longer founded on the exploitation of labour – or labour power, to use a more Marxist term – but

increasingly on the exploitation of communication, knowledge, creativity, sociality and affect. Because traditional forms of employment have lost their centrality in the production of value, the relationship has shifted from capital/labour to capital/life. As such, discussions around precarity cannot be limited to the world of work but need to include analyses of how processes of exploitation impact subjectivity. This does not mean that the workplace can no longer be a place of conflict, nor that the teachings of the workers' movement cannot be useful. It means that the battle inside and against precarisation cannot be restricted to the sphere of labour.

Nevertheless, even though post-Autonomist conceptions of the new economy have helped to understand the consequences of qualitative shifts in labour and life, their evaluations remain capital-oriented. Actively challenging the centrality of capitalist production in analyses of precarity, feminist critics such as Silvia Federici have argued for the need to break with binaries of production and reproduction, even when reformulated as capital/life. Questioning the Marxist basis of political economy, Federici asserts that life has always been productive and as such precarious working and living conditions are nothing new in principle (Federici 2004). Suggesting that analyses of immaterial labour are too production centred, she points to the exclusion of women's reproductive activities, care work and domestic labour in debates around capitalist exploitation (Federici 2012).

Building on Federici's manifesto 'Wages Against Housework' from 1974, numerous Marxist feminists have emphasised the blurring of the realms of production and reproduction in spheres neglected by post-Autonomists. Updating feminist critiques of gendered labour divisions from the 1970s, they contend that studies of precarious labour do not pay enough attention to the feminisation and devaluation of activities such as cleaning, nursing, working in retail, bartending, telephone operating, sex work. Since these kinds of jobs are historically ascribed to women, many feminist thinkers have argued for a less androcentric understanding of governmental precarisation and more awareness of gender differences within the debate.

For example, Laura Fantone asserts that the precarity movement in Italy initially developed a discourse based on an ideal-typical temp-worker. Questioning the make-up of groups like Chainworkers, she critiques the imaginary subject at the

heart of precarity politics: 'the single, male, urban artist or creative worker, idealised as the vanguard of the precariat', who is often counterposed to the implicitly more backward and less radical figure of the 'ageing housewife, living in the suburbs, engaged in social reproduction, shopping and taking care of her family' (Fantone 2007, 9). Subsequently, it can be argued that women are disproportionately represented in the precariat. According to Marina Vishmidt, the obscuring of reproductive activities in the cultural turn to precarity risks embedding itself precisely in the terms that it is interrogating, that is the dogma of creativity. She writes:

> Whereas at one time domestic work was excluded from Marxian theory on the basis of its exclusion from the exchange of abstract labour power, as mere "reproduction", nowadays it is excluded from critiques of emergent forms of labour not just because it is not considered "creative", not just because it is unpaid, but because "creativity" supplies an alibi to an ossification of social and productive relations which cannot admit, let alone imagine, the challenge posed by the destruction of housework as a discrete activity (Vishmidt 2005).

Following these comments, precarious working and living conditions are only discussed at the moment when a particular subject – male, urban, independent, creative – began to feel the negative effects of the new flexible job market. A similar argument is put forward by Isabell Lorey, who posits that especially those who do not meet the norm of the free, sovereign-bourgeois, white subject are precarised. Employing a Foucauldian analysis of sovereignty in Western modernity, Lorey employs the concept of 'biopolitical immunisation' to designate a dynamic of legitimising and securing relations of domination in post-industrial societies (Lorey 2015, 43). She stresses that liberal governmentality, within the welfare state paradigm of protection, is based on multiple forms of precarity as inequality through *othering*:

> On the one hand, on the paid labour of women in the reproduction area of the private sphere; on the other hand, on the precarity of all those excluded from the nation-state compromise between capital and labour – whether as abnormal, foreign or poor – as well as those living under extreme conditions of exploitation in the colonies (Lorey 2015, 36).

This issue is also reflected in political struggles focused on the restoration of declining welfare systems. As discussed above, demonstrations against precarious

existence often include demands for state-guaranteed employment and sustainable social entitlements such as universal basic income. Such entitlements, however, do not apply to everyone. For instance, as the number of undocumented migrants working in the care sector is growing, pink-collar work is less and less controlled by state regulations or labour laws. While precarity movements can be regarded as innovative modes of thinking political and social relations, they are nonetheless often bound to prevailing discourses and expectations surrounding notions of governance and citizenship. In addition, the conceptualisation of the precariat can be tied to accusations of Eurocentrism, which make different precarities less visible. Questioning the identification of a new political subjectivity in the early 2000s, Marina Vishmidt argues the "unity" of the precariat was in reality

> a de-classed group with eclectic skill sets and whose forms of life often reflected a historically novel (at least in Western Europe and North America) middle-class experience of the poorly waged and unstable conditions that had usually been the preserve of the working classes, especially the feminised and racialised segments (Vishmidt 2017, 223).

6. Precarious relationality: Solidarity across difference(s)

It follows that the discernment of precarity as an a-typical situation underpins many of the material and immaterial conditions through which contemporary forms of vulnerability are understood in Europe. Several critics have posited that it is relatively easy to depict insecure employment as an exception and an emergency in countries that have experienced Fordist compacts in the past. For example, Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter state that precarity appears as an irregular phenomenon only when set against a Fordist norm (Neilson and Rossiter 2005). Critically interrogating Autonomist approaches to labour exploitation, Franco Barchiesi claims that unstable jobs are the historical and statistical rule for workers, while the benefits of productivity-cum-consumerism pacts and demand-supported full employment are contingent and localised exceptions (Barchiesi 2012). In a similar way, Angela Mitropoulos states that the experience of regular, full-time, long-term employment, which characterised the most visible, mediated aspects of Fordism, is an anomaly in capitalist history (Mitropoulos 2005). These critiques reveal how

debates around insecure working and living conditions often reflect a tight discussion of Western neoliberalism, which needs to be challenged.

In many conversations addressing the problem of self-precarisation there is a tendency to collapse otherwise disparate forms of capitalist exploitation into the containing category of creativity. Implicit in this disposition is an obscuring of those forms of coerced and un(der)paid work primarily associated with low waged workers, women or migrants. According to Neilson and Rossiter, analyses of cultural production need not obscure the fact that 'the dark underbelly' of the creative sector consists of undocumented labour, domestic work, those engaged in the assembly production of micro-chips and the toxic impact of such manufacturing on the environment and health of those living adjacent to these industries (Neilson and Rossiter 2005). As these actors comprise the subaltern of the new economy, cultural thinkers should not overlook the actual relations of production that enable the internal clusters of the creative industries in Europe.

This does not mean that cultural investigations of the impact of immaterial labour in post-industrial societies are insignificant. With the reclassification of workers as independent contractors, the internalisation of exploitation affects more and more people across different strata. Consequently, investigating the normalisation of self-precarisation remains important. As Byung-Chul Han writes: 'Today, everyone is an auto-exploiting labourer in his or her own enterprise. People are now master and slave in one. Even class struggle has transformed into an inner struggle against oneself.' (Han 2017, 19). Yet we cannot leave unnoticed the fact that the self-precarising subject is conditioned by the new phase of global capitalism, which remains a class system with growing inequalities. Pointing towards the omission of the outsourcing of assembly line work in critiques of post-Fordist labour, Slavoj Žižek writes:

> There are still millions of manual workers in Third World countries, just as there are big differences between different kinds of immaterial workers (suffice it to mention the growing domain of "human services" like the caretakers of old people). A gap separates the top manager who owns or runs a company from a precarious worker spending days at home alone with his/her PC: they are definitely not both a master and a slave in the same sense (Žižek 2020).

Taken into account new divisions of labour in advanced capitalism, resistance in the context of precarity is not reducible to an intra-personal struggle against oneself. If the faith of workers in the Global North – including cultural producers in Western Europe – is closely connected to that of workers in the Global South, any alternative to structural insecurity will have to be global and networked (Bloois 2011). In addition, there is the need for more precision and more concrete evaluation of the real significance of immaterial labour. Such evaluation would consider how the creative worker exemplifies what capitalism wants from all its productive subjects, as well as the normative elements of this. Moreover, any politics based on the changing nature of work has to consider how differences in access to social power and the ability to have a voice regarding one's conditions affect organising from within such conditions, as well as the possibilities, and difficulties, of creating alliances between them (Shukaitis 2012). Subsequently there have been attempts at re-signifying the concept of precarity by paying closer attention to differences within 21st century working classes.

Questioning the disruptive possibilities of the EuroMayDay actions and its celebration of precarity lifestyles, some activists have engaged groups that are less politically visible, such as undocumented migrants, women of colour, people with disabilities, or impoverished communities. By bringing together "local" and "global" practices, these initiatives consider the diverse realities of work and life in contemporary neoliberalism: the resources people count upon, the emotional and material support, the rights, the risks, the social value of what they do, the diversity of availabilities and sensibilities, etc. To an extent these projects offer opportunities for more privileged individuals to shift the focus away from themselves, and acknowledge conditions of "others", while standing with them in solidarity. However, many instances end up reproducing divisions between specific groups of people. By relying on social categories that have long been axes of oppression, situations of precarity are addressed in ways that re-inscribe inequalities of citizenship, ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexuality and ability. Failing to perceive the limitations of specific social, political and cultural perspectives, the use of such classifications perpetuates the hierarchies between what Isabell Lorey has called the 'underprivileged' from the 'better off' precarious (Lorey 2015, 108).

Without denying the enormous inventive energy poured into efforts like the San Precario stunts in Italy or the Intermittents du Spectacle campaign in France, it often proves difficult to regard difference as a strength for developing relations of solidarity and shared interests in the context of precarity. Part of the problem seems to lie in thinking that commonality is limited to the context of a particular group or locality, and that social power and political efficacy are dependent on the formation of a community conceptualised as being coherent and harmonious. When attempting to identify what different subjects might share in neoliberal capitalism, it is necessary to disturb the beliefs of a homogenous collective subject, and work towards inventing new models of identification. By leaving behind narrow understandings of "belonging", it becomes possible to explore pathways towards alternative social ontologies, in the attempt to demonstrate that the very impossibility of defining an identitarian "we" still enables connection to others. Tackling this seemingly contradictory possibility is crucial for constructing common narratives in order to challenge privatisation and individualisation in contemporary societies.

In recent years the field of social sciences, and the arts as well as politics, have hosted debates on the notion of the commons, with the concept of "commoning" inspiring the possibility of envisioning a new social practice within capitalism. Triggered by the financial and real estate crisis in 2008, which increased the necessity to challenge capitalism's mode of operation, there remains a growing interest on the part of the left to develop community models that improve the quality of everyone's lives, regardless of one's gender, ethnicity and social, political or economic status. Expanding Karl Marx's account of primitive accumulation – as well as its more contemporary articulation in David Harvey's critique of 'accumulation through dispossession' (Harvey 2004) – Silvia Federici understands commoning as an insurgent togetherness that is built on relationality, reciprocity and care. Moving beyond the European framework of (land) enclosures, her analysis recognises different feminist and post-colonial struggles for the commons as both the claims for the sustenance of shared resources, and as a struggle for different forms of relating and belonging (Federici 2011; Barbagallo and Federici 2012). As such, commoning can be regarded as a practice that expands beyond the limits of any closed community or collective identity (Baldauf et al. 2018).

Comparably, numerous post-structuralist philosophers have argued for the need to destabilise the notion of community as unified and total. According to Roberto Esposito, community is not an entity or collective subject, but rather the relation that makes subjects no longer individual: 'it is the "with," the "between," and the threshold where they meet in a point of contact that brings them into relation with others to the degree to which it separates them from themselves' (Esposito 2010, 139). The idea of community functioning as a threshold, or in-between, can also be found in Jean-Luc Nancy's work on the implications of understanding being-with as radically and irreducibly relational (Nancy 2000). Reflected in his use of the hyphenated term 'being-singular-plural', Nancy proposes a co-essence in which the subject is never purely self-referential. It is not "me", nor "the other", but always the result of a resonance between these poles. Focused on tracing the relational zones between different beings, these ideas challenge binary-oppositional structures in which people are separate from their external world.

Since the 1980s, feminist and post-colonial theorists have brought into play similar critiques of individual autonomy in order to reframe social relationality. Rebuffing essentialist conceptions of political identity, Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou propose a re-theorisation of subjectivity that does not refer to a self-contained individuality, but rather to 'responsive dispositions of becoming-one-with-another, as they are manifested, for example, in the various affects that throw us "out of joint" and "beside ourselves".' (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 71). Such radical decentralisations of selfhood question the hard and dividing lines between "self" and "other" that neoliberalism draws. In her critique of post-Enlightenment European social configurations, Denise Ferreira da Silva makes a similar claim. Rejecting the idea of a fundamental separation between human collectives, whether in terms of nationality, ethnicity or social (gender, sexual, racial) identity, she understands difference not as a manifestation of 'an unresolvable estrangement', but as a thread of commonality (Ferreira da Silva 2016, 65). These re-imaginations of sociality support ethical and political interventions capable of interrupting processes of isolation in a segmented world. If people understand themselves to be interconnected and mutually influencing each other, through co-creating experiences and articulations, they might be able to resist the mechanisms of

advanced capitalism that structures mutual dependency in ways that are often mutually exclusive.

Certainly, there are limitations to simply advocating for relationality as if it were 'a self-evident good' (Gilbert 2014, 129). As we have seen in the context of precarity activism, connections are to be made, but never simply given or assumed. Equally, the idea of diversity as a strength might be a convincing argument in theory, but in practice it is not unmitigated. This is why the question of commonality cannot be simply described as a problem of self-interest versus common interests. Rather, it is about how individual interests articulate themselves in a way that constitutes shared interests. These interests cannot be postulated but can only be constituted through processes of commoning (Stavrides and De Angelis 2010, 11). To be of value this commoning must overcome material and immaterial divisions within the precariat. For this reason, it is not possible to rely on any vanguard of precarity (Mitropoulos 2005). By all accounts, precarity does not have a model worker; there is no precarious Stakhanov.[53] Rather, it strays across any number of practices, rendering their relations precisely precarious, that is to say, given to no essential connection but perpetually open to temporary and contingent relations (Neilson and Rossiter 2005).

To further explore the implications of this precarious relationality, the next chapter will turn to the activist-research of the Madrid-based feminist collective Precarias a la Deriva (PalD). Addressing the problematic status of domestic work and care activities done by women in the "non-productive" sphere, their militant political ethics attends to the difficulties associated with self-organisation and thinking through different experiences and articulations of the precarisation and feminisation of labour. Confronting the myth of the precariat sharing a common predicament, PalD crucially emphasise the inherent multiplicity and heterogeneity of collectivity, while calling into question the collapse of various situations into one stable and undivided subject position. Taking into account issues concerning

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[53] Aleksei Grigorevich Stakhanov (1906–1977) was a Russian coal miner who was exceptionally hard working and productive. "Stakhanovites" were model workers in the former Soviet Union, taking pride in their ability to produce more than was required, by working harder and more efficiently, thus strengthening the Communist state (Siegelbaum 1988).

accountability and responsibility, I investigate how their practice exposes the dangers of disguising inequalities between different subjectivities living and working in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. Indeed, the exclusion of some from generalised proclamations about who is exploited contributes to the oppression of those who do not fit the dominant construction of precarious experience (Butler 2009, 3). At the same time, I regard how PalD rehearses new ways of acting-being-thinking that cultivate forms of social relationality outside the neoliberal economy. The aim is to identify the specific knowledge produced by the group and to use this to conduct my own analyses about how to become common in conditions of economic exclusion, and what solidarity across difference(s) might look like.

Chapter 4 – When the common ground cannot be assumed: Situatedness and partial relationality in Precarias a la Deriva

1. Precarias a la Deriva: Adrift through the circuits of feminised precarious work

> One thing leads to another. From drifts to more drifts, from workshops to thousands more dialogues and debates, demonstrations, public spaces, the possibility – beyond a politics of the gesture to one of daily gestures – to accumulate density, history, links, narration, territory to be continued (PalD 2003c).

Focussing on the specific thinking and practice of the Madrid-based feminist collective Precarias a la Deriva (PalD), the fourth chapter of this thesis will address questions concerning the ethics and politics of situatedness and partial relationality in the context of precarisation. In doing so I'm taking the final step in exploring possibilities for struggle and resistance under the individualising mechanisms of neoliberal self-government. Offering a more complex reading of recent transformations in the spheres of labour and life, PalD has allocated much of their activist research to the ongoing invisibility of care and social reproduction as the motor of contemporary capital, with a focus on the prevalence of women working in the Spanish reproductive labour market. While strolling through the areas of daily life of waitresses, teachers, telephone operators, child minders, bartenders, cleaners, translators and retail workers in Madrid, members of the group developed a self-conscious strategy for creating new socio-political alliances between stratified precarious subjectivities in globalised and unregulated economies. This chapter focuses on PalD's publication and video project *A la Deriva, Por los Circuitos de la Precariedad Femenina* (*Adrift Through the Circuits of Feminised Precarious Work*), their workshops on globalised care in 2003 as well as their involvement in the Agencia de Asuntos Precarios (Agency of Precarious Affairs) in 2006. Through these cases, I consider the implications of PalD's militant political ethics to be a sustainable form of knowing-being-doing in which interdependency is considered fundamental.

Relating philosophical perspectives on subjectivation to the organisational circumstances of gendered labour relations in patriarchal and neo-colonial

capitalism, this chapter draws heavily on feminist critiques of individual autonomy and reframing of social relationality. Taking into account both Donna Haraway's situated epistemology of partial perspectives and Judith Butler's theorising of the relation between socio-ontological precariousness and political precarity, I examine how PalD's militant research challenges dominant conceptions of collectivity determined by European nation states. Through a careful (no pun intended) engagement with their texts, I investigate the ways PalD's practice of care explores possibilities of articulation among women who share the common experience of feminised labour but have very different geographic and ethnic backgrounds. By bringing together their everyday realities without assumptions of comparability, the group demonstrates the variations in social recognition and degrees of vulnerability among precarious women (PalD 2004a). At the same time, they probe possible routes to finding a sense of community amidst the radical dispersion of neoliberal capitalism. PalD's investigation is, above all, 'a way of thinking together towards collective action, an effort to locate the scattered sites of conflict and know how to name them' (PalD 2003b).

By means of open-ended traversals through the urban sites of female precarity in Madrid, PalD developed a distinct methodology of everyday struggle, slow activism and careful organising. Their procedures resulted in a variety of audio-visual and written materials, which were shared and worked out during a series of internal workshops and public presentations. Collectively working through their accumulated archives, the members of the group gathered their findings in various formats. Between 2003 and 2006, PalD released a book, a DVD, a website, numerous conference presentations and several online and paper publications. Circulated in order to multiply the acts of sharing and communication, many of their research outputs have been translated into English, German and other languages. Attracting the attention of activists, academics and cultural practitioners, PalD's project has gained significant popularity – locally, nationally and transnationally – and analyses of their work are still proliferating.

I came across PalD's work while attending Stefan Nowotny's research seminar 'Thinking Differently' held in May 2015 at Goldsmiths, University of London. Part of the Curatorial/Knowledge program in the department of Visual Cultures, this

session addressed questions around the use of abstraction in processes of thinking and the role of experiences that drive us to think differently and modify our thoughts. Nowotny introduced PalD as a practice that attempts to produce knowledges through the organisation of new encounters and ways of relating to one another. Looking at their article 'A Very Careful Strike: Four hypotheses' (2006) and watching extracts from their video *A la Deriva, Por los Circuitos de la Precariedad Femenina* (2003), we discussed PalD's methodologies trying to compose lived experiences to create new "common notions". Taking into account the axes of stratification that traverse precariousness, their work helped us understand how capitalist exploitation affects different people in different ways. At the same time their intersectional analyses motivated us to think about forging, maintaining and evolving relations between radically different conjunctures.

I was immediately intrigued by PalD's militant research and began conducting extensive research into their practice and thinking. For me their work offered new ways to approach the problem of self-precarisation, constituting a more complex relationship between work and non-work, the economic and the social, the personal and the political. Bringing the ethics of care into the analysis of structural insecurity, PalD's perspectives allowed me to address its multiple dimensions, especially those aspects that impact everyday life and social reproduction, as well as the role of heteronormative distinctions between public and private in the construction of precarious subjectivity. Moving away from established languages of precarity activism in the early 2000s, their texts opened up new ways of reflecting on my own lived experiences as a female PhD researcher in London.[54]

What I found most striking about PalD's practice is their optimism regarding possibilities and their pragmatic evaluation of the difficulties associated with building relations of solidarity between radically different subjectivities. Their self-reflexive writings are unambiguously hopeful about the creation of alliances, but

[54] Some of PalD's investigations spoke to my previous trajectories, such as their drift through the circuits of cultural and media production, which, among other things, addressed the sexist and masculine attitudes in the field of graphic design (PalD 2003c). Other procedures prompted me to think about the processes of precarisation I am currently involved in, such as the various forms of casualisation taking place at the campus where I study and teach. In the conclusion of this thesis I will briefly expand on how reading PalD's texts became a pivotal activity in coming to develop a feminist understanding of my experiences working as an associate lecturer at Goldsmiths.

also wary of its challenges. For me, their work encourages relations of mutual support by foregrounding shared interests, while thinking about the complexities and exigencies of allyship. As such, PalD's project operates as an accessible instrument of struggle, enabling the imagination of different contemporary politics, lives and subjectivities. The following can be seen as an attempt to unpack the ways that their practice allows for different responses to instances of exploitation and oppression occurring in our everyday lives, and offers the possibility to feel commonality in those moments when the common ground cannot be assumed, but there is shared recognition.

1.1. Thinking and acting together: The militant research of Precarias a la Deriva

PalD arose from the squatted feminist social centre La Eskalera Karakola located in the Lavapiés neighbourhood of Madrid in 2002. Describing their personal trajectories as 'quite diverse' (PalD 2006b), the women involved had different activist backgrounds. Some came out of the local squatting movement, with its anarchist heritage of critiquing social-democratic governments, and with strong links to Italy and Germany. Others came from a variety of feminist organising, leftist collectives, anti-racist groups, trade unions and student movements. Most women involved in PalD had already embarked on a trajectory of reflecting on the multifaceted transformations of labour in Spain and beyond. Few who joined the group had only just started to think through themes related to precarity within neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism.

PalD was not a group with clearly identified members, but rather an open and changing collective of women that operate under a common name. Dealing with highly mobile participants, often on the move, coming and going, the group articulates a diffused network of related individuals, some being involved more than others at different times. Regarding their collectivity as an ongoing process, constantly shifting and changing, PalD's mode of (co)operation was not so much about political belonging, but more about 'opening a field of communication and fluid action – sometimes perhaps too diffuse' (PalD 2003c). Describing their form of organising as (too) diffuse, the group demonstrates awareness of the challenges of

social and political mobilisation around precarisation. Deliberately wanting to move away from closed forms of organisation and the power structures at play within activist movements, the women involved embraced the difficulties that come with being fragmented and unfixed.

Progressing in irregular ways, PalD's practice can be conceived as an open-ended process. It is exposed to improvisation, shaped by encounters and altered through continuous searching and experimenting. Conducting research in this way does not imply a formalised project with a rigorous research plan. Instead, it is mostly 'a posteriori' (Producciones Translocales of the Counter-Cartographies Collective 2008), in the process of reflecting, writing and putting thoughts together, when things start to look more coherent. But even then, PalD's findings are never presented as singular interpretations. Their notes are always many and dispersed. As they state: 'The accounts and impressions which we have pulled together suggest more questions than answers.' (PalD 2003c).

PalD's research constitutes an analysis of contemporary political economy well informed by theoretical debates around precarity. Eclectically combining feminist debates on reproduction, neo-Marxist notions of affective labour, post-colonial insights on race, ethnicity and language, post-structuralist theories of power and Deleuzian understandings of subjectivity, PalD captures the complexity of a condition which cannot be reduced to exploitative labour conditions. Their project reviews different bodies of work in order to develop an innovative analytical framework attuned to their own circumstances and desires. Going back and forth between theoretical sources and actual lived experiences, PalD developed a situated investigation of precarious working and living conditions to intervene in exploitative relations in the Spanish labour market.

Organised around the idea of thinking and acting together, PalD can be described as an initiative between academia and activism. Searching for new ways of acting that lead to new ways of thinking and vice versa, their work is embedded in practices of militant research (Bookchin et al. 2013, 4). Militant research refers to the simultaneous production of common intelligence, collective subjectivity and strategies of intervention, as well as autonomous networks of knowledge

production (Malo de Molina 2004b). For their work, PalD took specific inspiration from Colectivo Situaciones, a militant research collective based in Buenos Aires.[55] They posit militant research as a form of intervention that does not distinguish between thinking and doing politics:

> For, insofar as we see thought as the thinking/doing activity that interrupts the logic by which existing models acquire meaning, thinking is immediately political. On the one hand, if we see politics as the struggle for freedom and justice, all politics involves thinking, because there are forms of thinking against established models implicit in every radical practice – a thought people carry out with their bodies (Colectivo Situaciones 2007, 75).

As a form of knowledge production that is activist on the one hand, and a kind of activism that takes the form of knowledge production on the other, Colectivo Situaciones think of their practice as a double movement:

> to create ways of being militants that escape the political certainties established a priori and embrace politics as research (in this case, it would be 'research militancy'), and, at the same time, to invent forms of thinking and producing concepts that reject academic procedures, breaking away from the image of an object to be known and putting at the centre subjective experience (in this case, it would be 'militant research') (Colectivo Situaciones 2011, 5).

Actively distancing themselves from the objectifying modalities established by academic research, traditional political activism and humanitarianism,[56] militant researchers use methods such as life stories, narrative interviews and diaries to

[55] Colectivo Situaciones was formed by independent activist researchers working in collaboration with different autonomous movements in Argentina during the national crisis that started in late 2001, when the Argentinian government failed to pay its debt to the International Monetary Fund. The group registered and analysed these events while considering their research work as a series of interventions throughout the different scenarios and political processes happening. Motivated by the search for a form of knowledge production that reads struggles from within, Colectivo Situaciones participated in numerous grassroots activities with unemployed workers, peasant movements, neighbourhood assemblies, and alternative education experiments (Colectivo Situaciones 2011). Their writings have become influential among networks of activist researchers and global justice movements around the world; Colectivo Situaciones' work was a key reference for the development of PalD's militant research practice.
[56] According to Colectivo Situaciones, academics often leave the function of attributing meaning, values, interests and rationalities of the subject who does the research outside the scope of their investigation. They state that the activities of traditional political activists involved in party-like organisations are no less objectifying, in the sense that they approach struggles from a previously constituted knowledge framework. Struggles are thus regarded not for their value in themselves, but rather in terms of their contribution to something other than themselves, such as a communist society. Scrutinising the justification and funding of nongovernmental organisations, Colectivo Situaciones state that humanitarian activists relate to others in an instrumental fashion and take the world as static, instead of subject to radical change (Colectivo Situaciones 2011).

circumscribe the itineraries of encounters, points of departures, meetings and dissolution in their everyday and the spaces they inhabit (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2006). Similar to practices of consciousness-raising discussed in chapter 2, it is oriented to make people think critically about their own realities.

Rather than operating as "extra-situational", militant researchers think and act immanently. They do so by remaining, existing and intervening *within* the situation or struggle. Here, the notion of immanence refers to a Deleuzian inspired philosophy based around the empirical real, and the flux of existence which has no transcendental level or inherent separation. Throughout his writings, Gilles Deleuze has insisted that for thought to have any real force, it must not work by setting up transcendentals, but by creating movement and consequences (Deleuze 1988; 1997; 2006). This can only be done well if it approaches the immanent conditions of that which it is trying to think. Hence a distinguishing characteristic of militant research is paying attention to concrete situations and the material conditions in which these are embedded.[57] At the same time militant researchers look at the situation's broader context and state of affairs. This is also the case in PalD's situated investigation. While looking into the everyday realties of women working and living in Madrid, they take into account the consequences produced by the process of a Europeanising and globalising Spain. This wider context will be briefly discussed below.

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[57] This approach clearly resonates with elements of Baruch Spinoza's practical philosophy, in which the question of ethics arises through the capacity to work in and through concrete existences in concrete circumstances. This idea is taken up by Deleuze, who analyses Spinoza's ethics as 'a typology of immanent modes of existence' (Deleuze 1988, 23). Deleuze's insistence on the concept of the immanent throughout his work also has an ontological dimension, as can be noted in 'Immanence: a life…', a text published a few months before his death in 1995. Here Deleuze explores the idea of 'a plane of immanence' (Deleuze 1997, 4) as a pure and unqualified form of immersion or embeddedness. He argues that there is only one substance in life, and therefore everything which exists must be considered on the same plane, the same level, and analysed by way of their relations, rather than by their essence. For an analysis of the nature of the human subject as an immanently political, social, embedded subject, see Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

1.2. Los precarios: Social discontent in a Europeanising and globalising Spain

During the 1970s and 1980s Spain shifted from being considered a semi-peripheral autarchic country under a Fascist dictatorship to becoming a developed parliamentary democracy and key player in global markets. Like many other European countries transitioning from Fordist to post-Fordist economies, Spain's highly organised industrial working class agglomerated in large production facilities transformed into a dispersed, temporary, part-time, mobile and educated labour force in emerging industries related to services as well as creative and knowledge work. Simultaneously, the tradition of state involvement in the provision of social services was displaced by the increasing role of the private sector in public affairs such as health, education and housing.

In 1984, the Spanish socialist administration – determined to enter the European Economic Community in order to catch up with more developed and more globalised countries – launched a series of profound reforms, employing the expression "we are becoming European" (Casas-Cortés 2014, 207). Intensified legal efforts to deregulate the labour market put an end to full-time and permanent employment whilst welcoming a variety of part-time and fixed-term contracts. Among the remodelling of collective safeguarding systems, these measures led to several years of remarkable economic growth, celebrated as the "Spanish economic miracle".

As labour rights eroded, however, activist groups and social organisations engaging with the everyday life and subjective experience of "becoming European" began to critique the development and effects of the new employment policies at local, regional and national levels. Pointing to a general tendency towards social fragmentation, individualisation, and (self-)exploitation, these movements denounced the official discourse praising the macro-economic achievements as well as a vision that claimed flexibility as the paradigmatic solution for notoriously rigid

Spanish labour markets.[58] By the end of the 1990s, the expectations raised by the entrance of Spain into the European Union had diminished. New flexible labour forms were associated with a decrease in the quality of working conditions, a multiplication in the types of contracts and variable pay structures. The expansion of these forms of employment were compounded by years of salary stagnation, skyrocketing of prices due to entry into the eurozone, as well as speculation within the housing market. It was during this time that the Spanish adjective "precario" became a term of everyday use, referring to flexible workplaces, insecure labour contracts, rent agreements and loan debts.

Many of the women involved in PalD went through adolescence during the 1990s. Notably, they experienced a certain ambivalence towards the transformations happening in Spain. They were part of the first generation in the country able to have access to higher education on a massive scale and gain exposure to international recreational or educational travel. At the same time, many of the employment securities and professional prospects of their parents' age group were being eroded, leading to the coining of the term 'los precarios' ('the precarious generation') (Casas-Cortés 2009, 74). Acknowledging the positive as well as the negative elements of being part of this generation, PalD opened one of their first publications with the following statement:

> We are precarious. Which is to say some good things (accumulation of diverse knowledges, skills and abilities through work and life experiences in permanent construction), and a lot of bad ones (vulnerability, insecurity, poverty, social exposure) (PalD 2004a, 157).

Located within the increasing politicisation of part-time, temporary and insecure jobs, in both traditional sectors and the growing knowledge and service sectors of the new economy, PalD aimed to interpret and intervene in the contradictions produced by the process of a Europeanising and globalising Spain. The goal was to enable the collective construction of other life possibilities through building a

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[58] According to Maribel Casas-Cortés, the television cartoon character of Bruja Averia from the children's program *La bola de cristal* (*The crystal ball*) broadcast by Televisión Española between 1984 and 1988, was an early expression of the social discontent with the legalisation of unstable labour relations through what eventually became a popular saying in Spain: 'viva el mal, viva el capital, viva la precariedad labboural!' ('long live evil, long live capital, long live precarious labour!') (Casas-Cortés 2009, 296).

shared and creative struggle. In order to understand how this intention was developed it is necessary to go back to the moment the collective was found. PalD started as a response to a general strike called by the major Spanish trade unions on the 20th of June in 2002. Coinciding with the end of the Spanish presidency of the EU and taking place on the day before a meeting of the European Council in Sevilla, this demonstration aimed to protest against the rollback of labour protections implemented following European economic parameters.

For PalD the call to strike was unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. In the first place, the suspension of work was directed at guaranteed wage labour and industrial forms of production. That is, the demonstration did not take into consideration the mobile, flexible, service- and information-oriented jobs in Spain's post-Fordist economy. For many self-employed, freelance, short term and temp-workers, interrupting activities on the day of the strike would do nothing but duplicate their chores the next day. A temporary deferral of labour in order to join a traditional mass march as a form of organised protest would not work for them. According to PalD, the familiar discourse about returning to full-time, life-long and highly protected employment seemed unable to respond to a radically different conjuncture (PalD 2003c). Besides marginalising those who have precarious jobs, the trade unions did not address the problematic status of work done by women in the "non-productive" sphere. According to PalD, there was no attention whatsoever to the devaluation and subsequent de-politicisation of reproductive labour that persist in contemporary society, despite the feminist insistence on the accumulation of "surplus value" by this type of work. It is precisely this issue that is at the heart of the collective's critical investment in precarity. The following will thus expand on PalD's specific focus by looking at the relation between social reproduction and the feminisation of labour in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism.

1.3. Social reproduction and the feminisation of labour in neoliberal capitalism

Confronting the realities of many women working in the undervalued spheres of the Spanish labour market, PalD's activist-research is positioned within 'the continuum of production-reproduction-and in-betweens' (Casas-Cortés 2009, 402). Their

perception goes beyond the 'production and reproduction of immediate life' (Engels 2010, 26-27) in terms of focussing on the role women play in literally giving birth to the next generation of the workforce as well as maintaining and sustaining the present one. The group understands reproductive labour in a strict sense (domestic work and care activities) as well as in a broad sense (communication, management, socialisation, production of well-being, lifestyles, and so on). Feminist thinkers have referred to the social devaluation of these activities as the feminisation of labour (McRobbie 2010; Federici 2012). This concept not only refers to women's work and the increasing participation of women in paid work, but to a general tendency in the current logic of capitalist production.

Since the 1970s, there has been a growing expansion, fragmentation and diversification of employment niches for women, no longer just in administration or manufacturing but increasingly in the service sector (cleaning, nursing, waitressing, telephone operating, sex work) where jobs are ever more precarious. Today the feminisation of labour relates not so much to quantitative aspects of work, but more to its qualitative dimensions, such as stressing the effect of 'female subjectivity' in the process of change in labour conditions (Morini 2007; Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2008). Often this involves the exploitation of women's "natural" qualities such as endurance, patience, submissiveness, and unconditional commitment (Demetrakake 2013). These typecast designations of femininity have moved out of the domestic sphere to saturate the post-Fordist public sphere, creating new forms of capitalist subjectivation.

Notably, the feminisation of labour goes beyond the precarisation of just women. It describes the changing nature of employment where precarious conditions have become widespread for both women and men. As Donna Haraway already observed in 1987:

> Work is being redefined as both literally female and feminised, whether performed by men or women. To be feminised means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labour force; seen less as workers than as servers; subjected to time arrangements on and off the paid job that make a mockery of a limited work day; leading an existence that always borders on being obscene, out of place, and reducible to sex (Haraway 1987, 26).

Feminisation refers both to processes of exploitation in the new economy as well as to stereotypical images of femininity, which have extended to the entire workforce, regardless of gender. Because it is not necessarily sexed, the concept of feminisation operates on the edge between identitarian understandings of what "feminine" means. For this reason, the feminisation of labour has also been described as the becoming woman of labour. Referring to Gilles Deleuze's idea of becoming as a state of flux, evading the binary logic of identity, "woman" stands for both what is and what is not. It indicates a mode of existence that is empirically linked with women's lives but refers qualitatively to a general form of being in society and working conditions related to devaluation and depoliticisation.

According to Encarnacion Gutiérrez-Rodríguez there is a danger in describing the precarious character of working conditions through the attribution of the gender category "woman". She states:

> It is problematic, even if this category might be considered in the Deleuzian sense of becoming. This is so, not because I don't share the analysis of momentary processes of exploitation and disfranchisement but, rather, because in this relation there is no consideration of the necessary translatability of the identity category "woman" (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2008).

In other words, we mean different things when we say "woman" and speak of precarity. Therefore, any analysis of the feminisation of labour should always arise within a geo-political and historical framework. Such analyses can only be transferred to another social context through translation. Besides addressing issues around the situatedness of feminine precarity, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez's comment brings up questions around the use of "woman" as a term of critique. For decades feminist struggles have sought to challenge the roles assigned to women and thus de-gender the social division of labour, not simply for the purposes of achieving equality between the sexes, but to bring about an altogether different kind of society, one that is less determined by relating or specific to people of one particular gender.[59]

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[59] Although this goes beyond the extent of my research, it is worth mentioning that there are many alternatives for the English word "women". One of these is "womxn", a term in use since 2015 to explicitly include non-cisgender women (Kerr 2019). Broadening the scope of womanhood, terms like womxn embrace femme/feminine-identifying genderqueer and non-binary individuals.

Yet in many ways our contemporary society is still heteronormatively structured. The labour market continues to discriminate between men and women. Obvious examples are the ongoing pay differential for the same jobs, and the predominance of women in part-time and badly paid work. As Nina Power writes:

> If the contemporary world of work on one level doesn't care who does the job as long as it is done, on the other it cannot forget the internal history of the transformations in gender roles when it has costs to shave or profits to reap by doing so – capitalism selectively remembers that women are women (Power 2009, 21).

This could be one of the reasons why women's responsibility for domestic work and care activities remains more or less unchanged. Because the gender-specific division of labour is not suspended, many critics maintain that the figure of precarity in the 21st century is feminine (Morini 2007). In fact, the spheres and activities of social reproduction have become a significant terrain for market expansion and new rounds of accumulation, especially financial (Dowling 2016, 456). This is also to do with the 'co-opting of feminist discourse' (Mennel 2014, 132), which will be discussed in below.

1.4. Balancing on the tightrope: Feminine precarity and the risk of losing stability

In today's entrepreneurial culture, many women are dealing with flexibility in the job market, while at the same time being subject to social constraints and pressure to devote themselves to activities necessary to ensure social reproduction. Discussing intergenerational differences within feminism from the specific point of view of young female scholars, the Italian feminist group Prec@s states:

> If we are asked to be flexible, creative, ready to change and avoid planning anything in the long-term, why should everyone or everything else in society impose on us heavy pressures to maintain stable families, stable jobs and reproduce gender divisions of labour? (Fantone 2007, 15).

Prec@s' question highlights a fundamental contradiction in the contemporary condition of female precariousness. On the one hand, women are subject to low economic status and heteronormative demands. On the other hand, there remains

the stipulation to act as free, autonomous and self-determined subjects.[60] The reality of negotiating this dilemma can be compared with the act of a tightrope walker. As a classic metaphor for dynamic equilibrium, tightrope walkers are constantly changing, adapting to conditions and adjusting to feedback in order to maintain an overall stability that enables movement along the rope. In his anthropological writings, Gregory Bateson has used the analogy of the tightrope to note the importance of flexibility in order to sustain balance in a dynamic system that includes the walker, the pole, the wind in the air, and the rope. He writes: 'a tightrope walker with a balancing pole will not be able to maintain his balance except by *varying* the forces which he exerts upon the pole' (Bateson 1973, 133).[61]

The importance of maintaining stability in an unstable position through constant adaption is also a recurring theme in feminist theory. Seeing herself on a tightrope, walking a thin line between feminism and philosophy, Rosi Braidotti has employed the metaphor to describe the position of feminist thinkers. In her book *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy* – on the cover is an image of a feminine figure poised on a thin cord – Braidotti seeks after a precarious balance in order to avoid falling headlong into nothingness or 'non-being' (Braidotti 1991, 75). She writes: 'Like an acrobat who steps onto the tightrope without a safety net, the feminist theoretician of difference runs the risk of a fall into the void. The stronger her desire to emulate, the dizzier she may become (Braidotti 1991, 14).

This analogy can easily be applied to the concrete realties and everyday life experiences of many women in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. Because they are under constant pressure to keep juggling household and career, contemporary femininity can be conceptualised as a high-wire performance. Like acrobats in a

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[60] These contradictions are already addressed in Helke Sander's *Redupers* (1977) and have been taken up by contemporary feminist filmmakers such as Tatiana Turanskyj, whose trilogy on women and work explores gendered experiences of entrepreneurial selfhood and commodified affect in the 21st century.

[61] The analogy of the tightrope is also used in *Der Himmel über Berlin* (*Wings of Desire)*, a 1987 romantic fantasy film from 1987 directed by Wim Wenders. The film is about invisible, immortal angels who populate Berlin and listen to the thoughts of its human inhabitants, comforting the distressed. Although the city is densely populated, many of the people feel isolated or estranged. When one of the angels falls in love with a female trapeze artist, he chooses, in a Faustian vein, to become mortal so that he can experience human sensory pleasures and discover love. In the film, the female circus character drifting through the divided city creates an image of danger as well as potential (Stoddart 2000).

circus tent, women are walking between traditional family expectations and "modern" beliefs in professional independence and empowerment. This balancing act requires continuous experimentation and negotiation, and the risk of making a misstep and losing stability is ever present. The dismantling and erosion of social security systems and safety nets on which women rely in case of failure increases fears of losing support.

The metaphor of the tightrope and the idea of balance as a psychophysical positioning brings us back to a common association with the adjective "precarious". As discussed in chapter 1, many people relate the term to physical instability, suggesting something is not securely held, rickety, or likely to fall or collapse. Expressions like "a precarious existence" are often perceived as the metaphorical usage of hanging in the balance. PalD has also referred to the analogy between physical instability and insecure work and life. Comparing precariousness to being on a high-wire, they point towards feelings of stress caused by 'trapeze efforts' (PalD 2004b, 256). In doing so they call into question the celebration of precarious lifestyles and self-chosen flexible working and living conditions in the 21st century:

> as good as uncertainty is in a certain – chosen – mode, it also is, at the same time, heterodetermined. And it is the case that, in the present, flexibility is increasingly something that benefits capital and not those who try to balance themselves on the tightrope (PalD 2005c).

Since the 1970s, capitalism has benefited from the struggles of feminists by taking advantage of their disruptions to the traditional family and its division of labour. With feminism now in the mainstream, that is to say, its appropriation and commodification, the affective appeal of female empowerment has spread across society. But this has not necessarily made feminism more powerful or accessible. In her book *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*, Angela McRobbie analyses the neoliberal backlash against (second- and third-wave) feminism while emphasising an entrepreneurial kind of self-improvement in which the self becomes the project of betterment (McRobbie 2009). Responding to the economic insecurities of the 1990s, a post-feminist discourse maintains and

rewrites the feminist notion of choice as individual prerogative, suggesting that equality has been achieved and feminist critique is therefore obsolete.[62]

Rather than buying into the illusion of women's emancipation and thinking that everything is now possible, PalD suggests that contemporary demands for virtuosic self-optimisation and self-management are placed disproportionately on women. Increasingly, women struggle to take on new forms of self-monitoring and self-discipline in the name of individualism, free choice, and empowerment. For many, autonomy ends up being little more than an ideal towards which they can barely even strive, something that may even be annoying to the extent that it is unreachable (PalD 2003c). Engaging with what McRobbie terms the aftermath of feminism, PalD's work addresses the problems of aspirational normativity and suspended agency in an era defined by conflicting gender role expectations and requirements.

By interrogating ideologies of the "strong" and "weak" woman, as well as the heteronormative structures underlying these, PalD understand that there is a risk in claiming that women are especially precarious. This risk emerges from the many other groups who are entitled to make the same claim, and considering that the category of women is intersected by class, race, age, and a number of other vectors of power and sites of potential discrimination and injury (Butler 2015, 140). In doing so the group questions the unchanging and defining vulnerability of female subjectivities. Rather than affirming inequalities of power that situate women in a powerless position, they argue that women are at once vulnerable and capable of resistance. As such, PalD refuses definitions of who or what precarious women are, including those definitions on offer from feminist theory. The methods by which their practice challenges paternalistic ideas and provisions of protection will be further discussed in the second half of this chapter.

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[62] McRobbie argues that a post-feminist climate forecloses any contention that women across disparate social, class, and ethnic formations might still occupy a subordinated position within society. Specifically focused on the representation of women with creative jobs in cities, she suggests that through the lens of post-feminism these images only offer the promise of the good life to white, educated, middle-class subjectivities. Echoing Lauren Berlant's critique of the fantasy of a good life, this analysis stresses how new dimensions of precarity and flexible workspaces continue to structure racist, classist and sexist dynamics. This will be discussed later on in this chapter.

While their work investigates how women are torn between the pressure to conform and the spirit of contradiction, PalD stresses that there also remains togetherness and solidarity. For example, their video features numerous shots of a woman performing a balance act on a tightrope during a demonstration in Madrid. Surrounded by mostly female onlookers who are cheering and applauding for her, the woman lays herself down on the wire, seemingly relaxing and taking a rest. It appears that she is able to do so because the women surrounding her will catch her if she makes a misstep. Incorporating these scenes into their video, PalD inverts the isolation of moving on a tightrope, 'slippery as the income we receive, trembling as our contract types and hit by the winds of the restructuring of public and state services' (PalD 2004b, 256). The group confronts the situation where there is no safety net to catch a female acrobat in case of a fall – in order words, no safeguard against possible hardship or adversity caused by feminine precarity. But instead of depicting an individualised subject on a wire, PalD presents a collective of women rallying around each other. In doing so they imagine a form of balance that can be achieved and maintained not just through self-centring but also through support networks. For PalD, this is necessary in order to escape from the neoliberal fragmentation separating and debilitating women, turning them into victims of fear, exploitation or the individualism of 'each one for herself' (PalD 2004a, 157).

1.5. What is your strike? Asking while walking

Returning to the moment PalD was founded, none of the aspects discussed in the previous section were taken into consideration by the Spanish trade unions that called for a classic labour strike on the 20th of June in 2002. While ignoring the crisis of deregulation, the general strike marginalised those who have mobile, flexible and temporary jobs. Crucially, it did not address the problematic status of reproductive work done by women in the "non-productive" sphere. As the trade unions failed to acknowledge the complexities of feminine precariousness, PalD decided to come together on the days before the general strike to brainstorm about ways to address these issues and confront the new realities of casualised work in Madrid.

As it happened, on the day of the demonstration a group of women gathered at the squatted feminist social centre La Eskalera Karakola located in the Lavapiés

neighbourhood to begin a procedure to capture the fragmented and contingent everyday lives of women working in informal, invisible and undervalued spheres. In an attempt to create spaces for exchange between those who were working that day and those who were protesting in the streets, they decided to spend the day of the strike walking around the city of Madrid:

> We might have spent more time, seated, situating the theoretical bases of our research, the hypotheses we were dealing [with] or the feminist perspective from which we departed. But what pushed us on was, above all, the desire to experience the path, to communicate with each other on the road, to meet those new (and not so new) situations and realities of the precarised labour market and of life put to work (PalD 2003b).

While strolling through the areas of daily life of waitresses, teachers, telephone operators, child minders, cleaners, translators, and retail workers, they asked: "What is your strike?" Asking this question served multiple purposes. First, it stopped the (re)production process for a few minutes, functioning like a mini-strike. Second, it provided an opportunity to talk among and listen to an invisible population of women working in precarious and feminised sectors. The question established a potential space for unmediated encounters between otherwise unconnected women, who shared similar conditions but had radically different experiences. Third, it allowed PalD to find out about forms of refusal and resistance within the context of feminised precarious labour. As such their questioning can be regarded as a form of militant inquiry, similar to kpD's workers-inquiry-without-a-workplace discussed in chapter 1.

Rather than a static picket line, PalD opted for a travelling picket survey, allowing for a kind of nomadic thinking-being in temporary locations. Committed to a mobile positioning, their practice can be regarded as a form of feminist embodiment that is not about being in a 'fixed' place (Haraway 1991, 154). Acknowledging that there is no single place or particular position where resistance occurs or is situated, PalD explored different ways and directions through which women could manipulate the power relations that exploit them. This approach resonates with Foucault's understanding of resistance as the effect of power:

there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat (Foucault 1978, 95-96).

While dealing with dynamic and transitory points of resistance, PalD looked for moments where different forms of refusal could converge, grow, proliferate and interlink. By asking "what is your strike?" they explored ways to mobilise and intensify practices of resistance – in so far as they were already everywhere, albeit disorganised.

It is important to reiterate that PalD carried out their survey whilst wandering around, conducting "interviews in movement". This practice can be compared with the method of "caminar preguntando" ("asking while walking") developed by the Zapatistas, a Mexican revolutionary force working for social and agrarian reforms who launched a popular uprising in the state of Chiapas in 1994 (Plotegher et al. 2013, 50). According to the Zapatistas, moving forward through questions rather than answers implies a form of horizontal politics and non-hierarchical organisation that involves everyone as much as possible. This requires maintaining humility in listening and being open to other perspectives and unknown experiences (Colectivo Situaciones 2009). Following the Zapatistas, this method alludes to a different temporality, a more patient one: 'caminamos, no corremos, porque vamos muy lejos' ('we walk, not run, because we are going very far'). (Holloway 2011).

By doing things in one's own time, at one's own rhythm, it becomes possible to construct an alternative relationship with time, which is part of constructing an alternative community. This might be one of the reasons why the Zapatista revolution took the snail as one of its principal symbols. The snail speaks of modesty, humility, closeness to the earth, and of the recognition that a revolution is realised slowly, patiently, steadily. Guided by a kind of playfulness in their imagery and language, their revolution is a protracted, incremental process, where leaders

are irrelevant and every life matters[63] (Solnit 2008). Rather than the old idea of revolution that trades one form of government for another in order to set people free, the Zapatistas understand change as a discipline that needs to be lived every day (Holloway 2014).

PalD employs a similar form of everyday struggle, slow activism and careful organising. Rather than working within a given framework or temporality in order to respond to the problem of feminised precarity, they developed their own methodology. Like the Zapatista's, the core of their struggle lies in establishing their own reality, their own logic, their own language, their own space, their own time. Aiming "to go very far", their walk around the city of Madrid on the day of the general strike was the beginning of a two-year action-research project. For several months an open and flexible group of women met almost weekly to wander around the relevant places constituting their precarious working and living conditions. They passed through the fields of communication work such as translation, language teaching and call centres, as well as domestic work, catering, nursing, and in a later stage sex work, academic research, education, media and advertising.

While exploring the transformations taking place in a Europeanising and globalising Spain, and the ways these affected women working and living in Madrid, the goal of PalD's activist-research was to address the hyper-fragmentation amongst the growing number of feminised workers. Their militant investigation was, above all, 'a way of thinking together towards collective action, an effort to locate the scattered sites of conflict and know how to name them' (PalD 2003b). The following will take a closer look at PalD's methodology of drifting through the urban circuits of feminised precarious work and analyse it as a subversive technique for intervening in struggles in and against neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism.

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[63] This idea speaks to a problem around discussing inequalities in contemporary society. For example, in today's Black Lives Matter movement, the slogan "All Lives Matter" is seen as a criticism of the campaign against systemic racism. Even when the intention behind it might be sincere – bringing communities together amid tension – the phrase detracts from the immediate issues and danger facing black people. Instead of an act of solidarity, it is also used by opponents as a counter-protest.

1.6. Dérive a la femme: Adrift through the circuits of feminised precarious work

PalD started their journey by admitting from the beginning that they did not have any answers to the problems at hand. The fact that they believed that a traditional mass march on the 20th of June 2002 was the wrong way to go, did not mean they knew the right way. As they were taking their first steps into the city, it was unclear down which path they were headed: 'Our point of departure: the occupied women's house La Eskalera Karakul. Point of arrival: unknown. It is the transit that interests us now.' (PalD 2003b).

For their open-ended traversals through the urban sites of female precarity, PalD found inspiration in the theory and practice of dérive. "Dériver" is a technique of uninterrupted passage through diverse physical and psychic environments employed by the Situationist International. The Situationist International was an organisation of social revolutionaries made up of anti-authoritarian Marxist intellectuals and avant-garde Dadaist and Surrealist artists, prominent in Europe from its formation in 1957 to its dissolution in 1972 (Wark 2008, 6). Throughout this period, Situationists were roaming through metropolitan areas, often without any particular destination, allowing for encounters, conversations, interactions, and micro-events to be the guide of their urban itineraries. The result was a kind of psychogeography based on coincidences and randomness (Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias 2007).

Contrary to what the most common translation of the term ("drifting") might suggest, dérives are not left entirely to the operations of chance. Guy Debord, the most well-known member, and de facto leader, of the Situationist International, writes:

> Chance is a less important factor in this activity than one might think: from a dérive point of view, cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones (Debord 1958).

Exposing oneself to the gravitation and repulsion of certain places, one might become aware of the ways specific environments influence exchanges and attitudes.

Whilst listening attentively to the city, its neighbourhoods are no longer perceived as 'spontaneously visible objects' (McDonough 2004, 257) but posited as social constructions and mechanisms of control, to be negotiated, fragmented and disrupted by the dérive. As such drifting can be seen as an intervention with the aim of challenging the capitalist formation of space and envisioning what non-capitalist environments could look like.

Looking for ways to explore the exploitative mechanisms of capitalist space in Madrid, PalD appropriated the Situationist dérive and used it as a subversive technique for intervening in struggles in and against feminisation and precarisation. By drifting through the city's informal labour markets, they could both investigate situations of constraint as well as enact a different kind of everyday life to create new networks of resistance. This innovative research-intervention methodology allowed the women to experiment with alternative forms of organisation outside of traditional political parties and trade union structures.

Following Debord, the dérive constitutes an urban practice that must be distinguished from classic notions of the journey and the walk (Debord 1958). For the Situationists, the technique was not simply an updating of 19th century flânerie; the Baudelairean strolling of the "man in the crowd". While the flâneur's ambiguous class position represents a kind of aristocratic holdover – a position ultimately recuperated by the bourgeoisie – the person on the dérive consciously attempts to suspend class allegiances for some time (McDonough 2004, 257). This is not to say that the Baudelarian flâneur and the Situationist drifter do not share some characteristics; both move among the crowd without being one with it. But while the flâneur walked by himself, Situationists often moved together:

> One can dériver alone, but everything indicates that the most fruitful numerical distribution consists of several small groups of two or three persons who have reached a similar state of consciousness, for comparing the impressions of these different groups makes it possible to reach objective conclusions (Debord 1958).

According to Tom McDonough, drifting was conducted in order to construct a more concrete collective space, a space whose potentialities remain open-ended for all participants in the 'ludic-constructive' narrative of a new urban terrain (McDonough

2004, 262). This might be another reason why PalD opted for dérives. The women found that moving together through the city allowed for a collective perception of the environment, spatially and temporally prefiguring a "we" (PalD 2003b). At the same time, the tactic helped them to develop a sensitivity for diverse particularities, that is to say, the sometimes radically different experiences of women working in precarious and feminised sectors. As PalD explains:

> Drifting allows us to traverse with our bodies, with our minds these realities and to make ourselves a part of them. As we travel, our senses sharpen and ideas begin to sprout; they emerge spontaneously, and we rethink them collectively, reorganise, disorganise and record them in the notebook, as one whispers into the ear of another. There is nothing to discover; all is here in front of us, waiting to be interpreted, linked together (Szumilak 2006, 172-3).

Following Debord's theory, drifting can be further distinguished from flânerie by its critical attitude toward the hegemonic scopic regime of modernity. Baudelair's flâneur was a detached observer of the bustle and business or busyness of others, 'the secret spectator of the spectacles on the space and places of the city' (Tester 1994, 7). Regarded as the classically modern disembodied male subject, 'suspended from obligation, disengaged, disinterested, dispassionate' (Ferguson 1994, 26), the flâneur's primary activity was watching.[64] Since the 1980s, feminist critics have drawn attention to the problematics of such specular activity. In her book *Vision and Difference* (1988), Griselda Pollock argues that the flâneur symbolises the privilege or freedom to move about the public arenas of the city, observing but never interacting. Because he is consuming the sights through a controlling but rarely acknowledged gaze, directed as much at other people as at the goods for sale, the flâneur embodies the gaze of modernity 'which is both covetous and erotic' (Pollock 1988, 94). In a different context, Michel de Certeau has described the flâneur's gaze as voyeuristic:

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[64] Rather than passive and evasive, some have argued that the flâneur's strolling was in fact quite active, even directed (Shields 1994, 65). These analyses often draw upon Walter Benjamin's cultural criticism of 19th century city life in Paris. Benjamin argued that through strolling, the flâneur was able to achieve a sense of distance of work and productivity. In his *Arcades Project*, he writes: 'basic to flânery, among other things, is the idea that the fruits of idleness are more precious than the fruits of labour. The flâneur, as is well known, makes studies' (Benjamin 1999, 454). Others have stated that through lingering the flâneur examined and produced 'new and unexpected connections in a serious kind of play' (Ferguson 1994, 30), transforming the very conditions of aesthetic experience. Following these arguments, the 19th century stroller was less disinterested and aimless than one might think.

His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was "possessed" into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more (Certeau 1984, 92).

Contesting the organisation of the society of the spectacle from the inside, the Situationists refuted any kind of controlling gaze or voyeuristic viewpoint. Instead, they located their cultural-political struggles *within* the city, attempting to alter the meaning of urban spaces by changing the ways these were inhabited. Resonating with Deleuzian ideas around immanence, discussed earlier in this chapter, the Situationist practice is a form of militant research, existing and operating within concrete situations.

Taking all this into account, the dérive presented itself as a perfect technique for PalD, attentive to the spatial-temporal continuum they were experiencing as women under the new labour conditions in post-Fordist neoliberal capitalism (Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias 2007, 118). Notably, the group exchanged the arbitrary wandering of the flâneur, so particular to the bourgeois male subject who has nothing pressing to do, for a directed trajectory through the urban circuits of feminised precarious work. While maintaining the tactic's multi-sensory and open character, they pursued a more intentional model of roaming, where spaces normally perceived as unconnected become linked and realities otherwise unnoticed are made visible. Their feminist version of drifting, a kind of "dérive a la femme", gave the Spanish name both to the project itself and to the participants – "Precarias a la Deriva" means "Precarious Women Adrift".

The next section will further analyse PalD's practice as a form of feminist knowledge production. Drawing on Donna Haraway's theory and politics of location and situating, I regard the relation between the idea of partial perspectives and PalD's embodied positionality. I will also explore how their militant research allowed for the formation of new coalitions around feminised precarious work in Madrid.

2. Taking the self as a point of departure to be able to get out of oneself: Situatedness in Precarias a la Deriva

2.1. Situated knowledges, partial perspectives and accountable positioning

Taking into account early feminist critiques of the male gaze (Mulvey 1975; Pollock 1988), it can be stated that through their version of drifting, PalD actively contests the idea of an elevated viewer surveying the scene below without actually partaking in it. Moving away from the disembodied perspective of the 'voyeur-god', they explain their practice as follows:

> It is not exactly an observation technique; it does not aspire to 'reproduce' or approach daily experience as it habitually occurs (an ideal of classical anthropology which has proved difficult to realise) but rather to produce simultaneous movements of approaching and distancing, visualising and defamiliarising, transit and narration. We are interested in the point of view of those that guide us – how they define and experience precariousness, how they organise themselves on a daily basis and what are their vital strategies in the short and the long term, what they hope for – without dismissing, in this process, the dialog and complicity which is produced in our encounter (PalD 2003b).

This distinctive approach can be analysed through feminist epistemologies and philosophies of science, and in particular through Donna Haraway's notion of situated knowledges. In her seminal text 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', Haraway proposes a theory and politics of location and situating, 'where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims' (Haraway 1988, 589). Arguing for a view from the body, 'always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body' (Haraway 1988, 589), Haraway reclaims vision as a metaphor for feminist objectivity. Eschewing the 'God-trick' of seeing everything from nowhere and other notions of vision as a detached gaze by a knowing subject distant from the world, she writes:

> Objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision (Haraway 1988, 583).

Following Haraway, partial perspective allows for a rendering of reality that, explicitly coming from a particular, or specific site of enunciation, accepts its non-totalising character, as well as the existence of other valid renderings coming from diverse locations. This is why the use of plural – situated knowledge*s* – is key, pointing out the irreducible diversity of bodies, and the partial perspectives embodied by them. For PalD, being attentive to the diversity of bodies and multiplicity of backgrounds within the realm of precarity is crucial. While taking into account their own positionalities within debates around labour exploitation in Spain, they describe the findings from their first five drifts as 'partial reflections' (PalD 2003b). To better understand the use of the adjective "partial", it is necessary to distinguish between notions of particularity, specificity, and partiality.

The term "particular" is commonly used to single out an individual member of a specified group, denoting a proposition in which something is asserted of some but not all of a class (OED 2018b). In a philosophical sense, "particularity" refers to an individual item, as contrasted with a universal quality. However, universals can be simultaneously exemplified by different particulars in different places. Meanwhile, "specific" means clearly defined or identified; precise and clear in making statements or issuing instructions (OED 2018d). But it also refers to having a special determining quality, relating to one thing and not others. In physics, for example, the adjective is used for denoting a quantity expressed in terms of a unit mass, volume, or other measure, in order to give a value independent of the properties or scale of the particular system studied. Therefore, as a noun, "specificity" denotes the quality of belonging or relating uniquely to a particular subject.

Haraway's theory of positioning complicates these definitions. Conceived as a limited example or section of reality, particularity is in its totality always used to describe some kind of general concern. This is a form of relativism – the doctrine that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute – that builds on the implication that everything can be converted into a universal notion that subsequently informs our thinking about various particularities. Refusing any kind of straightforward relation between particularities and universality, Haraway poses that relativism 'is the perfect mirror twin of totalisation in the ideologies of objectivity' (Haraway 1988, 590).

In the hope of transforming dominant systems of knowledge and ways of seeing, she challenges the assumption that all knowers are effectively interchangeable, and that knowledge exists separately from them. Knowledge cannot be transmitted or received intact as such but is constructed and embodied uniquely in each person. This contrasts with more traditional epistemologists who may see that knowledge is understood differently by different people. Consequently, Haraway claims that knowledge simply does not exist independently of embodied knowers, each knower therefore embodies different knowledges – however similar they may discover them to be on examination and conversation. It is precisely this 'positioned rationality' (Haraway 1988, 590) that makes knowledges situated and perspectives partial.

Confronting 'easy relativisms and holisms built out of summing and subsuming parts' (Haraway 1988, 585), Haraway also weighs up feminist critical empiricism and standpoint theory, and the influence of Marxism in these approaches. While sharing a commitment to recognising and analysing relationships between power and knowledge, as well as "semiotic technologies" for making meaning, she assesses these feminist tendencies as theories of science continuing to persist in legitimate meanings of objectivity. She asserts 'feminists have to insist on a better account of the world; it is not enough to show radical historical contingency and modes of construction for everything' (Haraway 1988, 579). Rather, as active critics of scientific objectivity and associated ideologies, feminist researchers need to resist any kind of simplification, especially when it comes to taking on viewpoints from below.

To illustrate this further, feminist standpoint theorists posit that women's experiences constitute the starting point for feminist knowledge claims (Hartsock 1983; Keller 1985; Harding 1986) Critiquing the dominant scientific gaze, they argue that the realities of women's lives could be used to challenge 'the masculinist definition of truth and method embodied in modern Western science and epistemology' (Hekman 2004, 233). Additionally, they propose that women's particular truths, resulting from their particular shared experiences, could be used to create a common political position for women via their common epistemological relationship to the world. While Haraway acknowledges the epistemic relevance and validity of knowledges coming from "marked" locations, such as women, she

dismisses the idea of a single feminist standpoint (Haraway 1988, 590). The idea of women as a group sharing a unique perspective not only disregards the radical diversity of experiences amongst female subjectivities, it also produces a discourse that – perhaps unintentionally – claims to be universal, whilst in fact it represents a very specific and located version of reality.

In order not to fall into the trap of the God-trick – 'the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity' (Haraway 1988, 589) – feminist epistemology needs to throw its own neutrality into question. Awareness of one's own subjectivity is crucial for challenging transcendent scientific ideologies and rejecting the power structures written into them. Pointing out that all knowledge is in a sense 'marked', that is, produced through the work of 'local' individuals, Sandra Harding posits that the researcher must appear 'not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests' (Harding 1988, 9). Doing away with that disembodied subject of knowledge, but without falling into relativist narratives, this epistemology proposes the idea of a subject of knowledge who is embodied and rooted in a concrete social structure (Malo de Molina 2004a). This subject produces situated – but no less objective – knowledges, and, most importantly, is aware of this and makes this apparent.

This could be the reason why Haraway resorts to the adjective "partial" in reclaiming feminist objectivity. On the one hand, partiality signifies bias: feeling or showing inclination or prejudice for or against someone or something (OED 2018a). If to be partial refers to having a particular liking or fondness, or favouring one side in a dispute over the other, then to see from a specific marked position or standpoint can never be innocent. As such, feminist objectivity means to realise precisely that one is always partial. It means to own the particular situation of one's knowledge and thus to take responsibility for this knowledge. Subsequently, feminist theorists and their specific desires and interests – including preferences for the standpoints of the subjugated, such as women – are never exempt from critical (re-)examination, decoding, deconstruction, and (re-)interpretation.

On the other hand, partiality refers to incompleteness, or existing only in part(s). Besides throwing the neutrality of feminist research into question, Haraway

employs the term to trouble the notion that specificity entails being clear and exact. Rather than distinct and comprehensible ideas, 'a splitting of senses, a confusion of voice and sight' becomes the metaphor for the ground of the rational (Haraway 1988, 590). Thus, instead of constituting cohesive standpoints, feminist theory needs to search for non-stable grounds of knowledge production. Notably, when Haraway argues for politics and epistemologies of location, she does not speak about being in a fixed place. She writes: 'location is about vulnerability; location resists the politics of closure, finality (…) That is because feminist embodiment resists fixation and is insatiably curious about the webs of differential positioning' (Haraway 1988, 590). Partiality is necessary for ensuring that these differences cannot be collapsed into fixed identities, such as a sameness of all women as "Woman", or a representation of feminism as a coherent and available image.

Finally, the aim of a partial perspective is to construct a usable – but not innocent – "doctrine" of embodied objectivity that accommodates critical and complex feminist research projects that refuse to resolve ambiguities, recognise contradiction, and value plurality and heterogeneity. To reiterate Haraway: 'The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision' (Haraway 1988, 583). Since the publication of her essay, this message has become a powerful foundation for reclaiming knowledge production as a site of politics. The concept of partial perspective is said to have reinvigorated a feminist movement within and beyond academic research that calls for the democratisation of socio-political theory and praxis (Casas-Cortés 2009, 54). Various feminist thinkers have used the idea in activist, cultural and artistic contexts to push forward new understandings of objectivity. In doing so they build towards situated epistemological models able to replace old and disempowering concepts of "truth" based on abstraction and generalisation.

Explicitly referring to the concept of situatedness and using the adjective "partial" to describe their reflections, PalD puts into practice feminist knowledge production as a basis for a theory and politics of location. The group specifically values the goal of an epistemology of engaged and accountable positioning. Bringing into action Haraway's idea of embodied vision, their militant research accounts for both the agency of the knowledge producer and that of the object – or subject – of study.

While drifting through the circuits of feminised precarious work in Madrid, they were interested in the point of view of those that guide them (PalD 2003b). But in doing so, their position never remained unmarked. Throughout their project, PalD remained conscious of their own subjectivity and supposed neutrality, actively addressing their own implications as research-activists with specific interests and desires.

During their investigations the group was careful not to embark upon any kind of exotic itinerary. For example, when they planned a drift in order to approach sex workers they understood they could not reproduce the role of the bourgeois (male) gaze or act like voyeuristic "gawkers", as one prostitute working in the Casa del Campo – the largest public park in Madrid with the reputation of being a prostitution zone – called them. The dialogue and complicity produced in such encounters was always taken into account by the group and formed a crucial part of their practice. This is particularly reflected in PalD's publications, which actively address the asymmetrical relationship between researchers and the researched.[65] Rather than relying on dichotomies between subjects and objects, the group challenges divisions between "us" and "them", by carrying out "research with".

Confronting the world as an active entity, Haraway states that 'actors come in many and wonderful forms. Accounts of a "real" world do not, then, depend on a logic of "discovery'' but on a power-charged social relation of "conversation"' (Haraway 1988, 593). In a similar sense, the realities that interested PalD were not an outside, waiting to be discovered by an individual, but something embodied and a product of intersubjectivity. That is to say, the group did not seek partiality for its own sake but rather for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings the situated knowledges of precarious women make possible. As Haraway states: 'Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals' (Haraway 1988, 590). This idea will be further unpacked in the following section, which looks at how

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[65] This resonates with my discussion of the characters in *Kamera Läuft!* in chapter 2. Establishing themselves as self-reflective and self-reflexive beings, the cultural producers in kpD's project take an active role in their own self-examination, functioning at once as the watcher and the watched; the perceiver and the perceived; the analyst and the analysand; the judge and the judged.

PalD's practice of situated knowledge production becomes crucial for the formation of new coalitions around feminised precarious work.

2.2. Entangling localised experiences: Self-narration as a relational practice

Attending to the immediacy of women's everyday lives in Madrid, PalD's situated drifts were done in first person, that is, 'with each one telling the others about herself, and walking together towards a prudent but sustained approximation of the differences between us' (PalD 2003b). At the same time, the group attempted to extract common names from the dispersion of singularities that comprises the new realities of labour and life in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. As explored previously, the driving force of their project was 'a desire for a common ground when the common ground is shattered' (Colectivo Situaciones 2007, 83).

While gathering personal narratives of women's feelings, needs and desires, PalD's practice is inscribed in traditions of women's consciousness-raising groups deriving from second-wave feminism, similar to kpD's practice discussed in chapter 2. Constituting a strategy for politicisation, the group takes the localised experience of feminised precarious work as starting point for taking action and making change. In doing so they allude to Carol Hanisch's infamous statement 'the personal is political' (Hanisch 1970).

> The drift permits us to take the quotidian as a dimension of the political and as a source of resistances, privileging experience as an epistemological category. Experience, in this sense, is not a preanalytic category but a central notion in understanding the warp of daily events, and, what is more, the ways in which we give meaning to our localised and incarnated quotidian (PalD 2003b).

Notably, for PalD the everyday becomes part of a process of collective analysing. As a form of feminist consciousness-raising, their drifts were intended to thread different subjectivities into a common realisation of a shared problem. Here the epistemological foundation of 'taking the self as a point of departure' ('partir de sí') was a device to be able to speak in first person about processes affecting many. Rather than an enclosing mechanism, it enabled the connection with others at the same level: taking the self as a point of departure, in the very attempt to get out of

oneself ('partir de sí para no quedarse en sí') (PalD 2004b, 11). According to Maribel Casas-Cortés, PalD's point of departure was never 'a narcissistic self' ('un sí narcisista'), but rather 'a self eager for proposing, suggesting, inventing' ('un sí propositivo') (Casas-Cortés 2009, 238).

In order to articulate points of power and creation without developing a hierarchising unit in charge of thinking on behalf of precarious women, PalD employed collective listening as a method for creating a non-individualised political space. For the group, the initial purpose of listening to accounts of the day-to-day experiences of precarious women working and living in Madrid was to build a picture of what was going on, how oppression was operating, and in what ways agency was constituted. Whilst familiarising themselves with unknown or under-known situations in order to understand and learn differently about feminised precarity in Spain, they stress: 'It is important to listen to those realities that are distant, listening until they become familiar and not exotic in order [to] feel them closer to oneself and think through them.' (Casas-Cortés 2009, 480).

Here, the practice of listening constitutes an intersubjective experience. Following Roland Barthes' writings on listening, testimonies interpolate us as 'listeners', using 'phatic expression' that compels an intersubjective relationship (Barthes 1986, 251). Such intersubjectivity necessarily extends the personal account beyond just the speaker and towards the listener. Similarly, the personal anecdote can be considered as a form of self-knowledge that acts upon both teller and listener. This means listening is always through the ear of the other (Farinati and Firth 2017, 39). Further theorising the collective practice of exchanging narratives as a form of consciousness-raising and becoming common, we could also follow Paul Ricoeur, who says that we are all entangled in each other's narratives (Ricouer 1996, 10), or Adriana Cavarero, who goes even further by stating that one 'needs the other's tale' (Cavarero 2000, 88).

Cavarero stresses the process of exchanging narratives is not accidental, but necessary. Humans have a desire to narrate, a desire to make sense of their lives. And because each of us is narratable by the other, we are dependent upon each other for the narration of our life-stories (Cavarero 2000, ix). These perspectives on

self-narration as relational, and thus political[66] challenge the idea that speaking in first person is individualistic or narcissistic. In the context of consciousness-raising, it is in fact a practice of sharing. As a dialogic practice which values listening as much as speaking, self-narration is not about monologues but about conversations. In order to overcome the distances between women within a segmented social space that multiplies everywhere, exchanging experiences and reflecting together was essential for PalD. Not only as a tool for diffusion but also as a new place, a new competence and primary material for the political.

In PalD's practice of collective listening, listening meant listening in order to give voice. It was about giving account, but also about reflecting back on the actual situations of women. The narration that was produced in their encounters entailed a process of remapping individual cases in order to analyse a bigger situation. While locating personal testimonies and conversations at the heart of their militant strategy, PalD stressed the importance of making connections between the subjective experiences of feminised precarious work in Madrid and the structural changes happening in the new economy of a Europeanising and globalising Spain. For the group, the process of intervening into these transformations starts by speaking from a subject that is embodied and rooted in a concrete social structure. Beginning at a private level, by facing one's own struggles and to start changing one's own conditions, it becomes possible to identify with the struggles of others.

2.3. Registering a collective struggle: Dispersed, partial and yet-insufficient reflections

In order to facilitate a process of thinking through the manifold realities of women undertaking feminised and precarious labour in Madrid, the group made sure to capture each drift. With a video and photo camera, tape recorder and notepad in hand, PalD documented everything, pulling together different voices and images from their drifts. Their practice of conscientiously registering their experiences with

[66] See also chapter 2, where I follow Cavarero in stating the reciprocal narrations of consciousness-raising groups are a scene in which the self is constitutively exposed to the other – an exposure that makes this a political scene.

the intention of preserving and giving form to their itineraries, deserves attention here.

As part of their militant research process, PalD kept reflective diaries, 'producing a kind of auto-ethnography of a collective struggle' (Casas-Cortés 2009, 437). Keeping diaries allowed the group to keep track of how they were being affected by the encounters – it was often not until afterwards (for example on the train home[67]) that they had particular thoughts and feelings in relation to the things they had come across during their drifts. The practice of registering these thoughts and feelings was an important element in PalD's consciousness-raising experience. Whilst listening to women's stories, recording conversations and making notes, they discovered that what seems a unique problem reflects a common condition faced by many women.

Simply gathering and recounting experiences, however, did not in itself alter women's understandings of their lives or transform the conditions in which they were being constructed as precarious. Therefore, after each drift PalD would meet in order to share their findings and collectively read over transcriptions of recorded interviews. While processing these materials, the group looked for patterns, identified topics, worked out concepts, and formulated new definitions of feminised precarity. Going beyond what Kathi Sarachild referred to as the pooling of experiences and getting stuff off their chests (Sarachild 1978, 148), this stage of PalD's consciousness-raising process cultivated new understandings of women's subjectivity. Rummaging through their accumulated "archives" provided valuable space for interpreting the interactions between women and exploring the relationships that were beginning to take shape between collected testimonies and systemic analyses of precarious and feminised labour. During these sessions, PalD frantically moved back and forth between theoretical sources and personal accounts, in order to extract common names from the dispersion of singularities that comprise the new realities of precarious labour and life in Madrid.

[67] See the reflective passages in PalD's 'First Stutterings' (2003) written in the train after a drift through the social nursing sector in the Atocha neighbourhood in Madrid.

From the beginning of their research, the women had intuited that "precariousness" might serve as a category to group the different forms of unstable and insecure work they had encountered during their drifts. But as they compared the various forms of paid, underpaid and unpaid labour, as well as the differentiations between freelance, contracted and forced work, they realised that this category could have the effect of flattening structural differences between very diverse situations. For example, a temporary cleaner and a freelance journalist might both be identified as flexible workers. However, there are huge differences in their social status, salary, rights, risks, etc. According to PalD, these differential degrees of insecurity have to do with monetary and cognitive resources, available support networks, capacity for mobility, place of origin, and legal status. Working towards a tentative hypothesis in order to structure this analysis, the group identified several 'axes of stratification' that traverse precariousness: mobility, border territories, bodies, knowledges and relationships, entrepreneurial logic, income, and conflict (PalD 2004b, 29). They used these axes to overlay and compare different realities of feminised precarious work, without renouncing their complexity (PalD 2003c).

Notably, PalD's hypotheses remained provisional, uncertain, and unfixed. The constant shifting, fragmenting and regrouping of information never led to complete, whole and total "conclusions" about processes of precarisation and how it affects women in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. Acknowledging the incomplete, fractured and partial nature of their methodology, the group entitled their first publication 'First Stutterings of Precarias a la Deriva'. Using the term "stuttering", PalD acknowledge the difficulties in speaking about and articulating the complex realities of feminised precarity. The title of the article also points towards the hesitations and doubts arising throughout their activist-research activities. Instead of coming to hasty diagnoses and sweeping statements, the group published their first stutterings to test their provisional and tentative ideas. This approach demonstrates a refusal to speak in normative languages of activism, as well as an opening of discussions around precariousness towards different (cognitive) abilities and capacities. In doing so, PalD reshapes activist-research languages and expands the ways social and political movements communicate precarious work and life in the 21st century.

Although PalD is an activist project, the group refrains from polemicising political persuasions. Employing the axes of stratification that traverse precariousness to loosely structure their thinking, PalD's research output remains complex throughout. In offering a kaleidoscopic composition that enables multiple points of view, it acts out Donna Haraway's conception of partial positionings that can never be collapsed into a fixed identity. The narrative that emerges is rough, incoherent, incomplete, and fragmented. Reflecting the contradictions of neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism and taking instability as the very basis of the work, their research presents a multifaceted subject that is difficult to identify. The interweaving of diverse experiences of feminised precarity articulates the polyphonic and in-process outcome of PalD's militant investigation. This is precisely what is powerful about their work: the effort to suggest commonality from within fragmented experience. While refiguring the fracturing aspects of feminised precarity, PalD's practice enacts a 'being in the presence of others' (Virno 2004, 51) within conditions of contingency and uncertainty.

2.4. *A la Deriva: Por los Circuitos de la Precariedad Femenina*: Suggesting commonality from within fragmented experience

Towards the end of 2003, one and half years after their first dérive and following many sessions of collectively working through their accumulated materials, PalD was invited by the Madrid-based independent publishing house Traficantes de Sueños to put together a publication. This pushed the group to gather their findings in a more formal way and think their project in a more linear and intentional trajectory than had originally been the case (Casas-Cortés 2009, 251). The result was the release of a website as well as the publication of a book and a video, both entitled *A la Deriva: Por los Circuitos de la Precariedad Femenina* (*Adrift Through the Circuits of Feminised Precarious Work*). The following takes a closer look at this outcome of PalD's militant research and analyses how it went adrift, eventually leading the group towards a new phase in their practice.

Interweaving different perspectives on feminised precarity and the methodology of drifting, PalD's publication can be conceived as a kind of notebook of a work in progress. It consists of a kaleidoscopic collage made up of personal reflections,

travel diaries, transcriptions of conversations, interviews, reports, short stories and longer essays. These are richly illustrated with photographs, video stills, drawings, maps and other images from PalD's accumulated archives. Created by more than 50 women, the book resembles a 'frankensteinian coral', as PalD describes in the introduction (PalD 2004b, 11). Rather than constructing perceived coherence or purposiveness, *A la Deriva* employs narrative creatively, brokenly, fragmented. Nothing seems to hold the publication at the centre, each chapter is 'intra-connected', like the different parts in a kaleidoscope (Cadena 2015, 32).

Responding to the complex material-semiotic circumstances of post-Fordism, Monika Szumilak argues that PalD's publication embraces 'a cyborg-like fragmentation and heterogeneity of social imaginaries instead of creating myths of uniformity' (Szumilak 2006, 183). By offering only partial perspectives on women's conditions, the reader will have to construct *A la Deriva* actively from its dispersed parts.[68] One example can be found in the chapter that recounts a drift with translators and language teachers. This section is richly illustrated with collages of technological imagery. One page features a computer motherboard decorated with icons of a truck, a computer mouse, a tool resembling a drill, a credit card, and a house; all of them linked into a networked route (PalD 2004b, 77). If treated as a riddle, this image may be interpreted as an invitation to put together one's own narrative out of tools and materials at hand and, as Szumilak posits, 'send it flowing through the information networks to reach others' (Szumilak 2006, 170).

While engaging participation from its audience, PalD's book shifts between different forms of narration; from intimate memoir-like accounts to explicitly political statements. Rather than representing the drifts in such a way as to conform to an overarching set of aims or values, PalD chose a form of expression able to reflect the multi-layered experiences of their urban itineraries as well as the diversity of bodies encountered. Through a variety of micro-narratives called "relatos" ("short stories") the book recounts anecdotes about drifts with nurses, cleaners, call centre operators and other precarious women – consistently from multiple points of view. For PalD,

[68] Effectively PalD's publication is an exquisite corpse, composed through the Surrealist method by which words or images are collectively assembled.

these relatos are never isolated, but always intertwined and as such able to produce a sense of connection and commonality among those who share them.

In *A la Deriva*, each short story is signed with the number of women that contributed to it – for example, 'relato a tres voces' ('story of three voices') (PalD 2004b, 79) – rather than signing with proper names. The plurality of anonymous voices allows discursive conceptions of the subject to shift from a single author to a community of authors. PalD's 52-minute-long video, also titled *A la Deriva: Por los Circuitos de la Precariedad Femenina,* employs a similar mode of address. It contains fragments of talking-head interviews in which the speaking subjects – all women – talk straight into the camera but are not identified by name. The focus is on their testimonies, directly interpolating the viewer.[69] Some accounts remain visually unidentified, protecting those women who wished to remain anonymous during the conveying of their stories.

The city of Madrid figures prominently in *A la Deriva*. Tracking shots of the urban landscape reappear throughout. Sequences traversing streets, crossings, subway stations and parks are accompanied by scenes filmed inside offices, shops, bars and private homes. Intertwining visual explorations of metropolitan space and stories of women's daily existence, the video gives a good impression of PalD's drifts through the Spanish capital. Szumilak describes: 'The "external" travels crisscrossed by links of intimacy, emotion, and caring come complemented with "internal" journeys into the privacy of homes, families, and bodily experience.' (Szumilak 2006, 174) Crossing demarcations of the inside and the outside, PalD's work reveals the permeable status of the boundaries that structure contemporary society. Recuperating feminist theories of the integration of the public and the private, the video approaches the continuities and discontinuities between what happens in the realm of the home and intimate relations, and in the realm of employment, politics and the nation state.

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[69] Medium close-up shots in which subjects are presented as speaking directly to the viewer are prominent in many activist video formats. Instances can be found in contemporary agit-propaganda films, where "objectivity" is not the main point – making people feel something for a cause is. See also my analysis of kpD's confessional monologues and "diary cam" sequences in *Kamera Läuft!* in chapter 2.

The radical interpenetration between public and private domains and how this produces inequalities in Spanish society is to PalD an essential path for investigation. Their video suggests that once we understand that the personal and political are no longer separated, there remains a difference in how the relations of these two realms are perceived. Sequences of journeys leading to various public and private locations are overlaid with narrated monologues and polylogues addressing the multifaceted aspects of feminised and precarious labour in Madrid. These off-screen voiceovers – their speech sometimes overlapping, speeding up or slowing down – demonstrate how PalD moves freely among various modes of spatiality and temporality. In doing so, *A la Deriva* reinforces the elements of physical and mental mobility, so typical of the everyday lived experiences of flexible workers in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism.

The utilisation of female voiceovers shows that PalD proceeds from the political base of feminist filmmaking. Their video continually demonstrates an effort to encourage women to see with their own eyes and speak in their own voice (Rich 1993, 158). Notably, the voiceovers in *A la Deriva* are discursive and non-hegemonic, rather than controlling. Any authoritarianism of narration is avoided in favour of a relationship that sounds more like conversation. Ruby Rich contends that such structuring and narrative voice in feminist cinema could be termed a 'cinema of correspondence' (Rich 1993, 155). This relational and dialogic configuration resonates with PalD's collective practice of exchanging narratives as a form of consciousness-raising and becoming common. Because of the polyvocality of the voiceovers, there is a sense that the women never drift alone, but always together. As such, the video performs and enacts a modality for collective life in an era of privatisation and individualisation.

Attentive to the invisible activities that comprise post-Fordist production, PalD's video makes visible the gestures and rituals of the everyday lives of precarious women. Through the direct visualisation of the material conditions of feminised labour in Madrid, the viewer is confronted with the conflicting demands women are facing in their personal and professional lives. Yet their activities – economic, social, cultural, political – are depicted sympathetically and humorously. PalD has a particular deftness for capturing the nuances of women's political and personal

orientations in the inflections of their behaviour and conversations, which are supportive, convivial and often causing laughter. Although their video conveys stories of less-than-ideal situations for women living and working in late capitalism, *A la Deriva* is anything but a tearful lamentation on the experience of feminised precarity. Instead of an endless contemplation of how women come to be restrained, PalD depicts women as witty and active subjects creatively intervening in patriarchal and heteronormative power structures.

A sense of optimism and possibility is also conveyed through the playful and frantic editing of *A la Deriva*. The video is interspersed with short fragments of found footage: historical images of women's labour, snippets of texts from newspapers, scenes of protest marches, screen grabs of video games with female protagonists, and sexist Disney cartoons. This method of appropriating and disassembling/reassembling audio-visual materials becomes a means to bring different perspectives on feminised precarity into collision. As a kind of film puzzle or audio-visual bricolage in which multiple strands of information come together, some viewers might find it difficult to focus on what is happening on screen. In experiencing and trying to make sense of the video, you need to remain active throughout. As soon as you think you have grasped one aspect of female precariousness, you are pulled back to see that this aspect has changed. Constantly accumulating new resonances and tensions, the constructed analyses continue to develop and change while you watch.

Challenging habitual ways of seeing and listening, *A la Deriva* can be seen as a feminist intervention by and for precarious women. Regarding their lives and visions as adequate to comprise the central concern of and reason for making an activist video, PalD's work recalls the motto of the feminist film movement since the 1970s: 'to tell different stories, and to tell stories differently.' Both in terms of content and form, their video consists in an effort to recognise and reconstruct female subjectivity in the early 2000s. Notably, this subjectivity is not one. It is multiple, plural, complex and partial – 'constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another' (Haraway 1988, 586).

Echoing Adriana Cavarero's argument that feminist narration is political first of all because it is relational, PalD's work presents a feminist subjectivity that exists always in relational with others. In their publication as well as in their video, the self is constitutively exposed to the other – an exposure that makes their practice a political scene. Because they present women as speaking from an articulated point of view, while readily acknowledging their subjective positions, the viewer is engaged as an ally in the collective enterprise of fashioning a critical and feminist voice. A voice that is capable of critiquing, subverting and agitating against exploitative labour regimes in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism.

It is here that we begin to see the political potential of PalD's research outcome. Affording us a view of women thinking and struggling together, PalD compel us to imagine alternative forms of social and political organisation in the context of precarity. While engaging the concrete possibility of embodying the city of Madrid otherwise, the women's togetherness and solidarity emerge as a space to recognise systematic oppression and to form resistance by drifting collectively through the urban circuits of feminised precarious work. In doing so, PalD challenges the image of women as striving, solipsistic and isolated individuals balancing on a tightrope, as well as the idea of women as inherently vulnerable subjects in need of protection.

2.5. Publishing, circulating, networking: Unexpected popularity and reflexive practice

No matter how meaningful its political form, however, it can be stated that the outcome of PalD's militant investigation does not exist in its own right. Taking into account that *A la Deriva* was first and foremost a social activism project, it was crucial to spread the work and let the ideas be inspirational for, and be re-appropriated by, others. Therefore, quickly after its release in 2004, PalD's research output went adrift. The video was pressed on DVD, and several copies were distributed and sent around activist networks. Published under a creative commons license, the book travelled through paper copies and free electronic versions. Numerous chapters were translated in different languages and published online. As with many materials produced by activists for organising purposes, *A la Deriva* was

circulated in order to multiply the acts of sharing and communication, both in the virtual world as in the concrete everyday. Following PalD, the work was:

> alive and able to produce communicative resonances, self-identification with the argument, and thus networking, because not only was it born out of a process of social struggle, but also it was released during an intense political moment where the notion of *precariedad* was being debated within European social movements. The goal of this publication was to work at the level of the imagination by cross-pollinating potential rebellion among those living a precarious existence. It sought to inspire certain de-politicised sectors of the population to think of their conditions as susceptible to change, generating new subjectivities sensitive to the discourse of precarity (Producciones Translocales of the Counter-Cartographies Collective 2008).

The outcome of PalD's research was shaped in a way that could serve as a tool for strengthening the networks and multiplying the alliances the group had established in the process so far. For example, PalD used the video to return to the spaces they had passed through in Madrid, in order to keep open the conversations they had initiated during the drifts (PalD 2003c). As a form of militant cinema (Getino 2011), *A la Deriva* was used as a target group video in feminist activist contexts. Creating temporary communities of precarious women, it functioned as a vehicle for discussion, raising issues to think about and instigating explorations of new perspectives on feminised labour. The idea was that by watching the video together women would become active participants in the creation of meaning around exploitation within the Spanish reproductive labour market. At the same time, it would enable them to identify themselves as somehow part of the circuit of feminine precarity. In this context, the video could provide a starting point from which people could begin to think and imagine the experience of feminised labour differently, as well as offer the possibility to feel part of a community in those moments when there is shared recognition.

For PalD, producing resonances was one of the main goals of publishing and distributing their work. Soon after it was set adrift, their project gained significant popularity – locally, nationally and transnationally. Looking back on how *A la Deriva* travelled around, one of PalD's members states in an interview with Maribel Casas-Cortés in 2008:

This was not expected, but the moment when our material was released was the boom of precarity debates, so people were looking for something on these questions. I guess we brought along some freshness and direct style that made it sexy. This traveling generated multiple encounters and opened the possibility of future alliances with people otherwise impossible to reach (Casas-Cortés 2009, 254).

Understandably, their video attracted much attention from activists involved in the EuroMayDay mobilisations. In 2005, a shortened 20-minute version of *A la Deriva* was included on *P2P Fightsharing III: Precarity*, a DVD bringing together 17 short experimental documentaries on the struggles of casualised workers in Europe and beyond. Whilst highly acclaimed by activists campaigning for political or social change in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism, PalD's situated investigations were also discussed in peer-reviewed journals. Cited by renowned intellectuals, their texts were included in university syllabi and picked up by students interested in feminist methodologies and strategies of militant research – including myself.

As the group became the object of increasing scholarly attention, many members of PalD were invited to present their work in academic as well as art contexts.[70] Within years the demand for PalD to participate in conferences and talks skyrocketed (Casas-Cortés 2009, 237). While acknowledging the importance of public utterances and visibility, the group did not want to 'fall into the star system' (PalD 2004a), touring and talking but not developing the local network that was so important to them. The unexpected popularity led PalD to go through a period of profound reflection, in which they submitted their practice to radical self-criticism. As one member of PalD explained in an interview with Maribel Casas-Cortés:

the project started to "ossify" itself (*cosificarse*). It became an exchange coin. This produced tensions in the group about who travels and who is unable to, who is becoming the spokesperson… Also, instead of creating productive

[70] Notably, PalD's project has gained significant art historical currency. For example, a PhD researcher in Arts from the University of the Basque Country has analysed PalD's practice as an alternative artistic practice. While exploring feminist and cooperative forms of performing situated art in the everyday and the local, she argues PalD's militant research challenges the restricted limits and cultural hegemony of institutionalised art (Casas-Cortés 2009, 256). In 2012, PalD's book was included in the exhibition *Feminist Genealogies in the Spanish Art 1960-2010* at the Contemporary Art Museum of Castilla y León in Spain. Emphasising the importance that discourses on gender and sexual identity have had in Spanish art production since the 1960s, this exhibition proposed a rereading of Spain's recent art history through feminist knowledge, practices and genealogies, including feminist activist movements from the early 2000s such as PalD (Vicente Aliaga and Mayayo 2012).

resonances, this process of traveling generated a series of replicas with no sense ... groups elsewhere would try just to imitate the project, just copying our modus operandi but ignoring completely the specificities of their own territory... (Casas-Cortés 2009, 254).

According to Colectivo Situaciones, whose methodologies have been a key reference for the development of PalD's trajectory, it is crucial for militant researchers to keep examining the implications of their work and interrogating its values and ideals:

> [The research collective] cannot exist without seriously investigating itself, without modifying itself, without reconfiguring itself in the social practices in which it takes part, without reviewing the ideals and values it holds dear, without permanently criticising its ideas and readings, in the end, without developing practices in all the possible directions (Colectivo Situaciones 2003).

Considering the video and the book to be part of their militant research, PalD evaluated the particular politics of knowledge production that they engaged while producing them. In doing so the women considered the extent to which they had been able to make substantial changes in precarised lives. Despite having great potential for generating a collective imaginary around the notion of feminine precarity, the group believed their action-research was unable to produce further processes of aggregation and political action. The drifts were a powerful mechanism to promote instances of valuable communication among dispersed and isolated actors. But by themselves they were not able to generate conflict (Casas-Cortés 2009, 429).

Moving forward, PalD did not want to get fixed into one kind of strategy. Yearning to go beyond imagining or "representing" politics and with the desire to do politics more directly, the collective opted to move away from their previous practices of temporary expeditions and research interventions to develop a more solid infrastructure able to articulate long-term connections and alliances among precarious subjectivities. In doing so, they left behind certain truisms pervasive in much of early 2000s activist culture, such as the idea that a particular type of communication – grassroots publishing and independent filmmaking – has an inherent emancipatory effect on people. Following a desire to 'politicise life from

within' (Colectivo Situaciones 2007, 87), the group wanted to think and act more immanently by actually intervening within the situation of feminised precarity.

This meant the end of Precarias a la Deriva as a textual and visual research operation. The new phase aimed to generate a new vocabulary for speaking about the present and a concrete mode of self-organising. This vocabulary would be less coded in the jargon of a particular activist culture, less ideological, and more focused on politicising everyday life and practical issues. PalD described this as a transition 'from the production of linguistic and visual codes (...) to the production of an everyday' (Casas-Cortés 2009, 429). If part of the goal of their initial research was to experiment with new forms of coming together around the different sectors and multifaceted aspects of feminised labour, the second phase was an attempt to respond to those results, and to establish a practice of working and living together for the longer term. Wanting to test the political hypotheses advanced previously, including the conceptualisation of the various axes of stratification within precariousness, the group embarked on a process oriented to building a tangible practice of mutual support. In doing so, they opened the possibility of becoming active participants in the project of trying to understand feminine precarity and challenge its exploitative mechanisms to a broader range of women. This shift points to a desire to go beyond enclosed and secluded frameworks of activist collectivity. As Producciones Translocales of the Counter-Cartographies Collective explains:

> You just hang out with people similar to you, and live through categories and codes of struggle you inherited from others. Everything from clothing to your own vocabulary speaks of a certain type of readily recognisable person: the activist, the squatter, etc. There is a problem of a ghetto-identity that does not allow you to cross trajectories with different people, except your own. Research was a tool to open up, to start knowing more about those others that we spoke about from a discursive level, but without actual or everyday encounters (Producciones Translocales of the Counter-Cartographies Collective 2008).

While moving away from a practice of self-organisation that is absorbed in itself, the new phase of PalD's project would push the initial move of "taking the self as a point of departure to be able to get out of oneself" even more outwards. As they explain: 'we consider a primary problem "starting from oneself," as one among many, in order to "get out of oneself" (out of one's individual ego and the radical group to

which one belongs) and to encounter other resisting people' (Colectivo Situaciones 2007, 87). Determined to work towards an activist practice that is radically open to connections with "others", PalD developed personal bonds and common political projects with less visible sectors of the population, such as migrant women working in the Spanish domestic labour market. This shift in mode of engagement became both controversial and a dilemma for the members of the group, whose own positionalities get displaced in order to support others. In addition, instigating articulations among very diverse precarious subjectivities and their dispersed struggles involved the acknowledgement of greater differences than had been expected. In the remaining sections of this chapter I will explore the possible ways for accounting for such difference through the notion of partial relationality.

3. From precariousness to the question of care: Intersecting gender, domestic work and citizenship

The practical shift in PalD's practice – from action-research starting from the self to more concrete organising in order to create substantial alliances with 'others' – was accompanied by an epistemological shift. While the focus during the first phase was mostly on the stratification of precariousness, an unexpected finding had caught their attention and became the focal point of the second phase: the question of care. In the course of their explorations, PalD had discovered that this matter was, in one way or another, central for all: 'as workers in the expanding care industry, as persons that give and that need care in a world where the meaning of care and the strategies for providing it are undergoing radical transformations' (PalD 2005a, 188). While contemplating the realities of as many women as possible – married or single, with or without children, legal or illegalised, paid or unpaid, in unions which are recognised or those which are not – care turned out to be the missing piece of the puzzle in the analysis of precarious labour and life.

When PalD speak of care they refer to a notion with multiple dimensions that cannot be separated from each other: care in the home, care outside the home, economically remunerated care, non-remunerated care, private care, public care, self-care, care that assures the sustainability of life, care that takes place in commodity spheres, care that occurs at the margins of the market, etc. Similar to

their understanding of the feminisation of labour, the group consequently regards care not only in a narrow sense – domestic work, nursing, child-raising and education – but also in the context of contemporary conditions of production. These conditions include new forms of affective labour, such as work in call centres, business management, bartending and sex work. Like in the first phase, their research is positioned within 'the continuum of production-reproduction-and in-betweens' (Casas-Cortés 2009, 402).

According to PalD, at the beginning of the 21st century we find ourselves in a multidimensional care crisis (PalD 2005a). This crisis cannot be separated from the precarisation of existence that confronts many people living and working in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. Whilst governing at a distance, the current system rests upon an image of the autarkic self that is economically independent and self-sufficient. Privatised risk management, in which one's own life conduct has to be controlled through self-discipline, is often correlated with the tendency of people to close themselves off from societal responsibilities. With the promotion of individual responsibility, segmentation between people increases, not least due to exploitative working conditions demanding permanent availability while social, political and labour rights are cut. Consequently, time and the capacity for caring – for others as well as for oneself – become scarce and only serve to create and maintain profitable and productive bodies.

Following PalD, these issues are not limited to the private or domestic sphere. The crisis of care is 'a submerged and many-legged conflict, involving immigration policy, the conception of social services, work conditions, family structure, affect… which we will have to take on as a whole but with attention to its specificities.' (PalD 2005a, 197). Actively trying to break down the borders between analyses of labour, gender and migration, the focus during the second phase of their trajectory was more global than in the first phase. Yet PalD's concerns were still deeply place-based and rooted in particular contexts. As in the first phase, their practice is situated in concrete everyday life, and specifically in the quotidian existences of women living and working in Madrid. Before focusing in on the specificities and particularities of PalD's new concern and mode of engagement, I will briefly look at the broader

context and transformations in the spheres and activities of social reproduction in Spain.

3.1. Fuelling securitisation: The crisis of care in a Europeanising and globalising Spain

Until the 1980s, Spain's hegemonic reproductive scheme was that of the nuclear patriarchal family with a strong sexual division of labour. During the Francoist military dictatorship, this scheme was embedded within the moral and institutional predominance of the Catholic religion, in which women were seen as 'angels of the home' (PalD 2003c). Because during this time reproductive activities such as domestic work and care labour were solely in the hands of women, the Spanish welfare state would only intervene in the absence of a woman (PalD 2005a, 191). After Franco's death in 1975, when Spain transitioned from a semi-peripheral autarchic country to a developed parliamentary democracy and key player in global markets, this configuration was challenged, in the first place by the expansion and diversification of employment for women.

This particular transformation can be related to the generalisation of feminist positions on the liberation of women from heteronormative structures, including the widespread acceptance of self-determination and independence. Simultaneously, when emancipated women were hailed as the new protagonists of post-Fordist labour, working conditions were organised to maximise the exploitation of their productive and reproductive capacities, both in the narrow and in the broad sense. To a large extent capitalist accumulation appropriated the need and desire to make visible feminist movements and women in general, in order to extract profit from their assigned tasks. Following Angela McRobbie, this is a situation in which women are being 'disempowered through the very discourses of empowerment they are being offered as substitutes for feminism.' (McRobbie 2009, 49).

As discussed in the first part of this chapter, despite the increasing participation of women in the labour market and attempts to transform the traditional gendered division of work, domestic chores and care activities are still perceived as women's

terrain. While men are no longer the only breadwinners in today's service economy power relations between the sexes remain existent. As a result of its social perception as "feminised", reproductive labour continues to be largely invisible in terms of the organisation of production or productive value and continues to be mostly unpaid or low paid. This is one of the reasons why PalD wanted to make care work more visible, and in doing so focus on issues around the revalorisation of un(der)paid reproductive labour in Spanish contemporary society.

The devaluation of care is tied up with the dismantling and erosion of social security systems and safety nets in neoliberal post-Fordism. At the same time when Spain moved away from the historical pattern of women at home to embrace the idea of women doing "real" work, the public sector subtracted itself from traditional forms of welfare provision. Like other Mediterranean countries adopting European practices of neoliberal privatisation in order to reduce costs, the Spanish government engaged in forms of social engineering aimed at producing subjects who are economically productive, self-responsible and self-sufficient. As we have seen in chapter 1, the consequences of individualist self-protection and preventative self-immunisation in Western post-industrial economies cannot be dismissed. Building on Judith Butler's analysis of the fundamental vulnerability of life, Isabell Lorey poses that in the current dynamic of governmental precarisation, the illusion of individual security is maintained specifically through the anxiety over being exposed to existential precariousness.[71] The abstract anxiety that a body, because it is mortal, cannot be made invulnerable overlaps with a concrete fear of politically and economically induced precarity. This includes fear of unemployment or of not being able to pay rent or health care bills, even when employed. In the context of uncertainty imposed by governmental precarisation, a securitarian logic based on fear prevails as a mode of control. This logic concretises itself in practices of containment and generates forms of isolation that persist in presenting social problems as individual ones (PalD 2006a, 40).

People's lack of control over their lives may lead to an obsessive struggle to reclaim control by micro-managing whatever is possible to control. As my analysis of health-

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[71] Butler's theorising of precariousness as an enduring feature of human existence will be discussed later in this chapter.

props such as yoga mats, herbal teas and bottles of spring water in kpD's *Kamera Läuft!* has demonstrated, there is a growing interest, specifically in Western post-industrial societies, along with the investment of time and money in care for oneself. Notably this function has been interiorised, and as such self-care may turn into a form of oppression, that is to say, into self-precarisation. PalD has described this process as a 'pendular movement[72] that takes place between the obsession for the self-cared-for (*autocuidado*) and (self)exploitation' (PalD 2005b). In this situation, feelings of insecurity are channelled into fuelling securitisation. This becomes a kind of vicious circle, where as securitisation increases the very conditions which cause the initial anxiety, which then feedback, in turn, into feelings of insecurity. This sequence of reciprocal cause and effect in which elements intensify and aggravate each other, leads inexorably to a worsening of the situation. Prompted to turn their disaffected consent inwards, people double down on the present in order to protect and secure themselves against others. In this scenario the fact that a better life cannot be an individual matter is highly obscured (Lorey 2011).

PalD reads these processes of privatisation and individualisation through the crisis of care. Going past the framework of the post-Autonomist capital/life analysis and entering into the realm of affect, they examine how this crisis impacts social relations. Following feminist critics who stress that it is not always easy to distinguish the realms of work from the realms of family or friendship, where capitalism instrumentalises our most intimate relationships (Morini 2007), PalD argues that the affective dimension of the crisis of care functions as a form of blackmail or manipulation. Addressing the complexities of relations of care, they write:

> Many of us are mortified by the thought of living with our families, even by the thought of having to care for them: we'll see how our elders get along. We flee from emotional blackmail and affirm our desire to maintain relationships which are free, that is to say, based upon affect and not obligation. Nevertheless these same relationships – more insecure to the extent that they don't produce guarantees nor are subject to formal contracts – do not produce

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[72] Previously I have resorted to the notion of "oscillation" in order to produce an integrated understanding of the experience of self-precarisation as a relational flow occurring in a complex relation between agency and exploitation, as well as between independence and dependence. However, in this particular context the movement is more like a spiral that intensifies, rather than swinging back and forth that slowly loses force.

frameworks – resources, spaces or bonds – for care. Okay, we haven't married, we have constructed other kinds of units for cohabitation but... how will we deal with the need for care in these environments? Will we go back to the family? To which family, if we are the youngest members? To the partners, for those that have them? Will we have partners? (PalD 2005a, 192).

PalD is interested in these questions as a dynamic which contributes to the reconfiguration of households and families, as well as the sense of intimacy and of the private, ways of loving, of caring, of managing affect, as well as in their connection with sexuality (PalD 2005a, 195). For them, the crisis of care is not limited to the private or domestic sphere but should be seen as a social question.

Yet the consequences of the dismantling and remodelling of collective safeguarding systems for the domestic labour market cannot be overlooked. Because of policies of welfare retrenchment and the increasing privatisation of social services, childcare as well as care for the physically and psychologically dependent has become progressively inaccessible and unaffordable. According to Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, cuts in social care and disability benefits re-interpellate women as the main providers of care and domestic work (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2014, 193). Poor and working-class households manage this situation by relying on their female family members, friends and neighbours. More affluent families continue to opt to employ someone to support them. But as private household incomes are reduced, employing a domestic worker is only an option if pay and contracts are renegotiated. Indeed, some households have decreased salaries and renegotiated insurance and social benefits, or employed a domestic worker on an irregular basis (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2014, 194).

Maribel Casas-Cortés has made a similar argument, stating that the increasing inclusion of female citizens into the Spanish labour market caused a growing lack of 'in-family' permanent care givers (Casas-Cortés 2009, 18). Consequently, families with resources started to contract other women to do domestic chores, thus essentially outsourcing care work. There is a shift to risk management and securitisation in the hands of an expanding 'third sector' (PalD 2006a, 37), where the work is done mostly by women with limited rights and precarious contracts. Often these women are migrants. It is here that immigration regulations come into play. This particular dimension of the crisis of care will be discussed next.

3.2. Breaking down borders between migration, citizenship and labour exploitation

Since its entrance into the European Economic Community in 1986, Spain has shifted from being a country of emigrants to one of massive immigration. Becoming an EU country, its borders with Portugal and France were opening, allowing free movement of citizens within the eurozone. At the same time, the border with Morocco was increasingly militarised, as to deter "intrusions" of illegal immigrants via the city of Melilla, a Spanish enclave located on the north coast of the African continent (Ferrer-Gallardo 2008). Adopting European policies of immigration control, Spain's strict visa system became more and more hostile towards migrants coming from Africa, Latin America and South Asia. This is apparent in the entry and settlement requirements migrants from these regions must fulfil in order to establish their lives within the European Union. If immigrants do not comply with the requirements set by migration laws, they are denied entry. If they enter without permission, they risk being made illegal, which means exposure to constant threats of deportation, as well as extremely exploitative and unsafe living and working conditions.

Without citizenship but nevertheless inside national economic space, undocumented migrants are precarious in more senses than might be indicated by other uses of the word (Mitropoulos 2005). Because their basic existence as social entities cannot be guaranteed, they lack the discursive socio-political status by which they are recognised as subjects. Those who are without documentation of their existence within the system are outside the rule of law, and at the same time most significantly impacted by it. This situation can be examined through Judith Butler's conception of precarity, which designates the politically induced condition of domination by which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and are thus differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death (Butler 2009, 2). Following Butler's analysis, undocumented migrants suffer from maximised precariousness as they simultaneously appeal to the state for protection while it is precisely the state from whom they require protection. As Butler puts it, 'To be protected from violence by the nation-state is to be exposed to the violence wielded by the nation-state, so to rely on the nation-state for protection

from violence is precisely to exchange one potential violence for another' (Butler 2009, 26).

As undocumented migrants do not 'sufficiently conform to the norms that confer recognisability on subjects' (Butler 2009, 3), they are rejected or excluded from the ruling social order and positioned outside of the political and social community as "not normal" or "alien". By neither having access to the labour market or to basic human rights and protections, they come to represent the ultimate precarious subject, who experiences extreme vulnerability on a political, social, economic as well as existential level. Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter responded to the increasingly subjugating methods of exclusion in the early 2000s by arguing that the figure of the undocumented migrant has become the exemplary precarious worker since,

> in the current global formation, the entire system of border control and detention technology provides the principal means by which capital controls the mobility of labour. Because the depreciation and precarisation of migrant labour threatens to engulf the workforce as a whole (and because the subjective mobility and resistance of migrants tests the limits of capitalist control), their position becomes the social anticipation of a political option to struggle against the general development of labour and life in the contemporary world (Neilson and Rossiter 2005).

For this reason, many social and political movements confronting the prevalence of unstable and insecure employment in Western societies, have made strategic links between the spheres of precarity and migration. Informed by authors such as Etienne Balibar, Sandro Mezzadra and Yann Moulier Boutang, networks of pro-migration collectives, working all over Europe, have been very active in bringing out the potentialities of migrant subjectivity in "undocumented" struggles against precarious working and living conditions.

One instance can be found in the Sans Papiers movement in France. Worldwide media attention was drawn to the situation of undocumented migrants in 1996 when the government ordered special police forces to break down the doors of a church in Paris to expel those who had been staging a hunger strike inside in order to stop deportations and claim the right to 'papers for all' (Freedman 2008). The activists involved spoke of this struggle as one against precarity, while emphasising

the need for self-determined organisation and representation for those without citizenship rights and with little prospect of mobility (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2004, 152). By naming themselves "without papers", the Sans Papiers demonstrate that income – usually the key criteria in defining precarity – is inseparable from having legal rights to work. Moving away from questions around distinct ethnic background or country of origin, they frame "difference" as a minor and arbitrary question of having or not having the appropriate documents.

Another example is the Frassanito Network from Puglia in Southern Italy. Part of the European No Border network established in 2000, this group shares a conception of migration as social movement and sees migrants' struggles as crucial to the development of global movements. They posit that to talk about migrant labour means to talk about a general tendency of labour towards mobility:

> Particularly because migrants experience all […] forms of depreciation and precarisation of contemporary work, and particularly because mobility is their answer through and against borders and identities, they manifest in their subjective conditions all the main characteristics which shape modern labour as a whole (The Frassanito Network 2006).

Subsequently the position of migrants comes to represent the social anticipation of a political option to struggle against the general development of labour as it is being extended to the whole of society.

It is important to note that in claiming the centrality of migrant labour, movements like the Sans Papiers and the Frassanito Network do not necessarily intend to privilege the figure of the migrant worker as a new political or even revolutionary subject. Rather, this focus changes the perspective, not only when looking at questions of precarity but also when considering issues of citizenship and ethnicity in debates about the changing nature of production. Changes that have effects on working and living conditions and the rethinking of labour organisation and social rights. Linking these discussions to questions around social reproduction, PalD employs an even more multi-faceted perspective. They proclaim that the crisis of care involves the condition of the labour market, social transformations, feminist positions, the role of migration and immigration law, as well as the legislation of domestic work (PalD 2005a, 189). This analysis will be further unpacked below.

3.3. Discrimination within precarity debates: Gender and the racialisation of domestic work

While focussing on the relationships between gender, care and migration, PalD takes into account analyses of global inequalities and the feminisation of the international economy. Because there is a lack of time, resources, recognition and desire for taking charge of non-remunerated care – for children, but also for those who are sick, disabled or old – reproductive labour in Spain is increasingly performed by a growing migrant population. The care crisis, combined with the ageing population and the falling birth rate, provokes a situation of uncertainty and 'social alarm', placing emphasis upon the profitable character of female migrants as a labour force, or even a procreative force (PalD 2003c). Consequently, many women from less developed countries outside the EU travel to Spain, looking for ways to make a living in order to support their families back home. While these migrant women are caring for families in Spain, the Spanish state disregards their duty of care towards migrant families by restricting family reunification. The welfare of these families is overshadowed by the aims of the government to control and restrict migration (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2014, 195).

Notably, there are growing numbers of undocumented migrant women undertaking care work in Spanish households. These women are channelled into an increasingly illegal care labour market, where they work under extremely precarious conditions, excluded from receiving any social benefits, unemployment compensation or health insurance. In this situation, becoming undocumented is intrinsically connected to questions of precarisation and feminisation. Here we can refer back to the analogy of the tightrope walker. Not so much to illustrate how undocumented migrant women are "extra" precarious – swaying on a very high wire without a safety net – but more to emphasise their contradictory position. As PalD posits, the work of in-house domestics, especially in the case of undocumented migrant women, is marked by a series of ambiguities which situate those who do it both inside and outside: inside the nation and outside the state; inside the economy and outside labour relations; inside the home and outside the family (PalD 2003b). This is a gendered positionality that is profoundly structured by race, ethnicity and origin.

Drawing on research conducted in Austria, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom on the organisation of domestic work in private households, Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez argues that feminisation and heteronormativity intersect with the logic of coloniality. Whilst governing the sphere of gender, family and migration policies, this form of power endures a racist logic dividing the population into 'superior' and 'inferior' (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2014, 198). As care becomes a space of tension where these relations of domination are reproduced, discussions around the devaluation of reproductive labour need to take into account analyses of multiple and simultaneous oppressions. Because there seems to be a perpetuation of local gender inequalities, sustained by global gender inequalities, the notion of feminisation should not only shed light on the specific dynamics of the social inscription of "femininity" but also on racism (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2014, 197).

While exploring the dialectical relation between the white male performing body and the exhausted racialised female body, Françoise Vergès looks at invisible cleaning and caring labour in contemporary cities done by black and migrant or refugee women. She states that without the work of women of colour, which is necessary but must remain invisible – literally and in valuative terms – neoliberal and hetero-patriarchal capitalism would not function (Vergès 2019). Inaugurated by colonial slavery and extended throughout the world in recent decades, the racialisation of domestic work is driven by the needs of finance capital and new forms of middle class living. Following this analysis, discussions around the exploitation of care and social reproduction need to take place in a framework that brings together multiple intersecting issues 'that go beyond the division of chores within a couple or the calculation of what domestic labour adds to general growth' (Vergès 2019).

While investigating the dynamics between gender, care and migration, PalD has likewise addressed the lack of attention to issues around discrimination within precarity debates. They state European social and political movements in the early 2000s not only ignored vast amounts of unpaid domestic work done by migrant women, but also racialised labour divisions within modes of post-Fordist production:

Insisting on the importance of care was a way for us to give a feminist radical edge to actions of the EuroMayDay, which was quick in proclaiming the disruptive possibilities of "precarity life style". For us, they overlooked the very unequal situations of precariousness in Europe by insisting on their liberating possibilities (e.g. the end of full time jobs). While our group also partially thought that the break of frameworks of rigid labour setting could be liberating, putting the accent on the work of care was a way to recall that the burden of care makes the biggest part of precarious "flexible" jobs and is assumed mostly by migrant women and women of colour – who were not actually included in the EuroMayday actions (Casas-Cortés 2009, 430).

Confronting the myth of the precariat sharing a common predicament exposes the danger of disguising inequalities between precarious subjectivities. In other words, the exclusion of some from generalised proclamations about who is exploited, contributes to the oppression of those who do not fit the dominant construction of precarious experience (Butler 2009, 3). As discussed in chapter 3, any politics that are based on the changing nature of work has to consider how unevenness in access to social power and the ability to have a voice about one's conditions affect the potential to organise from those conditions. At the same time, it needs to 'make visible the assignment of subject-positions' (Spivak 2006, 332) in order to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced in neoliberal capitalism.

Subsequently, there is the need for more attentiveness to discourse and the relationship between power and knowledge production in order to highlight how precarity movements celebrate particular versions of precarious experience and, in doing so, perpetuate certain inequalities. On the one hand, activist-researchers have to understand that capitalist measures are pervasive within the stratified global field of production, which implies that it hits everybody. On the other hand, they cannot overlook the fact that the most 'advanced' sections of the global working class – whether in terms of the level of their wage or in terms of the type of their labour – can materially reproduce themselves only on the basis of their interdependence with 'less advanced' sections (Stavrides and Angelis 2010, 12). If the security of some presumes the insecurity of others then narrow discussions of contemporary forms of exploitation need to be challenged. After all, precarisation is a phenomenon that extends far beyond the industries and economies of post-Fordist industrial nations in the West.

Aiming to build a less monolithic understanding of the transformations happening in Spain and Europe, PalD extended the scope of issues around exploitative working and living conditions to include questions of gender, care, citizenship and ethnicity. For the group, considering how political precarity and existential precariousness intersect with transformations in reproductive spaces and global migration invigorated a surge of energy towards the desire to articulate and engage with a sector that, despite its growth, had not thus far been politically visible. In an attempt to challenge gendered and racialised divisions of labour, PalD decided to organise a series of workshops on globalised care, bringing together women from multiple localities to share experiences related to domestic work in Madrid. What follows will discuss how these workshops led to the politicisation of a field that was not usually considered to constitute political action under the rubric of precarity.

4. The production of an everyday: Precarias a la Deriva's care community

4.1. Precarias a la Deriva's workshops on globalised care and the rights of cuidadania

Held at the squatted feminist social centre La Eskalera Karakola in Madrid in 2003, PalD's workshops on globalised care were initially set up to function as a space of encounter for female domestic workers, offering the possibility to feel themselves – at least temporarily – outside of the usual state of isolation and fragmentation experienced in the care economy. Allowing participants to share their stories and collectively reflect on working conditions in a highly dispersed sector, PalD hoped to contribute to an empowering reading of emergent but still hidden subjectivities, facilitate networking processes, and increase chances of finding possible sites of intervention. In a safe and supportive environment, self-narration and collective listening were practiced in order to overcome the distances between women from multiple localities. Again, the idea was to take the self as a point of departure so as to get out of oneself and connect with others.

Notably, the workshops operated as a meeting place and consciousness-raising group for women from very different geographic and ethnic backgrounds –

participants came from Spain, Romania, Morocco, Ivory Coast, Colombia, Ecuador and the United States – who normally would not come into contact with each other (Casas-Cortés 2009, 464). Whilst highlighting the symbolic and material asymmetries between migrant and non-migrant domestic workers, PalD actively tried to deconstruct hierarchies within the Spanish care labour market reinforced by European immigration laws. Their goal was to break through divisions between local and global perspectives, and thus facilitate the creation of transnational alliances and networks of cooperation.

During the sessions, PalD reiterated that the crisis of care concerns everyone whether they care in the narrow or broad sense, come from the North, South, East or West, have legal or illegal status. Indeed, they stated that 'in the end, in one way or another, we are talking about the daily life of each and every one of us.' (PalD 2005a, 195). Due to its capacity to make alliances across radically different subjectivities, PalD believed that breaking the silence around the crisis of care and introducing conflict in this field would assure 'better conditions for all' (PalD 2005a, 195). As such the workshops on globalised care were organised to diminish social atomisation and convert care into its rightful place as an abundant common good based on social relationality. With this purpose in mind, PalD took up the Spanish neologism "cuidadania" as a slogan for instantiating the notion of common care and care for the common.

"Cuidadania" is a play on words that is not directly translatable into English. The term came into existence in May 2004, when a rehabilitation house in the neighbourhood of Pumarejo in Sevilla was inaugurated. To celebrate the event, a commemorative plaque was attached to the wall of the building, bearing a sentence with the word "cuidadania" accidentally misspelled: the "u" and the "i" were swapped around (PalD 2005c). In Spanish, "ciudadania" means citizenship – as well as having resonances with the word for city or municipality "ciudad". "Cuidado" can be translated as care. The neologism "cuidadania" combines the two words, meaning something like "care-tizenship". This newly coined term transcends dominant conceptions of collectivity determined by the nation state, which connect the mechanisms of (non-)recognition with citizenship; the legal sense in which persons are juridically subject to the law's privileges and protections by virtue of national

identity status. Evoking a different notion of political belonging, care-tizenship enacts both an erasure and a democratic iteration of the conventional notion of citizenship, which in turn clashes and suppresses its inherent exclusionary logic. In doing so it takes important steps toward a condition of radical inclusion (Casas-Cortés 2018, 20). The defensive closure of national identity, its insistence on the fixity of position, and its equation of social with moral positioning, is challenged by PalD's instantiation of a care community. This community did not revolve around a 'polity' based upon sharing a national territory, certain ethnic blood or abstract individual rights, but was founded upon the urgency of a place-based response to a situation of shared needs (Casas-Cortés 2018, 20).

Besides enabling female domestic workers to think beyond borders, and corresponding national citizenships, as taken-for-granted institutions of political organisations, PalD used the rights of cuidadania to emphasise the analogy between fundamental socio-political rights and the right to care and be cared for. Principally, cuidadania instantiates the right to carry out care work under conditions of dignity, as well as the right not to have to carry out such activity. In other words, it also includes the right to have a choice about care work. By focussing on the ability to care and the need to be cared for, while simultaneously taking up radical critiques of affective and social reproduction as a device of control, dependence and blame of women, PalD goes beyond heteronormative and patriarchal understandings of the right to care as a 'feminine duty' (Lorey 2015, 96). As such the term cuidadania was able to connect to different women participating in the workshop – not just undocumented migrant domestic workers but also those with Spanish citizenship employed in call centres or sex workers performing affective labour. Despite their very diverse realities – the resources they count upon, the emotional and material support, the rights, the risks, the social value of what they do, the diversity of availabilities and sensibilities – the slogan helped the women to realise and foreground their shared interests.

Reframing social relations between migrant and non-migrant domestic workers in Madrid, PalD's workshops on globalised care pushed some of their actions and arguments surrounding feminised precarity to a more ethically engaged encounter. Their idea of a care community was directed at developing sustainable forms of

thinking and acting together where interdependency is considered fundamental. Looking for ways to build transnational relations of solidarity between women from very different geographic and ethnic backgrounds, the workshops were organised to advance a shared principle, rather than a shared identity. In order to better understand the implications of PalD's desire for common care and care for the common, the following section addresses questions around the ethics and politics of the precarious Other. Here it makes sense to return to Judith Butler and her analysis of precariousness as an enduring feature of human existence.

4.2. The ethics and politics of the precarious Other

In her book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), Judith Butler discusses the ways living beings are tied to one another, even in the form of loss and vulnerability. She reminds us of the simple truth that we can be injured and that others can be injured as well (Butler 2004, xii). Therefore, it can be stated that every human being is precarious, regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, sexuality, ability or economic, political, and legal statuses. Drawing upon Emmanuel Levinas' theorising of the ethical imperative arising from 'the face as the extreme precariousness of the Other' (Levinas 1996, 165), Butler states that shared vulnerability is the condition that exposes us to others. Because of the impossibility of a wholly autonomous life, humans are fundamentally socially dependent. Following this, precariousness is not something autonomous that exists in itself in an ontological sense. It is always relational and therefore a socio-ontological "being-with", involving other precarious lives. As Butler puts it: 'Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something.' (Butler 2004, 23).

At the basis of Butler's reframing of vulnerability lies the possibility of 'making different kinds of ties' (Butler 2004, 40). This means that, as potential, precariousness is a condition of openness to being affected and affecting in turn. In Erin Gilson's words: 'Vulner*ability* is not just a condition that limits us but one that can *enable* us' (Gilson 2011, 310). Butler makes this claim more insistent in her work, which follows on from *Precarious Life*, namely *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005) her first extended study of moral philosophy. In this work, Butler seeks to establish a relational politics, one in which 'the exposure and vulnerability of the

other makes a primary ethical claim upon me' (Butler 2005, 31). Here the question of socio-ontological precariousness becomes the basis for a theorising of interdependency. Urging us to understand that who "we" are is always tied up with others, she borrows from Paul Celan's poem *Praise of Distance*, which states 'I am you, if I am' (Butler 2005, 65).[73] For Butler, this means 'I am my relation to you' (Butler 2005, 81). In other words, it is the relation between the "I" and the "you" that brings the "I" into existence, just as it has the power to undo it (Drichel 2013, 15). This means the implicated relationality that makes us who "we" are can express itself as concern and care as well as oppression and injustice.

While rethinking the complex and fragile character of this social bond, Butler dissociates vulnerability from violence and frames it instead as the condition of possibility for an ethics of non-violence between the "I" and the precarious Other. To get a deeper insight into how this ethical relation is actualised, she stresses the need to examine – in a Foucauldian vein – the ways subjectivity is (re)constructed through the complex matrix of social norms and established regimes of truth (Butler 2005, 22). In her book *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (2009), for example, she analyses the moral frameworks through which the West wages modern war. Butler states that the media's portrayal of state violence has saturated our understanding of human life, and has led to the exploitation and abandonment of people who are cast as existential threats. Her argument takes shape above all in post-9/11 America, when she considers the conditions of heightened fear and aggression that followed the attack on the Twin Towers, and the US government's decision to invade Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001. It is here that Butler introduces the political notion of precarity I discussed earlier, designating a condition of domination by which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and are thus differentially exposed to injury, violence and death (Butler 2009, 2).

Taking into account the frames that govern contemporary norms of recognisability, Butler suggests the effect of precarity is spreading rather than retreating: 'The shared condition of precariousness leads not to reciprocal recognition, but to a

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[73] Here Butler follows Levinas, who in his book *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* quotes Celan's poem in German: 'Ich bin du, wenn ich ich bin.' (Levinas 1981, 99).

specific exploitation of targeted populations, of lives that are not quite lives cast as "destructible" and "ungrievable"' (Butler 2009, 31). While confronting Western perspectives on self-sufficiency, national sovereignty and First World privilege, she points towards our collective responsibility to re-create social and political conditions on more sustaining grounds. This requires that we ask 'what conditions might make violence less possible, lives more equally grievable and hence more livable' (Butler 2009, viii). In a response to the increasingly subjugating methods of discrimination, racism and exclusion around the globe, Butler calls upon a reformulation of both right- and left-wing politics in order to minimise inequality in precarity. In this way, the connection with others would become the foundation for the political, rather than an individualised independence that fends off the negatively connoted dependency of others.

Because these kinds of ethical perspectives sometimes risk detachment from the organisational circumstances of contemporary labour relations, numerous critical thinkers have actively worked towards the adaption of Butler's philosophical insights on the precarious to the insecure and unstable working and living circumstances of neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. For example, Isabell Lorey advances Butler's idea that beings can never be completely protected – precisely because they are permanently exposed to social, political, economic and legal conditions, under which life remains precarious. In her analysis, Lorey stresses the importance of recognising the shared condition of precariousness and of acknowledging that a sustainably better life cannot be an individual matter. She also posits that the fundamental social dependency of a living being, due to its vulnerability, highlights the eminent significance of care and reproduction (Lorey 2015, 19). Moving away from the neoliberal disposition of care – described by Lorey as 'the intertwining of affective and cognitive labour, the privatisation of prevention, anxiety about precariousness, and servile self-care' (Lorey 2019) – the recognition of ethical relationality can form the beginning of a process of becoming common. The precarious have the potential to refuse to allow themselves to be divided for the protection of some against the threatening of others by the very rejection of the

state's performance of immunising, warding off, and negation of incalculability, contingency and vulnerability (Lorey 2015, 110-111).[74]

The question remains, however, to what extent can dispersed precarious subjectivities actually become common. In the perspectives above it remains unclear how to attend to the tension between the "we" and the uneven distribution of precarity across different beings (Puar et al. 2012, 169). Moreover, if precarity indicates a social positioning of insecurity, how does it imply modes of domination as well as the social and political agency of those so positioned? If precariousness designates what we all share but also what distinguishes and separates us from others, how can practices that are oriented not solely to the self and one's own milieu, but rather to living together and common political action be imagined? Regarding PalD's practice, in what ways does the notion of "cuidadania" negotiate or subvert structural relationships organised around gendered and racialised identities? Perhaps it is not enough to challenge precarisation theoretically or even imaginatively. Instead, it must be found and invented in actual encounters. This is why it is important to look at *how* precarious subjects make connections with one another to deepen the obligations they have. As such the next sections will discuss the concrete materialisation of PalD's care community through the possibility of organising a care strike and setting up a barter network. Besides making visible the invisibility of reproductive labour, these practices cultivate sustainable relations of reciprocity between women from various backgrounds.

4.3. A very careful strike: Precarias a la Deriva's militant political ethics

PalD envisioned the workshops on globalised care as a space of encounter and a place to build concrete alliances from which to collectively devise ideas and launch proposals for visibility and struggle. One of these proposals consisted in exploring

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[74] In a similar way, Lauren Berlant regards precariousness as a rallying cry for a thriving new world of interdependency and care that is not just private. Stressing relationality's place at the heart of encounters defined by 'cruel optimism' (see chapter 2), Berlant tracks precarity in terms of the desperation and violence released when something desired becomes an obstacle to one's flourishing (Berlant 2011). While commenting on the need for precarious existence to be rethought as 'a zone of generously configured social relations', she stresses the importance of thinking about what kind of affective aspirations can create and multiply structures for a collective 'good-life' imaginary (Puar et al. 2012, 172).

the possibility of organising a care strike. What would happen if women stop caring – literally and figuratively speaking – even just for one day? Deliberately considering the viability of this provocative idea, PalD wondered what form a care strike could take: 'It seems a paradox, if, because the strike is always interruption and visibilisation and care is the continuous and invisible line whose interruption would be devastating' (PalD 2006a, 42).[75]

Already in 1975, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James pointed out how strike proposals, in relation to housework emerging in the 1970s, encountered a fundamental barrier when it became clear that women were not prepared to suspend their caring activities, provided that this endangered the well-being of their direct environment (Dalla Costa and James 1975, 34-35). Thinking about a caregiver's uprising is therefore never simple. Since the work of caring *for* someone – children, the elderly, those who are unwell or disabled – is an activity that people often do precisely because they care *about* them, it cannot be easily refused. Indeed, as Isabell Lorey rightly ponders in her discussion of PalD's proposal: 'Can the relationality of life, our connectedness with others, be the object of strike?' (Lorey 2015, 97).

For decades feminists have tried to challenge and transform divisions of labour, demanding that unpaid care work be acknowledged and rewarded. In recent years, some have critiqued the notion of "affective remuneration" as the valorisation of un(der)paid reproductive labour. They do so, while discussing its constitutive role in the neoliberalisation and financialisation of social reproduction in contemporary capitalism. For example, Kathi Weeks has warned that an affirmation of social reproduction can legitimise and thus re-inscribe the very discourses that affirm a capitalist work ethic (Weeks 2011, 13). This seems especially relevant at a time where the entrepreneurial imperative to continuously improve one's 'human capital' (Feher 2009) is making it more and more difficult for people to distinguish between their productive and non-productive selves. Criticising a kind of 'affective blackmail' of reproductivism, Heather Berg writes that a feminist politics should not

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[75] For an analysis of the temporality of care see Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (2017).

inadvertently place the burden of responsibility for ensuring social reproduction on care workers (Berg 2014, 173), something PalD also problematises.

In the wake of the global financial crisis, Emma Dowling asks what it would mean for social reproduction to be truly valued – socially, culturally, politically and economically – against how the labour of social reproduction in its gendered, racialised and classed distribution continues to be placed at the service of capital accumulation. In particular through new rounds of austerity, marketisation and financialisation (Dowling 2016, 453). She states that both the question of who bears the cost of social reproduction and the demand for its recognition are political questions circumscribed by the ways reproductive labour moves between households, communities, companies and state institutions and 'where individual reproductive activities are located along a paid and unpaid continuum' (Dowling 2016, 460). This means social and economic struggles over care work are shaped by questions of how it is valued, by what mechanisms, by whom, and for what purposes.

Since the 1970s feminists have not been unified in their responses to shifts in the organisation of reproductive labour. While focusing on demands for the better sharing of domestic tasks between men and women, many analyses have ignored the racial dimensions of care labour. For decades feminists of colour such as Angela Davis have critiqued heteronormative feminism and its framing of white women's liberation in terms of "freedom from housework", and in the process cementing the racial divide. For example, when white feminists denounced the boredom and invisibility of unpaid housework, the movement to recruit black and brown women for cleaning/caring accelerated (Vergès 2019). This challenges the idea that domestic labour can be used as the great leveller, a common burden imposed on all women equally by patriarchy. Instead, it astutely addresses the problem that when some women stop caring, others will have to do the job. These "others" are mostly working-class women of colour from the South (Anderson 2000). Often separated from the families they support back home, they clean the houses and take care of the children of those struggling with better-paid jobs or sweating in fitness clubs to keep up with the exigencies of self-care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 87).

Bringing together different actors in the 'global chains of affection' (PalD 2003c), PalD's workshops explored ways to organise a care strike that considered the unevenness in access to social power as well as the ability to have a voice about one's conditions. Taking into account critiques of classic forms of protest and objection within the context of reproductive labour, the group came up with the idea of "a very careful strike". This pun means, simultaneously, something very carefully done (something undertaken with thought and attention) and something dangerous (something around which one should be cautious), as well as referring to the proposal of a strike by those who carry out both paid and unpaid caring labour (PalD 2006a, 33). Here, care is not only located in that which is given or the finished product (care as such), or in the "object" to be analysed (care work), but also in the process (careful). That is to say, PalD understands care not only in terms of practices that endow life with sustainability, but also as a specific form of approach to such practices. In this context, care becomes the foundation for a 'militant political ethics' (Mennel and Nowotny 2011, 26). As a form of activist-research that links knowing, being and doing, this ethics concerns, in turn, the constitution of commonality itself.

Designed to break open the rigid order of the gendered and racialised apparatus of care, PalD's careful strike enabled an alternative response to the "problem" of insecurity. As a result of the dismantling and remodelling of collective safeguarding systems in neoliberal capitalism, care is understood as something negative, as something that needs "dealing" with. Resorting to a more positive outlook, PalD's strike entailed a re-valuation, rather than a suspension of care activities. Subverting neo-patriarchal and neo-colonialist perspectives through which reproductive labour is depoliticised and made invisible, the group intended to create a lens that modifies capitalist understandings of caring labour:

> all that is lacking is a change of perspective to see that that there is no paradox: the caring strike would be nothing other than the interruption of the order that is ineluctably produced in the moment in which we place the truth of care in the centre and politicise it (PalD 2006a, 42).

When PalD speaks of 'placing the truth of care in the centre', they actually mean "re-placing". This is because care, as they understand it, already is in the centre of life. In fact, it always has been and will continue to be there.

> Because care is what makes life possible (care generates life, nourishes it, makes it grow, heals it), care can make life happier (creating relations of interdependence among bodies) and more interesting (generating exchanges of all types of flows, knowledges, contagions), care can give life, definitively, some meaning (PalD 2006a, 41).

Resorting to interdependency as the basis for sociality, PalD moves away from dichotomous distinctions between dependence and independence. In making visible and re-politicising care activities, they deconstruct the notion of self-care – the kind of individual(ised) care promoted by neoliberal ideology – as a false concept imposing impossible models of autonomy and self-sufficiency (PalD 2004b, 243). At the same time PalD goes beyond the straightforward definition of caretaking as looking after and providing for the needs of others. Breaking what they call 'the securitary logic' (PalD 2006a, 42), the group challenges one-sided understandings of care, in which the weaker is depending on the stronger.[76] Rather than an individual attribute, care is inscribed in a form of relationality which denotes mutual reliance, a situation of reciprocity in which people are equally bound and have shared agency and responsibility.

4.4. Precarias a la Deriva's barter network: From an economy to an ecology of care

PalD's focus on interdependency can also be found in another idea resulting from the workshops on globalised care, which consisted in thinking social relationality beyond commodity mediations. By organising affective encounters and communicative exchanges with others, PalD aimed to produce transnational networks of cooperation free from the interests and imperatives of profit. Keen to rehearse new ways of thinking-acting-being and putting into operation tools for the production of relationships that escape the codification of affect, PalD proposed to shift from an 'economy of care' to an 'ecology of care' (PalD 2006a, 43). Simultaneously deconstructing the logic of financial benefit and constructing new

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[76] The relation between "strong" and "weak" needs untangling here, especially with regards to the racialised politics of resilience. Capital imposes the greater need for relations of care with oppressed communities. In other words, the socially, politically and economically "strong" force the "weak" to care for themselves, while also paying them to care for the wealthy. This means subaltern women working in the reproductive sector are required to care double – for their own family and the families of the privileged.

subjectivities and imaginaries hoping for a society of sustainability, the group set up a barter network for the direct exchange of knowledge, resources, goods and services – without using money.

In most "developed" countries, bartering usually only exist parallel to monetary systems and to a very limited extent. Market actors use it as a method of exchange in times of financial crisis, such as when currency becomes unstable or unavailable for conducting commerce. In Spain, particularly in the Catalonia region, there is a growing number of such exchange markets, where people bring things they do not need and swap them for the unwanted goods of others (Dirksen 2009). Since the economic crisis hit Europe in 2008, bartering is increasingly seen as an alternative way of exchanging products. With few jobs and no disposable income, people are also using so-called time banks to "deposit" time, knowledge and skills and trade them for things they need. As a practice of reciprocal service exchange which uses units of time as currency, timebanking is not the same as volunteering. It is less formal with people able to give and receive time doing things they enjoy, and when they want (Mir 2013).

Based on a similar principle, PalD envisioned a system of mutual exchange that would cultivate forms of social relationality outside the neoliberal care economy. Rather than an altruistic activity, their bartering was based on a two-way process of giving and receiving:

> I take care of the children when you work in the afternoon and in return you take care of them in the weekend; I give you Spanish classes in exchange for letting me use your washing machine; you let me use your internet connection and I teach you how to make delicious recipes from my country; I'll get you a friend to marry you and, once we have the papers, we can start organising protest actions together (PalD 2004b, 247).

Swapping time, knowledge and resources through a decentralised network based on interdependency, it becomes possible to overcome the individualisation and hierarchical division of care labour. Here PalD's barter system can be regarded as an example of J. K. Gibson-Graham's non-capitalist community economy, which recognises and builds on economic interdependence while 'adopting an ethic of care of the other' (Gibson-Graham 2006, xxxvii). Rather than constituting economic

interdependency as a relationship between the 'well off' and the 'less well off', which often has the effect of setting social groups against each other (Gibson-Graham 2006, 220), PalD's system fosters an ecology of social collaboration based on equality and fairness. The idea is that everyone's knowledge and skills have the same value, whether it concerns teaching a foreign language or cleaning a bathroom.[77]

Enhancing the status of all these activities, PalD's bartering network confronts heteronormative ideas of masculine independence as well as the feminisation of the need for protection. Eschewing limited understandings of care, in which dependents are cared for by those who are independent, it becomes possible to break through existing logics of security and insecurity, and open cracks in the walls of fear and precarisation. Rather than a privatised independence that fends off the negatively connoted dependency of others, PalD's practice facilitates concrete processes of back-and-forth cooperation and social reciprocity. Their system of mutual exchange also destabilises the idea of individualised self-interest, especially as it is understood as a governmental tool of the neoliberal hegemony formulated within a short-term temporality. Intervening in capitalist cost/benefit calculations by following a longer-term perspective, it makes concrete ethical and sustainable relations of care possible.

While cultivating conditions for 'ongoingness' (Haraway 2016, 38), PalD's practice can be described as an affective ecology in which actors are equally bound and have shared agency and responsibility. Notably, their barter system fostered experimental forms of exchange between all kinds of women, not just activists-researchers but also cleaners, sex workers and translators. Because the group advanced unexpected collaborations and combinations, their practice seems inspired by a feminist ethic of "response-ability". Donna Haraway has proposed response-ability as a term that might trigger imaginations for more relational ethics and politics enacted in everyday practices of living. She posits response-ability as a collective knowing and doing, an ecology of practices that is defined by heterogeneity (Haraway 2016, 34). Crucially, what counts as response-ability is not

[77] A similar argument could be made about what count as frontline or "essential" worker during the current Covid-19 crisis.

known in advance; it emerges within a particular context and among sometimes unlikely partners, who learn how to affect, and to become affected by, one another (Kenney 2019, 7).

Looking for ways to build relations of reciprocity between women from very different geographic and ethnic backgrounds, PalD's response-able ecology of care conjugates questions of difference with attentions to affect and entanglement. At the basis of their desire for common care and care for the common lies the possibility of making different kinds of ties. Here the relationality with precarious others is not so much about fostering identifications with suffering and vulnerability, but about solidarity. Following Elisabeth Povinelli, this solidarity is not 'with this or that group', but an activity and effort of 'lending support to an infrastructure that is immanent to how existence is entangled and untangling' (Povinelli 2017).[78] Pointing towards the 'obligated coresponsiveness' people have to each other, Povinelli regards this reciprocal orientation as a form of 'mutually embodied obligation' (Povinelli 2016, 79). Such ethical obligation can also be found in PalD's practice. Moving beyond categorisations of who or what is more or less precarious, their militant political ethics is grounded in a particular form of multifaceted and shared reciprocity. Rather than the reciprocal identification in "I am you, you are me" – suggesting a relational ethics based on identity – PalD's community of care functions as an ecology in which different subjectivities are tied to one another by testifying to their 'shared obligation to obligations' (Haritaworn et al. 2013, 559).

Alerting women to their collective responsibility to re-create social and political conditions on more sustaining grounds, PalD's feminist interventions regard caring not as an option, but as a vital necessity. As Maria Puig de la Bellacasa reiterates: 'nothing holds together without relations of care' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 67). Taking care to be a practical everyday commitment, as something that women *do*,

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[78] This particular orientation comes to the fore in Povinelli's work with the Karrabing collective. This is a grassroots media collective initiated in 2008 as a form of critical activism bringing together separate indigenous clans in Australia's Northwest Territory in the wake of their government's Emergency Response intervention. Approaching film production as both a form of self-organisation and social analysis, Karrabing advocates collective indigenous agency and self-representation through the production of local artistic forms that serve as alternatives to dominant settler-colonial narratives. Rather than an identitarian "being together" in order to produce narrative cinema, their practice uses filmmaking – its infrastructure as well as its temporality – as a means to survive as a collective, as a way of "coming and staying together" (Lea and Povinelli 2018).

PalD's work insists on stressing the hands-on side of care. At the same time, their workshops instigated creative practices in order to make visible the invisibility of domestic labour. Underlining the importance of public utterances and visibility, PalD believed it was necessary to circulate statements which would place care as a conflict on the table, while linking it to questions of gender, migration, citizenship and ethnicity. Concrete examples include guerrilla-style communication and interventions in the public sphere (developing campaigns, designing posters and magazines, subverting existing advertisements, setting up a fake union for care workers) and organising so-called "escraches" (identifying and denouncing publicly those who hire domestic workers for endless days in exchange for meagre salaries and in conditions of confinement and violence). Most of these tactics were intended to disrupt cognitive schemas and thought processes concerning social reproduction in Spanish society.

However, in the end, for PalD none of these proposals and ideas for struggle produced satisfactory conflicts or significant interventions in Madrid's globalised care sector. Indeed, regarding social and political transformation in the Spanish labour market, they state: 'don't be misled into thinking we've been able to do it. We're a little group doing a little work, unfortunately we are very very far from mobilising anything major.' (PalD 2006b). Concerned with increasing the small numbers of domestic workers active in changing their precarious conditions, PalD looked for ways to produce more visibility, more mobilisation, more aggregation. In an attempt to formalise the relationships, resources and knowledges they had gained so far, the group organised itself to operate more directly and concretely in the Lavapies neighbourhood and the city of Madrid. Bringing together local activists, scholars, lawyers, social mediators and care workers, the women set up a new experiment in 2006 under the name of 'Agencia de Asuntos Precarios', which can be translated as 'Agency of Precarious Affairs'. The different politics involved in this experiment will be addressed in the following section.

5. When the common ground cannot be assumed: Partial relationality in Precarias a la Deriva

5.1. Agencia de Asuntos Precarios: The politics of law versus the politics of affect

Based in the new headquarters of the feminist social centre Eskalera Karakola in Madrid, the Agencia de Asuntos Precarios gathered information about citizenship and labour rights, providing free legal consultation and juridical support to migrant women undertaking domestic work. Initially, the Agencia focussed on specific cases. They looked into distinct policies and procedures in order to assist care workers struggling with migration documents, layoffs, workload issues, and instances of racial abuse or sexual harassment. Very soon however, PalD wanted to go beyond a strictly juridical and individualised treatment of problems. Rather than working on a one-case-basis, they aimed to improve the situations of migrant domestic workers as part of a broader struggle against the precarisation, feminisation and devaluation of care work. Their intention was to redefine personal problems into common issues and move towards the creation of an affective community of care based on solidarity.

However, this involved the acknowledgement of greater differences than expected. Similar to the tension between intermittents and précaires within the CIP-IDF discussed in chapter 3, a point of encounter among different political imaginaries came into friction in the Agencia: the politics of law versus the politics of affect. Some believed it was crucial for the organisation to emphasise struggles for changing the legal status of domestic work in private households, and focus on formalising immigration policies in order to guarantee better treatment of migrant women working in the care sector. But while some aspects of their exploitation were covered by existing laws and could therefore be considered illegal, the vast majority were not. In most cases the systemic injustice went beyond the reach of labour and employment rights and immigration legislation. Moreover, petitioning for the rights of "subalterns" within legal structures built upon the effacement and exploitation of indigenous cultures, risks reconfirming the power exercised through that law. A power of the state which, in the service of global capital, reproduces statelessness and precarious conditions (Butler 2009, i).

For these reasons PalD thought a merely juridical approach to the crisis of care was not sufficient enough. Foregrounding collective responsibility in order to build and sustain more liveable lives in contemporary capitalism, they worked towards a different kind of response to exploitation within the Spanish reproductive labour market – one that would teach participants how to affect, and become affected by, one another. This does not mean that the group regarded legal procedures to be unimportant. As Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez has argued, while the state does not directly intervene in the employment arrangement for domestic work, the reluctance to regularise this activity fosters its social devaluation, as domestic work is kept outside the framework of workers' rights and the cost of this labour is kept low (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2014, 195). Without dismissing the significance of addressing legal questions and fighting juridical injustices in the care sector, PalD did not want the Agencia's activities and procedures to become too service-oriented. Perceived as 'a group of girls committed to the cause' (Casas-Cortés 2009, 462), many members of the group felt uncomfortable being seen as merely supporters or 'simple sympathisers' (PalD 2003c). PalD wanted everyone, including themselves, to be acknowledged as part of the same struggle. Moreover, they believed the creation of hierarchies between providers and receivers, helpers and helped, solicitors and clients, or experts and non-experts advanced a process of disempowerment rather than empowerment.

From the beginning, PalD's premise was 'to facilitate a self-empowering sense that "we are the experts" (...) nobody knows "better than us" what it means to live under precarious conditions' (Casas-Cortés 2009, 453) and therefore 'we can represent ourselves' (Casas-Cortés 2009, 461). This perspective resonates with second wave feminist consciousness-raising groups where women refused to make sense of their lives through already packaged theories produced and devised by 'outsiders who were not experiencing the suffering' (Rogers 2010, 50). In this context, consciousness-raising can be analysed as an activity that entails making active choices about which (sets of) ideas to take up. Instead of passive recipients of the disciplinary effects of dominant discourses, women demonstrated their agency in being able to relate actively and critically to knowledge. The idea was that, rather than learning about oppression through pre-existing patriarchal frameworks, women would start with their own feelings, needs and desires. Insisting on the

specificity of female embodiment and situatedness, feminist consciousness-raising provided a ground for self-definition and self-representation, while enabling women to "name" things they did not previously have the language for.

As stated in chapter 2, original documents portray second wave feminist consciousness-raising groups as non-hierarchic, safe and supportive environments, within which it would be possible for women to openly express themselves, in the most honest way possible (Sarachild 1973). These groups were supposedly leaderless and mutually constituting, fostering a sense of solidarity amongst participants. However, reflections on feminist activities reveal that, due to the operation of 'hidden hierarchies,' 'cliques' and 'coercive consensus,' achieving this aim was far from easy (Rowbotham 1980, 41). For example, in talking about their lives, some women were impeded by requirements to tell their stories from a particular feminist perspective. Here, the appeal of "telling the truth" or "saying it correct" becomes problematic.

In *Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research,* Liz Stanley and Sue Wise examine consciousness-raising as a practice through which feminists strive to move themselves from the undesirable category of unknowing women to the desirable category of knowing feminists (Stanley and Wise 1983, 119). In a Foucauldian vein, they critique feminism's disciplinary tendencies and how it divides women into subcategories according to their level of consciousness. Many post-structuralist feminist thinkers have addressed the ways in which such discourses contribute to how particular ways of being a woman are taken for granted, as well as declaring some categories of female subjectivity to be more desirably occupied than others. Elsewhere, it has been argued that through consciousness-raising the experiences of a few white, heterosexual, middle-class women came to be encoded as "women's experience", obscuring the very different problems faced by working class, black and third world women (Bryson 1992, 248).

Modifying identitarian arguments about women as a group sharing a unique perspective, intersectional feminists have contributed to growing understandings of the diversity of experiences amongst women. While making visible structures of power and privilege within feminism since the 1970s, they posit that despite its

usefulness, the concept of patriarchy needs to be handled with extreme care if it is to avoid the pitfalls of essentialism and false universalism. Moreover, its use should not be taken to imply explanatory claims or the possibility of understanding gender in isolation from class, race, sexuality and other systematic inequalities. Taking into account the distinctive perspectives of BAME women, non-mothers and those identifying as LGBTQ+, these critiques have debunked the myth of all women sharing a common predicament, showing that the "we" of feminism was shaped by some bodies more than others. This is why the difficulty of saying "I" and of speaking in one's own voice has been a central subject for many feminist and post-colonial thinkers striving 'to tell less false stories' (Harding 1991, 187).

Further complicating the connections between women's experience and feminist knowledge production, postmodernist thinkers such as Donna Haraway have stressed that acknowledging the different experiences of diverse "other" women problematically left intact the notion of the 'unmarked default feminist subject' (Rogers 2010, 52) as white, heterosexual, middle class, and so on. This argument suggests that contemporary struggles over the valorisation of care and domestic labour are more than a matter of reform or inclusion. Instead, it involves radically deconstructing current paradigms of feminised precarity in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. This includes resisting definitions of who or what precarious women in the 21st century are or should be, such as those on offer from feminist theory. It is for this reason that PalD insisted on the idea of self-definition and self-representation to facilitate an empowering sense of "we are the experts".

In her evaluation of feminist theories and the politics of situatedness, Peta Hinton argues that by insisting on the primary locus of the body as the site from which one's partial perspective can be enunciated, 'a politics of location clears a space for women to speak of their experiences on their own terms' (Hinton 2014, 101). This embodied positionality is also what PalD envisioned for the Agencia. Encouraging participants to speak with a self-expressive voice, they hoped to provide a space where migrant domestic workers could become experts in their own oppression. While telling stories in their own words and gestures, they would develop their individual politics with the support of one another, rather than through the filter of preconceived ideologies about care, gender, ethnicity or citizenship. The Agencia

would then help connecting their personal narratives in order to grasp personal failures as dimensions of a systemic problem – the crisis of care. At the same time, the organisation would work towards building a sense of collective agency outside of established frameworks, such as the juridical system devised by the Spanish government. Instead of following dominant representations determined by the nation state, PalD envisaged that the Agencia would create and promote new interpretations of migrant women's lives and thus transform assumed practices and stereotypes of domestic workers:

> first, from being quiet and submissive to being eloquent and knowledgeable about their own rights and responsibilities; second, from remaining in a semi-hidden state, alone with their fears of employers and migration authorities, to feeling accompanied and supported enough to make their work public and an object of political discussion. Finally, from being under the burden of multiple super-imposed prejudices – as woman, immigrant, from different ethnic background and being a domestic servant – to being able to participate in a struggle for recognition and re-valorisation (Casas-Cortés 2009, 463-4).

While thinking from marginalised experiences of domestic labour, PalD did not dismiss the complicities produced in building relations of solidarity with migrant women. How their practice cultivated a capacity for response will be addressed in the next section.

5.2. From charity to solidarity: Double vision, approaching and distancing

While facilitating a sense of self-empowerment among female migrant domestic workers, PalD aimed to embody an ethos of solidarity rather than charity. In doing so they refused to naturalise the 'victimising objectuality' (Colectivo Situaciones 2003) that separates precarious women from their productive capacities and their possibilities to find new ways of thinking, acting and being in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. The desire to move away from manufactured forms of vulnerability imposed on oppressed subjectivities can be read as a critique of the rhetorical use of injury and the ways this enters politics. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed examines how the investment in the figure of the suffering or vulnerable other gives the Western subject 'the pleasures of being charitable' (Ahmed 2014, 162). Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's analysis of the work of the Subaltern Studies

group (Spivak 1988), Ahmed explains that the other can become an investment by providing the normative subject with a vision of what is lacking. This allows the project of speaking for the other, whose silence is read as an injury. In the context of supporting those in need of protection against precariousness, this raises the question to whom one is responsible or accountable in the process of giving voice to the voiceless.[79]

Used as a rhetorical trope, voicing the voiceless is often associated with a 'duty to listen' (Heddon 2008, 128). Although the practice of listening is key to PalD's militant political ethics, their new role as predominantly listeners became a point of discussion. Some members did not completely anticipate the strength of the emotional aspects of listening. In an interview with Maribel Casas-Cortés, one member expressed confusion about hearing long stories of distress and suffering: 'What do you do with those detailed episodes about situations of injustice at the domestic workspace?' (Casas-Cortés 2009, 479). How to link the intensity of a testimony to a constructive articulation of emotions and perhaps redirect them? For PalD it was important to create a space in which vulnerability could be felt in order to ameliorate suffering and enhance relationships between domestic workers. At the same time the group sensed the need to redefine emotions such as hopelessness and alienation, and transform them into affective forms enabling recomposition. As such, the accompanying and supporting of migrant women would have to take place in a framework of reciprocal exchange and solidarity. While taking time to listen and trying to understand the positions of female domestic workers in Madrid, PalD did not want to be perceived as merely sympathetic supporters. Rather than a duty, the group regarded the practice of listening as an intersubjective experience, instigating a process of cooperation and shared understanding.

Proposing listening as an act of mutual support and recognition, the group imagined the Agencia as a place for learning how to affect, and to become affected by, one another. As an alternative rendering of solidarity building and becoming common, this relational practice was not so much about imparting moral obligation but about

[79] Following Spivak, under conditions of subalternity – especially within the Global South – the point is to negotiate the right to speak. But in making sure the voiceless are given a right to speak this cannot mean to impose that voice.

cultivating the capacity for response. There is a particular form of collective reciprocity at stake here, one that has important consequences for the shaping of a possible community of care. Complying with Donna Haraway's feminist ethic of response-ability, everyone involved in the Agencia would be responsible to and for shaping conditions for care in the face of precarisation. However, not everyone would be *equally* responsible. As Haraway states: 'we are not all response-able in the same ways. The differences matter – in ecologies, economies, species, lives.' (Haraway 2016, 29). Regarded as a strength for developing relations of solidarity, PalD addressed differences not to form some kind of altruistic relationship between privileged and subaltern women, but for the purpose of advancing a shared principle. Focussing on the fundamental role of reproductive labour, the group was interested in creating a space where women from very different geographic and ethnic backgrounds could share knowledge and gradually organise themselves into an affective community of care.

While thinking from marginalised experiences of domestic labour in order to find mutual comprehension, PalD did not dismiss the complicities produced in their relational work. For example, in affirming those with whom they were trying to build a relation, they were aware of the danger of appropriating the accounts of undocumented care workers. This raises the question of how to engage with 'inappropriate/d others' (Haraway 2004, 69) without diminishing response-ability. Following Haraway, becoming-with each other in response-ability means 'staying with the trouble' in real and particular places and times (Haraway 2016, 3). This means that paying attention to "minor" knowledges of care involves taking into account the conditions in which these knowledges are produced. That is to say, building solidarity and response-ability with "others" involves attentiveness to one's own positionality. Haraway has described this as taking up a 'double vision'.

Expanding her theory and politics of situated knowledges and partial perspectives, Haraway discusses the idea of double vision in relation to the problem of how to take on viewpoints of the oppressed. In many currents of feminism, subjugated standpoints are preferred 'because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world.' (Haraway 1988, 584). However, there lies a serious danger of romanticising or appropriating the vision of the less

powerful while claiming to see from their positions. For example, the concealment of power relations involved in encounters between privileged and subaltern women may lead to problematic essentialising gestures or the construction of limiting identities. Wary of unlocatable and thus unaccountable knowledge claims, Haraway writes: 'To see from below is neither easily learned nor unproblematic, even if "we" "naturally" inhabit the great underground terrain of subjugated knowledges' (Haraway 1988, 584). In other words, the standpoints of the subjugated are never innocent. Subsequently, feminist activist-researchers and their specific desires and interests are not exempt from critical (re-)examination, decoding, deconstruction, and interpretation.

PalD seem to acknowledge that thinking from the positions of oppressed women in neo-patriarchal and neo-colonial capitalism often happens without doing the work of looking closely into the material and semiotic conditions from which articulations of subjugated knowledges are produced. Hinting at the inevitability of the intrinsic relationship between knowledge and power in precarity debates, they continue to stress the non-innocence of their own knowledge production while working towards the empowerment of migrant domestic workers in Spain. Emphasising the response-ability that goes with their knowledge claims, they take up a double vision to radicalise their position of feminist activist-researchers as critical 'outsiders-within' (Prins 1995, 362). Reflecting on the simultaneity of taking two approaches at the same time, Haraway explains: 'The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point. Single vision produces worse illusion than double vision' (Haraway 2004, 12). Always having one eye on the object of inquiry, and the other on the inquirer – that is, on themselves – PalD's practice seems imbued with a double vision focused on avoiding the pitfalls of confusing the collective with spokespersons or falling into fascination with the experiences of highly precarious women.

With regards to their involvement in the Agencia, having a double vision as both participant and observer involved seeing the relationship with migrant domestic workers as a *particular* relationship, one that can be described as friendship as well as strangerness. In her book *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-*

Coloniality, Sara Ahmed discusses the implications of affecting and being affected by informants seen as both friends and strangers. In the chapter 'Knowing Strangers', she rethinks notions of reciprocity and collaboration in both postmodern and feminist ethnographic research through a post-colonial feminist emphasis on the power differences between women (Ahmed 2000, 64). Pondering upon the ways in which female anthropologists both know and fail to know, Ahmed suggests that taking on a double vision means 'presupposing the impossibility of becoming or going native' (Ahmed 2000, 72).

This analysis can also be applied to PalD's militant political ethics. From the start of their project, PalD's goal was always 'to produce simultaneous movements of approaching and distancing, visualising and defamiliarising' (PalD 2003b). In approaching migrant domestic workers, the recognition of distance was crucial for the group's affective politics. In order to understand the situations of the women they were thinking and working with, PalD had to immerse themselves in their conditions without becoming them. The process involved a certain intimacy, one of becoming-like-them, as well as a distancing of knowledge. This meant they could never become part of the lives of those they were trying to inspire and empower. Following Ahmed's analysis, PalD's knowledge of migrant domestic workers rendered the group 'closer to them, but unable to be with them' (Ahmed 2000, 72). It is precisely this distantiation as outsiders-within that the group struggled with during their involvement in the Agencia.

Bearing in mind that building solidarity involves commitment and work, for Sara Ahmed alliances between people cannot be guaranteed by the pre-existing form of a social group or community, whether that form is understood as commonality or uncommonality (Ahmed 2000, 17). Proposing a model of 'strange encounters' as a form of political activism and collective work, she asserts that collectivity 'is not about proximity or distance, but a getting closer which accepts the distance, and puts it to work' (Ahmed 2000, 180). PalD seems to take a similar approach in their activist-research. They believed a care community could be formed through the very work that needed to be done in order to get closer to migrant domestic workers and break through the individualising mechanisms of the Spanish reproductive labour market. One way of understanding the getting closer to "others," without becoming

them, can be found in the notion of partial relationality, which will be discussed below.

5.3. Partial relationality: Making connections without assumptions of comparability

Setting up a space of encounter for female domestic workers, PalD aimed to create concrete transnational alliances and networks of cooperation between women from very different geographic and ethnic backgrounds. Whilst highlighting the symbolic and material asymmetries between migrant and non-migrant carers, the group actively tried to deconstruct hierarchies within the Spanish reproductive labour market reinforced by European immigration laws. In doing so they engaged the complicities produced in the encounters – the friction between the politics of law and the politics of affect; the inequalities among privileged and subaltern women – and addressed their own implications as research-activists. At the same time, they explored pathways towards alternative social ontologies in order to demonstrate that the impossibility of defining an identitarian "we" still enables a sense of togetherness. So as to better understand the implications of PalD's desire for common care and care for the common, the following focusses not so much on *what* it is that the women may share, but rather *how* they make connections with others.

One way of conceptualising the manner with which occupants of different positionalities relate and communicate can be found in the notion of partiality. As I discussed earlier, Donna Haraway employs this term to challenge the assumption that all knowers are effectively interchangeable, and that knowledge exists separately from them. Besides throwing the neutrality of feminist epistemology into question, Haraway's motive is to envision a world where people are 'not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints' (Haraway 2004, 13). Stressing the need for critical and complex feminist research projects, which refuse to resolve ambiguities and value heterogeneity, she writes:

> The split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history. Splitting, not being, is the

privileged image for feminist epistemologies of scientific knowledge (Haraway 1988, 586).

In this context, partiality is about multiplicities within and among fragmented subjectivities. Following Haraway's feminist material semiotics, the adjective "partial" means "split" and "double" at the same time. When taking on a partial perspective, one looks at oneself from the outside as another body or entity – as a self split from itself or, indeed, as a double. Such positioning challenges the concept of one true and complete self, as well as the total becoming other. To reiterate Haraway's words:

> The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another. Here is the promise of objectivity: a scientific knower seeks the subject position, not of identity, but of objectivity, that is, partial connection (Haraway 1988, 586).

In her book *Partial Connections*, Marilyn Strathern argues that this is the kind of connection one might conceive between entities that are made and reproduced in different ways but work together (Strathern 1991, 37).[80] Echoing Haraway's analysis of the cyborg[81] as a field of extensions, Strathern claims partiality is neither a singular "I" nor a plural "we", neither one nor many, but a circuit of connections that joins parts that cannot be compared insofar as they are not isomorphic with one another (Strathern 1991, 54). This affective circuit cannot be conceived as a single unit. Nor do its parts add up to any whole. That is because, notwithstanding the connections, the conditions of the entities composing partiality are incommensurable (Cadena 2015, 31).

[80] While exposing taken-for-granted conceptual logics in the field of anthropology, Strathern has argued for a more critically reflexive knowledge practice that studies relations with relations. She writes about 'accepting the risk of relentless contingency, of putting relations at risk with other relations, from unexpected worlds.' (Haraway 2016, 34). Subsequently, her idea of partial connections can be used to think about new ways of living within structural uncertainty.
[81] Following Donna Haraway's generative trope, the cyborg is a set of partial connections between two or more parts that cannot be reduced to one another but nonetheless relate to one another. Those parts may be material (between machine and human or between human and animal), political (between different social groups or political imaginaries and commitments), or they may exist in a tension between reality and fiction. Crucially, these parts do not add up to any whole. This is why the cyborg is an entity characterised by partiality.

While resisting divisions into units and wholes, the notion of partial connections offers the possibility of conceptualising subjectivity with relations integrally implied. Whether it concerns singular or pluralistic entities, the argument is that "this" – whatever "this" may be – is included in "that", but "this" cannot be reduced to "that" (Law 2004, 64). Applied to questions around commonality, the individual "I" is included in the collective "we", and the collective "we" is included in the individual "I" – but neither is reducible to the other. Because subjects are never corresponding or similar in form, partiality is able to create 'webs of connections' and 'shared conversations' (Haraway 1988, 584) between beings who do not require being bound by the appeal to common unity or origin, but who are connected as different, exterior presences to one another.

Entertaining the possibility of making connections without assumptions of comparability, the idea of partial connections offers an imaginative entry into how we might conceive of the social relationships in PalD's care community. With regards to their involvement in the Agencia, PalD's world was included in the world that migrant domestic workers inhabited and vice versa. Their world, however, could not be reduced to PalD's, or PalD's world to theirs. Because the women could only ever make partial connections with "others", PalD's practice aspired to dialogue rather than identification. This orientation suggests a critique of the idea that "I am you, you are me". While this reciprocal identification can ethically interpellate subjects and make them responsible, it is grounded in a normative commitment to equality that risks negating hierarchisations and differences among the precarious. Pondering upon the intersubjective basis of self-narration, Adriana Cavarero writes:

> No matter how much you are similar and consonant, (...) your story is never my story. No matter how much the larger traits of our life-stories are similar, I still do not recognise myself *in* you and, even less, in the collective *we*. I do not dissolve both into a common identity, nor do I digest your tale in order to construct the meaning of mine (Cavarero 2000, 92).

Alluding to a relation that can only ever be partial, Judith Butler makes a similar argument in her article 'Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation' (2012). Addressing the ethical obligations that emerge both at a distance and within relations of proximity, Butler writes:

> When any of us are affected by the sufferings of others, it is not only that we put ourselves in their place or that they usurp our own place; perhaps it is the moment in which a certain chiasmic link comes to the fore and I become somehow implicated in lives that are clearly not the same as my own (Butler 2012, 149).

Asserting precariousness implies exposure both to those we know and to those we do not know, Butler argues that being impinged upon by the dependency of others constitutes obligations toward "others" – most of whom we cannot name. This means that the "we" does not, and cannot, recognise itself. As such collectivity is constituted by alterity, rather than familiarity. Critically reflecting on processes and practices of inclusion in political communities, Butler states: 'the obligations "we" have are precisely those that disrupt any established notion of the "we" (Butler 2009, 14). Subsequently, the idea of 'a common vulnerability' (Butler 2005, 100), finds its ethical claim not so much in the figure of precariousness, but in the injustice of its selective allocation. Rather than a normative commitment to equality, this social ontology is about making us more attentive to the differential distribution of precarity, its normative force and the mechanisms that produce and obscure inequalities within our contemporary society.

Yet the impossibility of reciprocal identification, or a collective "we," does not mean ethical relations of care are not possible. If people understand their obligations as shared and mutually embodied, a form of social interpenetration may emerge, one that ties different subjectivities to one another and testifies to their response-ability. This is where partial relationality comes in. Conceived as an affective exchange in which differences matter, partiality produces simultaneous movements of approaching and distancing. It is precisely this kind of feminist objectivity that instigates the response-ability to engage with unexpected others (Haraway 2016, 209). It allows for a rendering of reality that, explicitly coming from a particular or specific site, accepts its non-totalising character, as well as the existence of other valid renderings coming from diverse locations.

This is also how PalD operated in the Agencia. By practising a self-conscious getting closer to "others" without becoming them, and by making connections without assumptions of comparability, their practice was able to overcome some of the distances between politics and subjectivities within the organisation. Rather than an

individualised independence that fends off the negatively connoted dependency of others, their recognition of partial relationality formed the beginning of a process of 'constructing the common in a moment in which the common is shattered' (PalD 2005c). While acknowledging the partial connections within and between precarious women, PalD aimed to build response-able relationships of care while recognising divergent sites and positionalities. As a consciously enacted strategy for social and political organisation, their approach offered a pathway to reconsider the divide between friends and strangers, between commonality and uncommonality, between sameness and difference.

5.4. Difficult and unrelenting work: Thinking-acting-being with care

Throughout their participation in the Agencia, PalD insisted on the need to account for "who" it is that speaks or organises collectivity. Acknowledging the asymmetrical power relations at play in the organisation, those involved had to actively think about how they would work with, and speak to, precarious women and foster response-ability in collective listening. While these issues have at their centre a concern with accountability and responsibility, the question of who is speaking, who is spoken of, and who listens is often a result, as well as an act, of political struggle (Alcoff 1991, 15). Notably, PalD did not shy away from this struggle.

In interviews with Maribel Casas-Cortés (2009), PalD talks about how, in due course, their role in the Agencia became an object of controversy and a dilemma for the members of the group, whose own positionalities were displaced in order to further provide and create networks of support. While reflecting on their involvement in the organisation, the women openly admit that the terms and requirements for the establishment of solidarity across difference(s) can be demanding. Shifting the focus away from themselves, acknowledging conditions of "others" and attempting to stand with them in solidarity, while at the same time thinking about their own desire to create a community of care based on affect and reciprocity, turned out to be far from easy.

By acknowledging that forging, maintaining and evolving alliances demands difficult and unrelenting work, PalD did not expect the divisions within the Agencia to be

rectified overnight. Nor did the group look for quick solutions in the face of the complexities that members faced while exploring the possibility of solidarity between women from different localities. It follows that in trying to slowly and carefully break through habitual polarisations, such as between the politics of law and the politics of affect, desires for total consensus should be questioned. When building a community of care that manages to hold together different politics, it is necessary to oppose utopian understandings of coming together as a social congregation free of friction. Affective encounters and communicative exchanges with "inappropriate/d others" are not necessarily harmonious. There might be antagonisms between those that demand clearer forms of identification, and those that appeal to forms of non-identitarian belonging.

Throughout their project, PalD acknowledged that there was always the possibility that their practice would produce relations marked by sensations of unease and discomfort rather than closeness. However, taking this risk seems essential to the "critical efficacy" of PalD's militant political ethics. As Judith Butler observes: 'The question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of our schemes of intelligibility, the site where we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be assumed' (Butler 2005, 21). Instead of presenting a unified subject as a prerequisite for 'community-as-togetherness' (Bishop 2004, 79), those interested in building alliances with others should consider working towards modes of connectivity that are predicated not on social harmony, but on exposing that which is repressed in sustaining the semblance of such harmony.[82] This relates to the problem in precarity activism discussed in chapter 3, which seems to lie within the idea of coming together as a source of collective identity able to put forward effective political strategies. As pointed out by post-structuralist, feminist and post-colonial critics, the aspiration towards organising around the dream of a political community can problematically suppress and exclude otherness.

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[82] According to Linnell Secomb it is not disagreement, resistance, and agitation that erodes community, but 'rather the repression or suppression of difference and disagreement in the name of unity and consensus which destroys the engagement and interrelation of community' (Secomb 2000, 134).

Committed to building solidarity across difference(s), PalD's project is about searching for commonalities as well as the fostering of singularities, 'while maintaining the tension between them' (Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias 2007, 118). Rather than resolving contradictions into larger "wholes", their collectivity aims to hold incompatible things together because all are necessary and true (Haraway 2004, 7). Instead of a weakness, the group regards the multiplicity of availabilities, means and resources among different subjectivities as a strength for developing collective reflections and concrete initiatives. While partially relating between various symbolic and material divisions and asymmetries amongst female carers, they actively tried to break through hierarchies among women working in the Spanish reproductive sector. In the hope that everyone in the Agencia could participate in the struggle for dignity within the globalised domestic labour market, PalD once again placed the question of care at the centre:

> only if the maids, the whores, the phone sex operators, grant-holding students or researchers, telephone operators, social workers, nurses, friends, mothers, daughters, compañeras, lovers... only if the caregivers, which all women are and everyone should be, rediscover the fundamental role of the labour (remunerated or not) of care and of the social wealth it produces and we withdraw from the invisibilisation, hyperexploitation, infra-valorisation or social stigma of which care is the object, only then will we be prepared to extract from care its transformative force (PalD 2006a, 42).

In terms of political practice and strategy, this statement demonstrates the extent to which PalD was able to hold different female subjectivities and their labour practices in some degree of conceptual and material separation while articulating them in struggle. Stressing the importance of speaking for something, rather than someone, Sara Ahmed states that gestures of solidarity do not assume that people's struggles are the same, or that their hope is for the same future. She proclaims that solidarity involves 'the recognition that even if we do not have the same feelings, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground' (Ahmed 2014, 189). While modestly trying to find and name this common ground, PalD conceived of care not only as a turning towards oneself and others, but also as caring for the situation of gathering bodies, spaces and temporalities. This approach resonates with Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's proposal for thinking with care.

For Puig de la Bellacasa, thinking with care stems from awareness of the efforts it takes to cultivate relatedness in diverseness. This means collective and accountable knowledge construction that does not negate dissent or the impurity of coalitions: 'It speaks for ways of taking care of the unavoidably thorny relations that foster rich, collective, interdependent, albeit not seamless, thinking-with' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 79). While proposing alternative narratives of solidarity building, she posits that learning from complex conflicts is vital for acting and being-with. Rather than models of resistance to domination that would expect actors to rely on evident or given bonding, Puig de la Bellacasa stresses the need to open ourselves to unexpected and perhaps 'unnatural' alliances in order to test the edges of a "we" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 80). Significantly, she reads such moments of 'dissenting-within a collective' as instances of thinking with care.

This is also how we may conceive of PalD's involvement in the Agencia. Carefully listening, responding and adapting, their militant political ethics consisted in nurturing partial relationality with others without assumptions of comparison, and without becoming them. This approach suggests that as long as precarious women are willing to articulate the starkly diverse experiences of exploitation – stratified by sexism, racism, and being excluded from basic human rights (as migrant) – they can carve out possibilities for solidarity. Putting into practice Donna Haraway's epistemology of engaged and accountable positioning the group did not seek partiality for its own sake but rather for the sake of connections. However different the politics, subjectivities and lives of those implicated may appear, and however antagonistic their interests may seem, PalD demonstrates that response-ability, mutual exchange and comprehension of each other's actions remained possible.

PalD's commitment to tell stories about feminised precarity in ways that emphasise non-innocent relations has contributed to the ongoing re-enactment of a feminist politics of care as an everyday practice. Like kpD, PalD's work is part of the urgent, fundamental and politically indispensable task of developing new practices of the self, and the formation of "an art of living" under governmental precarisation in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism. Moving towards a practice of shared interdependence, in order to create new socio-political alliances between precarious subjectivities in individualising societies, PalD comes to the question of ethics not as

philosophers but as practitioners. As opposed to a moral imperative or transcendent value, PalD's logic of care can be imagined as an intrinsic ethical practice, one that is transindividual, intersubjective, and immanent: 'it does not depend on one but rather on many and is thus inseparable from the social, material, and concrete forms of organisation of the tasks related to care' (PalD 2006a, 44). This is precisely what PalD's proposal for placing care in the centre consists of: recognising the impossibility of separating the materiality of (precarious) bodies – despite the determination of late capitalism to do just that (PalD 2006a, 42).

Conclusion – Critical agency and collective resistance against governmental precarisation

Critically appraising kpD's artistic practice and PalD's activist research, this thesis can be seen as an effort to rethink relationality under the becoming-normal of precarisation in Western Europe. I position myself in relation to the current and past discourses of precarity within which my two case studies are located by exploring possibilities for critical agency and collective resistance under the individualising mechanisms of neoliberal self-government. Drawing upon the theoretical work of Isabell Lorey, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Donna Haraway, my project consists in *redescribing* the works of kpD and PalD, in the attempt to make them become 'thicker' (Haraway and Goodeve 2000, 108) then they first seem. I argue that through methods of militant research and consciousness-raising, both practices refresh the epistemologically, ethically and politically necessary critical encounter between the self and others. Ultimately my research demonstrates that it is through the articulation of partial relationality that self-precarisation can be transformed into an instrument of resistance against dominant and internalised discourses and practices of governance.

Expanding the situated knowledges and discursive strategies of both kpD and PalD and bringing them into the present, this conclusion discusses the implications of articulating partiality as a pathway towards solidarity across different politics, lives and subjectivities in contemporary society. As such it proposes a conceptual reconfiguration of insecure work and life in the 21st century to enable the imagination and production of an insurgent togetherness at a moment in which the common ground seems shattered. Working through the contradictions experienced by precarious subjectivities – within themselves, between each other and in relation to their working and living conditions – I argue that my project is not just about developing critical capabilities but also makes it possible to understand what is common in governmental precarisation. In doing so it is essential to think through the ways of becoming common not only in the present but in the future too. Most importantly, it addresses the question of *how* to do so. By looking at practices that refigure commonality from within fragmented experience, I consider strategies for self-organisation in order to overcome some of the distances that a segmented and

competitive social space reproduces everywhere. In order to reiterate the basis for my tentative hypothesis, the following will provide a brief summary of the four chapters and the arguments made.

1. From self-precarisation to the critical reformation of subjectivity

Drawing upon Isabell Lorey's writings on the forms of regulation in modern Western societies, my PhD started by unpacking the complex interactions between instruments of governing and the conditions of economic exploitation. In addition to this it addressed modes of subjectivation through the ambivalence regarding the seemingly dichotomous processes of domination and self-empowerment. Employing a Foucauldian-inflected genealogical analysis of the term "precarious", the first chapter investigated some of the historical practices through which insecurity has become an object of techniques and deployments of power. I looked at the precarial relations between owners and non-owners in early modern Europe, the exploitative dynamics between capitalists and wage labourers in the 19th century, the restructuring of production that accompanied the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism, as well as the notion of human capital becoming the predominant subjective norm of contemporary neoliberalism. Confronting the relocation of properties, functions and activities previously attributed to the nation state, the hierarchical firm, the nuclear family and the centralised trade union, I focussed on processes of insourcing that enabled a new form of subjugation in post-industrial societies, namely: governmental precarisation.

Operating through the privatisation of risks and self-responsibility, governmental precarisation can be understood as a power relation that consists of inwardly held self-discipline. Because people assimilate abilities in order to govern themselves and be subjects of governance, they look for personalised solutions to meet individual needs. This entrepreneurial model erodes social relations because it replaces them with a competitive and purely economic logic. The disappearance of any sense of interdependency or mutual obligation leads to the weakening of collective bonds and the proliferation of feelings of isolation. In the permanent race to secure one's own life against the achievement of others, the fact that a better life cannot be an individual pursuit becomes highly obscured. I explained that, as a mode of

exploitation, governmental precarisation is not easy to discern, because it works *through* and not necessarily *against* subjectivity. Following Michel Foucault, this power not only unilaterally acts on individuals as a form of oppression, but also activates and constructs them as subjects. It is precisely this paradoxical simultaneity that constitutes the ambivalence of self-precarisation.

The second chapter of my PhD sought to differentiate self-precarisation from the situation in which self-determined modes of being contribute to the conditions for becoming an active part of oppressive relations in post-Fordist capitalism. It did so by engaging with the artistic practice of the Berlin-based group kleines postfordistisches Drama (kpD). Comprised of Brigitta Kuster, Isabell Lorey, Marion von Osten and Katja Reichard, kpD was developed in the framework of the research and exhibition project *Atelier Europa* at Kunstverein München in 2003. Coming together through a shared desire to critically engage with neoliberal economisation from the perspective of culture, and to reflect on their own participation as actors in this discourse, I considered how the four women embarked on a collaborative investigation to re-articulate the conscious and voluntary acceptance of precarious work and life in Western Europe. Coupling the sociological analysis of cultural production with questions of subjectivation and resistance, the group investigated conditions of creative and cognitive labour, particularly as these forms of labour depart from their celebrated positions within European cultural policy and social theory.

In order to make sense of the continued, and in many ways intensified, mechanisms of labour exploitation I experienced working as a freelance graphic designer in Amsterdam, I conducted extensive research into kpD's video project *Kamera Läuft!* (2004). For this project, Kuster, Lorey, von Osten and Reichard interviewed fifteen "Kulturarbeiter" living and working in Berlin – including themselves – about their flexible and mobile labour practices. In order to bring together the accounts, the group translated the results of their 'workers'-inquiry-without-a-workplace' (Vishmidt 2017, 225) into a script, hybridising the personal testimonies of the interviewees into composite dramatised identities. Subsequently they hired nine professional actors to play out the small post-Fordist work/life dramas that occur in cultural contexts. The result is a 35-minute fictional "sociological" documentary

describing the productive cycles within the labour practices of creative workers, as well as the levels of exploitation, and the ability of cultural producers to react to their changing awareness of self-precarisation.

Concerned by the ideological restructuring of cultural forms of labour in an age of creative industries, urban development strategies and "Ich-AG" schemes, I discussed the ways in which kpD's project troubled the regulatory mechanisms through which cultural producers are produced and maintained as entrepreneurial subjects. As I argued, their work demonstrates capitalism's adaptation to artistic and social critiques that increasingly corrode the politicisation of life, paving the way for governmental precarisation. At the same time, their artistic practice constitutes an intervention into the isolated situations of creative practitioners in the 21st century. Self-consciously questioning strong desires for freedom, autonomy and self-determination in the context of cultural production, the group explored 'lines capable of collectivity' (kpD 2005c) amidst pervasive individualisation in the creative sector.

Stressing the performative elements of entrepreneurial labour, I discussed the narrative of *Kamera Läuft!* revolving around a casting competition. The process engendered both the creation and representation of specific interactions of capital and cultural production, in which issues of virtuosity and self-promotion are taken to extremes. Depicting creative workers striving against each other to sell their cultural capital, kpD enacts the combative structure of contemporary society that relies on a theatrical exhibition of individuality. The mediated public sphere in which the candidates are forced to produce and reproduce themselves, creates a dynamic that prevents them from finding commonality within their individuated understandings and subjectivities. Drawing attention to the desire to improve precarious existence through forms of aesthetic self-stylisation, *Kamera Läuft!* illustrates how struggles around flexible work and life are viewed as a private problem. As such kpD problematises the potential for social transformation in the cultural sector. Instead of emancipated subjectivities, the protagonists are enacted as Faustian characters who perpetuate the very systems that seek to oppress and limit their autonomy and freedom. Although they perceive certain forms of injustice

that collectively put them in an exploitable position, they do not develop collective strategies in order to counteract individualising forms of production.

However, through the narration of the everyday lived experiences of those who "freely" choose insecure living and working conditions, I argued that kpD's project offers a potent strategy for subverting self-precarisation. Notably, Kuster, Lorey, von Osten and Reichard turned the casting competition, with its normalising mechanisms, into a media spectacle. Through the emphasis on liveness and frontality, and the ways the protagonists perform their constructed identities, they stressed the representational mode that is presented in the depiction of cultural production. Exposing the constructed artificiality of their video, the women bring into action the so-called 'dispositif' (Foucault 1995, 194) of their project. While blending the realms of front stage, backstage, and off-stage, kpD's pseudo-reality format shows cultural producers working *in* and *for* the project at the same time. The interplay between observed action, in-camera testimony and behind-the-scenes fragments is further complicated through the mixing of roles between authors, directors, producers and actors. As such kpD's video consists of an ambiguous interaction of the pre-scripted and non-scripted, the performed and the non-performed, fiction and non-fiction. I specified that in their project a continuous process of "selving" takes place, whereby "true selves" are seen to emerge via "social selves" and are developed through the "performed selves" projected for the viewer.

Bringing into play the matter and the making of precarious subjectivity, I claimed that kpD presents cultural producers as both objects and subjects *in* and *of Kamera Läuft!*. This simultaneity creates a complex but compelling self-reflexive practice. On the one hand, kpD's theatricalisation of the confessional format corresponds to a growing obsession with the self and the generalised compulsion to self-expression in contemporary society. On the other hand, it challenges the obedient mode of confession and its claim to legitimacy and truth, as well as the ways that cultural producers are bound to this format through certain deployments of truth. Engaging Foucault's notion of parrhesia – 'the act of telling all' (Foucault 2005, 366) – as a practice of freedom, I argued that *Kamera Läuft!* undoes the work of confession as a form of domination. I described the confessional mode in *Kamera Läuft!* as a practice of not being precarised quite so much by linking kpD's non-normative

practice of truth-telling to Foucault's concern with the 'art of not being governed quite so much' (Foucault 2007b, 45).

Committed to redressing the realities of contemporary cultural production, kpD constructs an apparatus that can be critical of its own processes and organisation. Further exploring what such transformation of subjectivity involves, I turned to Judith Butler's study of the figure of the psyche that turns against itself. While filming and recording themselves, the characters in *Kamera Läuft!* establish themselves as self-reflective and self-reflexive beings. Shifting between interior and exterior discourses, they destabilise the self-enclosed frameworks and "Me Inc." models upon which ego-centred neoliberal identities are based. Here the practice of self-examination and self-expression – of turning on and stalking the self – becomes a practice of critical introspection, which is, at the same time, attuned to a critique of the world outside. Revealing the potential of kpD's project, I claimed that *Kamera Läuft!* is itself a vital form of self-transformation, a turning *within* the self, a critical reformation of subjectivity, and, as such, a form of resistance against dominant discourses and practices of governance.

Besides analysing kpD's work as an aesthetic product "representing" self-precarisation, I studied their practice as a mode of knowledge production and critical self-organisation. Starting from the deconstruction of the realities of "freely" chosen precarious conditions, their video project becomes an instrument for exploring new ways of interpreting and shaping the paradoxical status of cultural production in Western Europe. By trying to connect individualised problems to structural changes happening in neoliberal economies, kpD used consciousness-raising to share personal experiences of cultural production in such a way that they bring out their political implications and develop a strategy for change. Probing *Kamera Läuft!* as a consciousness-raising tool, I drew on my own experience of encountering the video as a device for artists and creative practitioners to raise awareness of the oppressive mechanisms they are involved in. I argued that by watching *Kamera Läuft!* together and collectively discussing its resonances, viewers become active participants in the creation of meaning around self-precarisation in the creative sector. As such I contented that kpD did not only develop an artistic practice but also a theoretical discourse and socio-political field of action.

kpD's work plays an important role in countering widespread discourses blaming cultural producers themselves for their precarious working and living conditions. It does so by putting forward new perspectives on the entanglements of governmental precarisation and the appropriation of strong beliefs in self-determination and independence. By disseminating experiences of self-precarisation, *Kamera Läuft!* provides a starting point from which individualised subjects can begin to overcome the personalisation of oppression and create new forms of sociality through the realisation of common conditions. This realisation, however, does not automatically empower people to take action and make change. kpD's awareness of, and desire to theorise and re-articulate, the conditions of their own labour was instrumental in the development of a new politics of precarity in the context of creative labour in the early 2000s. Nevertheless, their work does not actively engage the question of wider social and political organisation under governmental precarisation. It is precisely this problem that I addressed in the third chapter of my PhD. I did so by stating that in order to explore possibilities for struggle and resistance under the exploitative mechanisms of neoliberal self-government, it is necessary to work out if, and when, new collective forms of action take shape, and which forms they are, or could be.

2. From the feminisation of labour to thinking-acting-being with care

Regarding the ways in which workers, identifying themselves as precarious, have mobilised in Europe around the turn of the 21st century, the third chapter started with a survey of social and political movements such as the Intermittents du Spectacle in France and the transnational EuroMayDay mobilisations held between 2001 and 2006. Claiming precarity as their rallying cry, these movements brought together antagonisms against shared yet distinct forms of exploitation in post-industrial societies. Their goal was to represent, unite and empower those who, by the precarious nature of their mode of being, were isolated, disseminated and often invisible. My analysis concentrated on the French CIP-IDF and the Italian Chainworkers. These two independent groups aligned themselves with different practices of refusal emerging in various social spheres in order to turn limited collective actions into a multi-sector protest. Eschewing the hierarchising of structural insecurity into low and high sectors, they rejected the reproduction of

conventional categories and divisions between cultural workers and other precariously employed persons, such as temp workers in chain stores, students and (undocumented) migrants.

While sidestepping the seemingly disparate fields of the political and the cultural, I contended that precarity movements have tested new forms of struggle and developed new perspectives on labour organisation and social rights. Notably, the organisation of their activities – ranging from syndicalist mobilisation to subvertising, culture jamming and media stunts – took place outside the realm of traditional union activities, sometimes even in direct opposition to them. Playfully turning knowledge about precarisation against itself, their 'non-representationist practices' (Lorey 2015, 9), such as San Precario, La Precariomanzia and Precariopoli, allude to a radically different way of fighting against casualisation in cognitive-cultural economies. It is notable that in order to make political action attractive to young people who had no memory of class struggle, their cultural activism, visual identities and guerrilla style communication tactics contributed to shifting the meaning of "precarious" towards a certain ambiguity by denouncing the consequences of flexible work while also showing its potentialities.

Because the familiar discourse about returning to full-time, life-long and highly protected jobs seemed unable to respond to the new conjuncture, some precarity activists focused on the revamping of declining welfare systems in Western Europe. Their protests include demands for state-guaranteed employment and sustainable social entitlements such as commonfare, universal basic income and flexicurity. I stressed the danger that these measures, insofar as they cast the nation state as the provider of continuity and certainty, reinforce the dominant rhetoric of securitisation. Moreover, as capital continues to win lavish returns from subcontracting and outsourcing, the European labour market is more and more awash with unregulated forms of 'flexploitation' (Ross 2008). Due to the continuing rise in the amount of self-employed and freelance workers in the gig economy, we need to understand that security is moving from social protection and labour rights to self-insurance and individual responsibility. This logic concretises itself in practices of containment and generates forms of isolation that persist in the

personalisation of oppression. This is precisely what kpD tried to address in their re-articulation of self-precarisation.

Nevertheless, we cannot leave unnoticed the fact that the self-exploiting subject is conditioned by the new phase of global capitalism, which remains a class system with growing inequalities. Instead of serving the protection and security of people, the institutions of the 'precautionary state' (Lorey 2011) support economically productive and self-governing citizens who insure themselves and precarise others at the same time. This points to an important and sometimes overlooked feature of the precarious: that of structural exclusion and marginalisation. Within the welfare state paradigm of protection, I argued that liberal governmentality is based on multiple forms of precarisation through *othering*. On the one hand, the un(der)paid labour of women in the reproductive area of the private sphere, while on the other hand, the precarity of all those excluded from the nation-state compromise between capital and labour – those considered abnormal, foreign or poor, as well as those living under extreme conditions of exploitation in the colonies (Lorey 2015, 36).

By taking into account the divisions of labour in neo-patriarchal and neo-colonial capitalism, I tied the conceptualisation of the precariat to accusations of androcentrism and Eurocentrism which make different precarities less visible. I claimed that the discernment of precarity as an a-typical situation underpins many of the material and immaterial conditions through which contemporary forms of vulnerability are understood in the West. This means that precarious working and living conditions only begin to be discussed at a societal level at the moment a particular subject – male, white, urban, independent, creative – begins to feel the negative effects of the post-Fordist job market. Following feminist and post-colonial arguments for more awareness of gendered and racialised labour relations within the precarity debate, the fourth chapter of my PhD extended the scope of issues around exploitative work in neoliberal capitalism. I confronted the myth of the precariat sharing a common predicament by taking a more intersectional approach to the analysis of governmental precarisation. I did so by looking at the activist research of the Madrid-based feminist collective Precarias a la Deriva (PalD).

Questioning the disruptive possibilities of the EuroMayDay actions and the celebration of flexible lifestyles, PalD stressed that as good as uncertainty is in a certain chosen mode, it is also heterodetermined (PalD 2005c). Accounting for issues surrounding aspirational normativity and suspended agency in an era defined by conflicting gender role expectations and requirements, the group argued that neoliberal demands for self-optimisation are placed disproportionately on women. Building on feminist Marxist critiques of the feminisation of labour, I analysed this argument in relation to the centrality of capitalist production and the dogma of creativity in evaluations and representations of precarity. Addressing the problematic status of reproductive work done by women in the "non-productive" sphere, I asserted that PalD's work reiterates the need to go beyond binaries of production and reproduction, even when reformulated as capital/life. Leaving behind limited understandings of affect, their practice demonstrates the possibility for breaking through existing logics of security and insecurity, and thus opens cracks in the walls of fear and precarisation.

Operating under a common name since 2002, members of PalD allocated much of their militant investigations to the ongoing invisibility of care and domestic work as the motor of contemporary capital, with a focus on the prevalence of migrant women working in the Spanish reproductive labour market. While exploring the transformations taking place in a Europeanising and globalising Spain, PalD draws attention to the variations in social recognition and degrees of vulnerability among precarious women living and working in Madrid. Drifting through the areas of daily life of waitresses, teachers, telephone operators, nurses, sex workers, translators, cleaners and retail workers, their practice can be seen as a way of thinking towards collective action, 'an effort to locate the scattered sites of conflict and know how to name them' (PalD 2003b). Using Donna Haraway's arguments for thinking and practicing knowledge in accountable ways, I evaluated PalD's innovative research-intervention method as a form of feminist embodiment that is not about being in a 'fixed' place (Haraway 1991, 154). While taking into account the dialogue and complicity produced in their encounters, I described their practice as a situated epistemology that is constituted by partial perspectives.

Spatially and temporally prefiguring a "we" through conducting interviews in movement – asking 'what is your strike?' – PalD developed a sensitivity for the sometimes radically different experiences of women working in precarious and feminised sectors. With the concrete possibility of embodying the city of Madrid otherwise, I argued their technique aspired to producing simultaneous movements of approaching and distancing, visualising and defamiliarising. This is also reflected in my analysis of PalD's publication and video project *A la Deriva, Por los Circuitos de la Precariedad Femenina* (*Adrift Through the Circuits of Feminised Precarious Work*) from 2003. Shifting between different forms of narration – from intimate memoir-like accounts to explicitly political statements – their kaleidoscopic collages and audio-visual bricolages cross demarcations of inside and outside, as well as of the private and the public. While mimicking PalD's practice of collective listening and exchanging narratives, the book and the video articulate the polyphonic, and in-process, outcomes of PalD's militant investigations. Through their distinct methodology of everyday struggle, slow activism and careful organising, I evaluated PalD's relational and dialogic configuration of feminised precarity as a form of consciousness-raising and becoming common itself.

Connecting the axes of stratification that traverse precariousness with the multidimensional crisis of care, my inquiry traced some of the practical and epistemological shifts in PalD's organising practice. Focusing on how the group began to politicise the everyday lives of women working in the globalised care sector, I analysed PalD's use of the slogan "cuidadania" as well as their proposals for 'a very careful strike' and a barter system in the attempt to shift from an economy to an ecology of care. I asserted that by deconstructing hierarchies within the Spanish reproductive labour market, as they are reinforced by European immigration laws, the group developed a self-consciously enacted strategy for building transnational alliances and networks of cooperation between women from very different geographic and ethnic backgrounds. Subverting neo-patriarchal and neo-colonialist perspectives through which reproductive labour is devalued, they created a lens that modified capitalist understandings of care as well as dominant conceptions of collectivity determined by nation states. In doing so, PalD confronted heteronormative ideas of masculine independence as well as the feminisation of the

need for protection. Enabling an alternative response to the "problem" of insecurity, the group moved towards the instantiation of a care community.

I analysed PalD's desire for common care and care for the common as a form of thinking-acting-being in which relationality with precarious others is considered fundamental. Understanding care not only in terms of practices that endow life with sustainability, but also as a specific form of approach to such practices, I argued PalD's practice becomes the foundation for a 'militant political ethics' (Mennel and Nowotny 2011, 26). This ethics, grounded in a particular form of shared reciprocity, concerns the constitution of commonality itself. I regarded the ways PalD organised their workshops on globalised care to build concrete relations of solidarity between women from multiple localities as the advancement of shared principles, rather than a shared identity. I found that this approach serves to alert individualised subjectivities to their collective responsibility in the effort to re-create social and political conditions on more sustainable grounds. At the same time, it acknowledges that not everyone is equally responsible, that is to say, that differences matter.

Pushing some of the actions and arguments surrounding governmental precarisation to a more philosophically engaged encounter, I contended that PalD's care community conjugated questions of difference with specific attention to affect and entanglement. I substantiated this claim by linking Judith Butler's reframing of socio-ontological precariousness and political precarity with Donna Haraway's feminist ethics of response-ability. Applying these perspectives to PalD's involvement in the Agencia de Asuntos Precarios (Agency of Precarious Affairs) in 2006, I stressed that relationality with precarious others is not so much about fostering identification with suffering and vulnerability but about solidarity. Engaging the friction between the politics of law and the politics of affect, as well as the symbolic and material asymmetries between privileged and subaltern women in the Agencia, I advanced Haraway's 'positioned rationality' (Haraway 1988, 590) to argue for PalD's practice of getting closer to 'unexpected others' (Haraway 2016, 209) without becoming them. Entertaining the possibility of making connections without assumptions of comparability, I employed the notion of partiality so as to conceive of the social relationships in PalD's care community. Rather than an individualised independence that fends off the negatively connoted dependency of

others, I proclaimed that the recognition of partial connections forms the beginning of a process of constructing the common at a moment in which the common is shattered.

3. Partial relationality in kleines postfordistisches Drama and Precarias a la Deriva

My PhD demonstrates that a refusal of governmental precarisation within neoliberal capitalism cannot be addressed without working through the contradictions experienced by people: within themselves, between each other, and in relation to their working and living conditions. Signifying a process of subjugation as well as a process of becoming, my analysis of self-precarisation takes into account the full ambivalence of the conditions of its operation. I maintain that any examination of power that is imposed on individuals but also animates their agency, needs to be double: involving tracing the conditions of subject formation, as well as tracing the turn against those conditions for subjectivity to emerge. Moreover, if self-precarisation symbolises a contested field where the attempt to start a new cycle of exploitation also meets desires and subjective behaviours, then resistance to it cannot be positioned in reductionist or binary ways. Neither can the processes involved in the opening up of the precarised self towards others as to affect and become affected by one another.

Throughout this thesis I have tried to show that the adjective "precarious" does not just describe a situation characterised by a lack of security but is also inscribed in a form of relationality. Rather than a one-sided form of reliance, whereby someone or something is dependent on or being controlled by someone or something else, I stressed this relationality as indicative of a situation of interdependence and reciprocity whereby people or entities are equally bound and have shared agency and responsibility. Moving away from neoliberal dispositions of sociality – described by Isabell Lorey as 'the intertwining of affective and cognitive labour, the privatisation of prevention, anxiety about precariousness, and servile self-care' (Lorey 2019) – many critical thinkers have argued that the recognition of ethical relationality can form the beginning of a process of becoming common. Indeed, some argue that focusing on 'a common vulnerability' (Butler 2005, 100) can

ethically interpellate subjects and tie them to others. Others state that if people understand the obligations they have to each other as 'mutually embodied' (Povinelli 2016, 79) then a form of social interpenetration emerges, one that connects singular individuals to one another and testifies to their response-ability (Haraway 2016, 125).

I posit, however, that the shared condition of precariousness does not necessarily lead to reciprocal recognition or a collective "we". Taking into account the increasingly subjugating methods of discrimination and exclusion, as well as the specific exploitation of targeted populations in contemporary capitalism, it is necessary to consider how differences in access to socio-political power and the ability to have a voice about one's conditions affect organising from within those conditions. This, in turn, affects the ability to create alliances between those fighting for parallel yet entangled causes. While there have been attempts to re-signify the concept of precarity by paying closer attention to differences within 21st century working classes, the question remains to what extent dispersed subjectivities can actually become common. In many of the theoretical perspectives I came across during my research it remains unclear how to attend to the tensions between the collective "we" and the uneven distribution of insecurity across different beings (Puar et al. 2012, 169). Moreover, if precarity indicates a social positioning, how does it imply modes of domination as well as the political agency of those so positioned? If precariousness designates what we all share but also what distinguishes and separates us from others, how can practices that are oriented not solely to the self and one's own milieu, but rather to thinking-acting-being together be conceptualised? Taking into account the heterogeneous processes and complex practices through which individuals come to relate to themselves and others as subjects, my PhD project stressed the need to look at *how* the precarious make connections.

Thinking about the complexities and exigencies of allyship, I acknowledge that advocating for relationality as if it were a self-evident good is not going to work. That is to say, connections among the precarious are to be made, but never simply given or assumed. According to Sara Ahmed, alliances between people cannot be guaranteed by the pre-existing form of a social group or community, whether that

form is understood as commonality or uncommonality (Ahmed 2000, 17). I thus accept that the question of commonality cannot be simply described as a problem of self-interest versus common interests, friends versus strangers, or sameness versus difference. Rather, it is about how individual interests articulate themselves in a way to constitute shared interests. Taking into account the difficulties at play when regarding difference as a strength for developing relations of solidarity, I insist that these shared interests can never be postulated as identitarian forms of belonging or a homogenising "being together". For this reason, I resort to the notion of partiality to resist normative understandings of the individual "I" and the collective "we" in discussions around organising under governmental precarisation.

I have stated that partiality allows for a rendering of reality that, explicitly coming from a particular or specific site, accepts its non-totalising character, as well as the existence of other valid renderings coming from diverse locations. Throwing the neutrality of objective knowledge into question, Donna Haraway employs the notion to stress feminist theorists and their specific desires and interests – including preferences for the standpoints of the subjugated – as never exempt from critical (re-)examination, decoding, deconstruction, and (re-)interpretation. After Haraway, in this dissertation partiality means to own the particular situation of one's knowledge and thus to take responsibility for this knowledge. Referring to being "split" and "double" at the same time, it entails looking at oneself from the outside as another body or entity. Such positioning, as I assert, challenges the concept of one true and complete self, as well as the total becoming of an other.

Evaluating kpD's and PalD's work, I claim that both practices take on partial perspectives to generate knowledges that are situated and embodied, rather than supposedly neutral and distanced. Inscribed in traditions of workers' inquiries and co-research associated with the Italian workers movement of the 1970s as well as women's consciousness-raising groups deriving from second-wave feminism, my case studies confirm that the only way to build a radical movement is by starting from the self. Beginning at a private level, by facing one's own struggles, it becomes possible to identify with the struggles of others. Throughout their militant investigations, kpD and PalD remained conscious of their own subjectivity, actively addressing the implications of being artist-researchers and research-activists with

specific interests and desires. Always having one eye on the object of inquiry, and the other on the inquirer – that is, on themselves – their practices are imbued with a split-double vision necessary to avoid the pitfalls of confusing themselves with spokespersons or falling into fascination with the experiences of self-exploiting cultural producers or women working in feminised sectors.

In order not to fall into the trap of a displacement that avoids questioning the conditions of one's own life and work, kpD's workers' inquiry accompanied a self-analysis. Dissolving the asymmetrical relationship between researchers and researched, between "them" and "us", Kuster, Lorey, von Osten and Reichard addressed their own implications as cultural producers in the process of developing *Kamera Läuft!.* By carrying out "research with", I contend that the group goes beyond dichotomies between subjects and objects. This is also reflected in kpD's employment of the confessional mode, whereby cultural producers establish themselves as self-reflective and self-reflexive beings in order to subvert exploitative powers that operate internally. Self-narration allows the protagonists in *Kamera Läuft!* to inhabit a critical stance in relation to dominant discourses blaming autonomous workers themselves for their precarious working and living conditions. kpD's video project challenges the disciplinary effects of neoliberal rationality by actively engaging with what it would mean to exceed or go beyond oneself and the normalised ways of thinking-acting-being.

While deconstructing specific understandings of truth that produce self-precarisation, I argued that kpD confronts the illusion of identity as a stable, coherent and self-contained unity. Cultivating a dissociating view of the self, the group challenges the understanding of freedom as individual possession and something that emanates from independence. As I also claimed, the apparatus of *Kamera Läuft!* fabricates non-isomorphic subjectivities – selves split from themselves – to refuse the categories and norms that seek to represent cultural producers in neoliberal post-Fordism. By dramaturgically reworking and scripting personal accounts into sample performances played out by actors, the group persistently depersonalised creative subjectivity and resisted engaging in any celebration of "authentic" or veritable individuality. Placing theatricality and performativity at the centre of their project, kpD did not assume the existence of

some "original" creative self that can be enacted. By analysing the playfulness with which kpD approached the idea of self-representation, I engaged with the composite dramatised identities in *Kamera Läuft!* as discursive collages that are multiple, shifting and relational. Furthermore, by presenting cultural producers as partial entities capable of connecting and relating to others, the group subverts the idea of self-precarisation as something that is only experienced 'in intercourse with oneself' (Arendt 2006, 163).

PalD employs partiality in a similar way, albeit more directed towards expanding the idea of becoming common beyond the limits of any closed community or collective identity. I described their care community not so much as a collective subject, but rather as the relation that makes subjects no longer individual. Focused on tracing the relational zones between women from different localities, I argued that PalD's practice challenges binary-oppositional structures in which people are separate from their external world. While establishing a social ecology based on relationality, reciprocity and care, the group takes localised experiences of capitalist oppression as a starting point for taking action and making change. In doing so PalD recognises the knowledge needed to change working methods and lifestyles as inherent in the conditions of reproductive labour themselves, and articulated in the desire for transformation felt by those working in this particular sphere.

Drifting through the circuits of feminised precarious work in Madrid, members of PalD were interested in the point of view of those that guided them (PalD 2003b). In doing so, however, their own positions never remained unmarked. Immersing themselves in the conditions of women working in the Spanish reproductive labour market, their militant research simultaneously involved a certain intimacy, as well as a distancing of knowledge. Presupposing the impossibility of becoming the other, I used the notion of partiality to describe PalD's organising practice. Analysing their involvement in the Agencia, I regarded their relationship with female migrant domestic workers as a partial relationship, one that I characterised both as friendship as well as strangerness. Presupposing the impossibility of "becoming the other", the idea of partial connections helped me understand how PalD could form socio-political alliances with subaltern women without assumptions of comparability. Conceptualising the manner in which occupants of different

positionalities relate and communicate, partial relationality proposes an insurgent togetherness consisting of a form of getting closer that accepts the distance, and, in Sara Ahmed's words, 'puts it to work' (Ahmed 2000, 180).

4. Critical agency and collective resistance against governmental precarisation in the 21st century

kpD's and PalD's work, as I have asserted, is part of the urgent, fundamental and politically indispensable task of developing new practices of the self, the formation of "an art of living" under governmental precarisation in Western Europe. Creating new openings for the politicisation of the concrete everyday, both groups draw upon methods of militant research and consciousness-raising. As a form of activist knowledge production, I probed militant research as a situated investigation that reads struggles against precarity from within. Revisiting the feminist idea of the personal is political, I analysed consciousness-raising as a practice that takes the self as a point of departure in order to get out of oneself and connect with the struggles of others. Both kpD and PalD locate personal narratives and exchanges at the heart of their creative and socio-political strategies. While attending to the immediacy of everyday work and life in the early 2000s, the groups compel us to imagine alternative forms of self-organisation in the context of precarity.

Affording us a view of women from different backgrounds thinking and acting together, PalD's work refuses the 'victimising objectuality' (Colectivo Situaciones 2003) that separates feminised subjectivities from their agency and productive capacities. While facilitating a sense of self-empowerment among female migrant domestic workers – "we are the experts" – I insisted that the group embodies an ethos of solidarity rather than charity. At the same time PalD understands that "solidarity" does not mean "uniformity" and that it can never be imposed from above. Building relations of mutual support between different precarities entails adopting a reflexive position and having awareness of problematic essentialising gestures, the construction of limiting identities, and issues of structural inequality, appropriation and exploitation. Hinting at the intrinsic relationship between knowledge and power in debates around precarity, PalD's practice stresses the non-innocence of militant research in this field. By offering only partial perspectives on

the exploitation of women working in the globalised care sector, we have to actively construct their critique of neo-patriarchal and neo-colonial capitalism from its parts.

Although operating in a very different context, kpD's project functions in a similar way. Presenting knowing selves that are 'constructed and stitched together imperfectly' (Haraway 1988, 586), the collective demonstrates that exploitative self-practices in the creative industries cannot be represented as a coherent and available image. As such, *Kamera Läuft!* should not be seen as a route into a "factual" truth about cultural producers' experiences, but rather as an opportunity for us to discursively reconstruct our own subjective realities, and perhaps talk about our situations in ways that differ from how we are used to. Regarded as an instrument for reclaiming the syntax of self-precarisation in the 21st century, kpD's video can help in the production of a new language to think and act upon neoliberal governmentality. I thus underscored that, like the practice of self-transformation, *Kamera Läuft!* is not so much about a liberation from external authorities, but more about interrogating the regulatory mechanisms through which we are constructed and maintained as subjects. This means that instead of a struggle against an outside instance, the subversion of governmental precarisation begins with a struggle against one's own self.

In the preface of this thesis I explained how learning about the problems occurring for cultural producers living and working in Berlin in the early 2000s was an important consciousness-raising moment for me. Watching *Kamera Läuft!* during Isabell Lorey's workshop in 2013 advanced a political interpretation of my own post-Fordist work/life drama while working as a freelance graphic designer in Amsterdam. Two years later, when I was pursuing my PhD research in Visual Cultures in London, coming across PalD's militant investigations furnished another epistemological shift in my thinking. Reading their texts informed the development of a more intersectional approach to analysing the complexities of labour exploitation in neoliberal capitalism. Crucially, I learned resistance against precarity cannot be limited to an intra-personal struggle against oneself. Taking into account positionalities structured by gender, class, race and sexuality, it also entails how desires for freedom and autonomy intersect with the experiences of other precarious workers. Additionally, PalD's practice directed me to concrete modes of

self-organisation, which are less coded in the jargon of a particular activist culture, less ideological and more focused on the production of an everyday.

This does not mean I regard kpD's practice to be less political than PalD's. While it is perhaps more focussed on the production of linguistic and visual codes, *Kamera Läuft!* transcends mere reflexivity and interventionist critique. This is exemplified in my analysis of kpD's video as a tool for consciousness-raising in workshops and seminars on labour exploitation in cognitive-cultural economies. As I argue, rather than just an aesthetic rendering of stories about self-precarisation in the creative industries, *Kamera Läuft!* can be used to create a 'context of experience and articulation' (Nowotny 2004). While producing an artistic film itself is not necessarily political nor intrinsically ethical, it can be both when it makes space for people who did not have space before to gather, or when it shifts its audience's imagination about what is socially possible. Therefore, although kpD and PalD create different kinds of spaces for different subjectivities that are positioned in different ways, I maintain that both case studies can be used to build shared and creative struggles against governmental precarisation in the 21st century.

By activating practices of critical and collective knowledge production from the early 2000s into the contemporary, this PhD has intended to find a new audience for kpD's and PalD's work, and take it further. In doing so my thesis can be used to make sense of the continued and in many ways intensified mechanisms of labour exploitation in Western Europe. Compared to the early 2000s, capitalism seems stronger than ever. Not only in terms of its coverage, but also with regards to its expansion into areas where it has created entirely new markets and commodified things that were historically never objects of transaction, such as leisure time, social media, unemployment, education. Here it is important to note, despite the fact that a considerable amount of literature produced in the last two decades attempts to make sense of the cultural and political changes brought about by new rounds of austerity, marketisation and financialisation, my study retains a pre-2008 lens. Inevitably, due to the scope of my research, I have not been able to talk through the drastic socio-economic shifts precipitated by the global financial crash that began unfolding in 2008. In addition, I have not been able to reflect on the unprecedented health crisis that is sweeping the world at the moment of writing. A reassessment of

governmental precarisation in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic seems paramount. Especially given the increased fear of the loss of stability is drawing more and more people into false senses of security through nationalistic conceptions of community and ethics of belonging.

Also, due to limitations of space, my PhD addresses only two case studies. Many other possibilities of practices and experiences underrepresented in the known histories of precarity, or represented under limited critical readings, have been left out. This means the story I tell in this thesis could be told in radically different ways. For example, it could be told from places where neoliberal discourse was violently imposed, with the added burden of a racist colonial history. Instead I am writing this PhD from Western Europe. In spite of the obvious limitations that come with the Eurocentric case studies and my own positionality, there are good reasons for telling this story from here. Besides the inherent capitalist logic of the European project, it is necessary to interrogate Europe itself as a hierarchical union governed by finance. The refugee crises, right-wing movements and leave campaigns of the last two decades threaten the self-understanding and the cohesion of the European Union. Exploring the implications of these developments makes an important contribution to ongoing conversations, in different parts of the world, concerning revisiting debates around structural insecurity.

Besides expanding my research on creative and socio-political responses to governmental precarisation in geographical terms, another potential direction can be found in the ways theory and practice connect to each other in this study. This connection opens an opportunity to continue exploring the possibilities of militant research. Here, a deeper investigation into the notion of partiality could expand the context of my thinking. As a driving concept, partial relationality can be mobilised to explore additional aspects of the relationship between response-ability and accountability. This is also possible with regards to academic research and activism. To a certain extent my work has already provoked such an expansion. Indeed, at the time of writing this conclusion I became involved in the anti-casualisation struggle at Goldsmiths, University of London. The following will briefly elaborate on this resonance.

5. Producing communicative resonances and constructing different futures

On the 7th of May 2020 Goldsmiths senior management announced a policy that casualised contracts would not be renewed as a cost-cutting measure to mitigate against the damage caused by the Covid-19 crisis. Laying off 163 academics on fixed term contracts, along with 309 Associate Lecturers (ALs) and Graduate Trainee Tutors (GTTs), Goldsmiths is leaving hundreds of its already lowest paid academics unemployed during a recession and a pandemic. These redundancies will significantly increase workload for remaining staff and threaten the viability of undergraduate and postgraduate courses across the university. Furthermore, there is a blatant issue around structural inequalities at play. An overwhelming majority of those being laid off are women. A significantly large number are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. If these job cuts go ahead, Goldsmiths will lose a large proportion of its BAME teaching staff, leaving students with fewer non-white role models, a narrower curriculum and an impoverished all-round educational experience.[83]

An associate lecturer myself, I am absolutely devastated by this news. Like many other casualised colleagues, I feel angered that the university considers hourly paid and fixed term academics to be disposable and uses their disposability to absorb the shock of the current crisis. Responding to the assault on our livelihoods, a group of GTTs, ALs and academics on fixed term contracts got together and self-organised as to explore the leverage we might have in resisting this disregard of our wellbeing and attack on the future of Goldsmiths. On the 31st of May we launched a collective wildcat action to withhold labour through the refusal to return assessment grades until senior management changes course and negotiates with lecturers on casualised contracts. After a successful virtual picket on Twitter – with a huge number of views and a range of organisations and groups backing the campaign –

[83] This move by Goldsmiths senior management undermines the demands fought and won in 2019 through the occupation of Deptford Townhall by Goldsmiths Anti-Racist Action. Notably, these demands were only agreed to by the university after issuing a possession order to have the students removed at the end of their occupation. The move comes too after two successive strikes by the University and College Union asking universities to address this issue, with its "Four Fights" campaign making explicit the race and gender pay gaps apparent across the board, and how this relies specifically on job insecurity for these members of staff.

and pressure from the Goldsmiths University and College Union branch to threaten a formal dispute, Goldsmiths senior management agreed to meet representatives of the boycott alongside union branch officials. The precise terms of the meeting have been stated as follows:

> up to two Fixed Term Contract/Associate Lecturer reps could attend to set out their 'lived experience' as the first item, but they should then leave the meeting so the Warden and senior management colleagues can have a conversation with the formal officers of the trade union (Precarious@Gold 2020).

This illustrates how providing a space for underrepresented individuals to be heard and for their particular precarities to be acknowledged is in reality a way to make those in power effectively unaccountable. Impeding any effort to make meaningful changes in governance, Goldsmiths senior management mobilises the idea of "lived experience" as a way of depoliticising and effectively muting precarious subjectivities. Here, the recognition of the realities of casualisation becomes nothing more than a box ticking exercise that can then be virtue signalled in the university's official communications and public relations. As a fellow comrade puts it: 'frankly speaking to have people empathise with our "lived experience" does not provide us the modest security of another 6-month contract next term, which after all is all we are asking.' (Precarious@Gold 2020).

While I believe that any campaign against precarity in higher education should be aimed at raising awareness about some of the lived experiences of casualised academic staff, I now realise that only becoming acquainted with the difficulties of our individual lives is not enough. Without denying the importance of constructing a voice and 'telling it like it is' (Farinati and Firth 2017, 40) so as to acknowledge the hardship of precarious labour, we should not be limited to its conditions. Moreover, while our personal circumstances may differ and our contractual terms may likewise vary, our collective cause needs to be 'singular' (Precarious@Gold 2020). This crucially implies that our struggle is one we partially share with teaching staff across the college at various levels, including colleagues from professional services, cleaning and security. It also means we have to partially embed ourselves in the radical feminist and anti-racist practices of our students. Only then can we empower our common ability to foster change at Goldsmiths.

As neoliberal capitalism advances and Covid-19 reinforces the powers of those in charge, our communities become increasingly enclosed and secluded from the realities of the world we live in. Solidly anchored in our social and political milieus, it becomes harder for us to cross trajectories with other people or move into other communities in order to, as Angela Davis puts it, 'understand and learn' (Claycomb 2003, 103). If we want to free ourselves from thinking-acting-being in privatised and individualised ways, we need to allow ourselves to be less threatened by others. Being open to encounters in order to see, recognise and acknowledge different perspectives, and being ready to be transformed by them, are essential in order to "unlearn" capitalist relationality and reconstruct the social world anew. According to Bernice Johnson Reagon, coalition building is fundamentally about people working with others different from themselves. Neither ignoring nor particularly celebrating difference as such, she states the task of bringing together conflicting politics requires that participants have the courage to be resilient in the face of apparent contradiction. Describing what it feels like to do coalition work, she writes: 'Most of the time you feel threatened to the core and if you don't, you're not really doing no coalescing.' (Reagon 2000, 343). She concludes: 'if you feel the strain, you may be doing some good work'. (Reagon 2000, 349)

While building solidarity across differences, it is necessary to consider through what kind of exclusions our collectives are constructed, and keep in mind that those excluded domains might return to haunt the 'integrity' and 'unity' of our 'we' (Butler 1992, 14). Going beyond simply pooling and lumping together different experiences of precarisation, any practice interested in commonality needs to 'make visible the assignment of subject-positions' (Spivak 2006, 332) in order to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced in neoliberal capitalism. To say the least, this work can be profoundly disruptive to pre-existing understandings of what it means to be part of a group. When deconstructing identitarian categories, there is always the possibility that a collaborative practice produces relations marked by sensations of unease and discomfort rather than belonging.

It is hard work becoming common and keeping it together, especially in conditions of fragmentation and dispersion. Those involved are riven with self-doubt,

frustration, confusion, rage, empathy, bafflement and the weight of their own ignorance most of the time (Williams 2019). However, taking this risk seems essential to the 'critical efficacy' of militant political ethics. To reiterate Judith Butler's observation: 'The question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of our schemes of intelligibility, the site where we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be assumed' (Butler 2005, 21).

For me, it is the notion of continuing that stands out in this comment. Acknowledging the incomplete and partial nature of my research, I consider this PhD to be alive and able to produce communicative resonances with its argument. While it evoked a desire to engage with the critique of governmental precarisation from the perspective of higher education, and to reflect on my own participation as an actor in this discourse, I hope my commitment in this study to partial relationality may inspire and mobilise other thinkers and practitioners across various social, political and cultural contexts to construct different futures in the 21st century.

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