Critical Exchange

The politics of precarity

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Contemporary Political Theory (2022) **21**, 142–173. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-020-00435-z>; advance online publication 28 August 2020

The adequacy of any theory of radical democracy requires that it thematize the social conditions within which an emancipatory politics might be enacted. Paul Apostolidis's *The Fight for Time* offers a sustained reflection on how democratic politics is both frustrated and facilitated by widespread and increasing precarity. However, as this Critical Exchange demonstrates, the nature of precarity, the

forms that political agency and solidarity might take in response to it, and the appropriate site within which precarious social conditions can be contested and transformed, is controversial. Precarity refers to a situation lacking in predictability, security or material and social welfare. Importantly, this condition is socially *produced* by the development of post-Fordist capitalism (which relies on flexible employment practices) and neoliberal forms of governance (which remove social protections) (see Azmanova, 2020). Precarity entails social suffering, which is manifested in the declining mental and physical health of both working and ‘out of work’ people and compounded by the attribution of personal responsibility to individuals for their politically induced predicament (Apostolidis, 2019, pp. 3–5). Precarity leads to social isolation as workers find themselves segregated and alienated by work processes while the capacity to sustain community is undermined (pp. 8–10). Moreover, precarity leads to temporal displacement with precarious workers finding they have no time to do much else than work: they must constantly make time to find and prepare for work and, in doing so, become out of sync with the normal rhythms of social life (pp. 5–8). Precarity involves social dislocation as people are forced to relocate to adapt to precarious situations at the same time as their movements are constrained and policed (pp. 10–12). Importantly, precarity is distributed unequally, with people of colour, women, low-status workers and many in the global south experiencing its most devastating effects. At the same time, however, some of its aspects penetrate all social strata. As Apostolidis (2019, p. 2) puts it, ‘if precarity names the special plight of the world’s most virulently oppressed human beings, it also denotes a near-universal complex of unfreedom’.

Recognizing that anti-capitalist struggle has always been a fight for time, Apostolidis (2019, p. 15) reflects on how this fight should be adapted to our present political conjuncture. To develop this vision of radical democratic politics, he turns to the experience of migrant day labourers to both diagnose contemporary social pathologies and envision alternative social possibilities. The research for the book is based on Apostolidis’s involvement in the activities of two worker centres located in Seattle, Washington, and Portland, Oregon. In addition to participating in various activities of the centres (such as staffing phones and running occupational health and safety sessions), the research team conducted 78 interviews with migrant day labourers. Through interpreting the interviews, Apostolidis practices a kind of political theory inspired by Paulo Freire, which he characterises as ‘critical-popular analysis’ (p. 30). By attending to the self-interpretations of the research participants, Apostolidis characterises precarity and considers the possibility of its transformation in terms of four generative themes around which the book is structured. The first three themes speak to the experience of precarity: ‘desperate responsibility’, ‘fighting for the job’ and ‘risk on all sides, eyes wide open’. The fourth theme envisions an anti-precarity politics in terms of a ‘convivial politics’.

As Apostolidis acknowledges, there is an ethnographic dimension to this project since it provides a thick description of the everyday experiences and practices of migrant day labourers. However, it also entails critical-popular analysis since Apostolidis aims to co-create political theory with the research participants. He does so by staging a constructive dialogue between the self-interpretations and practical insights of day labourers and the systematic and defamiliarized perspective afforded by critical theory. *The Fight for Time* not only provides insight into how some of the most vulnerable people in society experience, negotiate and resist precarity: from this social perspective, it aims to generate a wider understanding, of what agency all working (and ‘out of work’) people have to challenge the precarisation of social life.

As such, the book pivots on a fundamental distinction between day labour as *exception* and day labour as *synecdoche*. As Kathi Weeks explains below, this paradigmatic understanding of the precarity of day labouring, enables a perspectival shift from the singular experiences and ideas of migrant day labourers to the more general social condition of precarity and the possibility of its transformation. On the one hand, Apostolidis considers those exceptionalising forms of precarity that dominate day labourers’ lives, differentiating them from other members of society. On the other hand, however, Apostolidis considers the significance of day labour as synecdoche for how precarity permeates social relations on a much broader social scale. A synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part represents the whole. An often remarked on synecdoche in political language is that of the people, whereby the poor (those who do not participate in politics) speak in the name of the citizenry (the people as a whole). Similarly, Apostolidis treats day labour as synecdoche, according to which the exceptional forms of precarity experienced by labourers might make visible the precarity that increasingly conditions all social relations.

In the final chapters, Apostolidis explores how worker centres might also function synecdochally insofar as the purpose of association is construed not only instrumentally, as protection against the risks associated with precarity, but in terms of their constitutive potential to sustain convivial networks of political possibility for more mutually supportive, creative and pluralistic forms of solidarity than those afforded by traditional unionised spaces. It is in these spaces, which are both mundane and potentially extraordinary, that Apostolidis discerns a nascent form of radical democratic politics that consists in a struggle against precarity. This entails three key elements: first, the refusal of work, i.e. the refusal to allow one’s life to be consumed according to one’s role as worker within capitalist social relations; second, the constitution of spaces for egalitarian social interaction that resist the imperatives of neoliberal governance, and; third, the reclamation of people’s time from capitalist and state powers (p. 34). This recuperation of time (the time robbed from people’s lives, which is symptomatic of alienated labour) is fundamental to understanding how day

labour might function as synecdoche both of the wider social condition of precarity and the possibility of its transformation. As Apostolidis explains, ‘working people are *running* out of time and *living* out of time’ (p. 8; emphasis in original). In this context, he suggests, day labourers’ socialized activities within the ‘time-gaps’ of the precarious work economy indicate how the ‘time of everyday precarity’ might be remade into ‘novel, unpredictable, and politically generative temporalities’ (p. 29).

The contributors to this Critical Exchange engage with two key aspects of the politics of precarity. The first relates to the subject of an anti-precarity politics and the extent to which the exceptional but inevitably partial experiences of day labourers can function as a synecdoche for the precarity of all. Edwina Barvosa questions whether identification with precarity provides an adequate basis for an emancipatory politics, given that it may condition unreflexive modes of action. Bice Maiguashca suggests that an intersectional politics would require attending to multiple exceptions, each with their own set of experiences and aspirations, as the basis for a coalitional anti-precarity politics. Leah Bassel similarly advocates building a politics of migrant justice from the knowledge experiences that are generated by a matrix of oppression, which requires acknowledging struggles against patriarchy and racism as well as capitalist domination. In this context, she emphasises the political imperative of making settler colonialism visible in any analysis of migrant justice, including acknowledging the social position of migrants as settlers. In contrast, Kathi Weeks highlights how certain appropriations of the Marxian category of *Lumpenproletariat* resonate with Apostolidis’s synecdochal interpretation of day labour. As such, it can be interpreted as a conceptual articulation of a heterogenous – rather than a homogenizing – political subject. Indeed, in his response, Apostolidis clarifies that the use of the term synecdoche indicates that the perspectival shift from the experience of day labour to the general social condition of precarity is intended as a contingent act of representation – rather than a reductive empirical truth.

The second issue relates to the mode and site of political organizing against precarity, encapsulated in Apostolidis’s demand of ‘workers’ centres for all’. Weeks emphasises the urgency of politicizing workplace death and injury, which is obscured by the managerial appropriation of discourses of health and well-being with increased productivity of workers. Yet, she is concerned that workers centres might be susceptible to co-optation. Moreover, she wonders whether workers centres require embodied social interaction to be effective or might also be realised in virtual spaces. Bassel highlights how such anti-precarity spaces are both sustained by affective labour of women and may reproduce other forms of oppression. Maiguashca wonders what the visionary pragmatism that Apostolidis ascribes to day laborers has in common with the principled pragmatism that she and Catherine Eschle observed among feminist activists involved in the Global Justice Movement. Barvosa questions the assumption that global inequality is most

effectively redressed through the mobilization of oppressed groups according to a salt-of-the-earth script. She invokes instead to an alternative keep-only-a-competency script, according to which social inequality might be more effectively reduced by the voluntary giving of the wealthy. In response, Apostolidis elaborates on the benefits of the critical-popular approach he adopts in the book. While the practical focus of *The Fight for Time* supports a coalitional politics as a key mode of struggle, Apostolidis highlights the limits of a ‘coalitional epistemology’, which would require a cumulative assemblage of particularised knowledges prior to envisioning a desirable form of mass solidarity.

Lois McNay (2014) has rightly highlighted how radical democratic theory risks becoming ‘socially weightless’ to the extent that it treats the social world as contingent, devoid of any significance of its own and able to be reshaped in limitless ways through political action. Radical democrats tend to over-estimate the agency of members of oppressed groups when they neglect the mundane experiences of social suffering, which undermine individuals’ capacity to participate in politics (McNay, 2014, pp. 11, 14–15). As this Critical Exchange demonstrates, *The Fight For Time* challenges theorists of radical democracy to recognise the weight of the world while reflecting on how political agency is shaped, constrained and enabled by the conditions that it seeks to transform. Moreover it challenges us to reflect on how political solidarity is possible across the differences and inequalities that are currently being exacerbated and intensified by the social production of precarity in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Andrew Schaap

The future of anti-precarity politics

The discussion that follows is constructed around three insights gleaned from the *Fight for Time* about how to formulate an anti-precarity politics in the U.S. today. The first concerns one target for such a politics, the second its political subject, and the third considers one of its organizational sites. All three draw on Apostolidis’s approach to day labouring as both singular and paradigmatic, as at once an exceptional case and an exemplar of precarious work in the contemporary economy.

I will begin with one of the targets of an anti-precarity politics Apostolidis identifies that seems critically important today: publicizing and politicizing the incidents of work-related death and injury. This is one of the aspects of day labouring, which might be distinctive insofar as it is more hazardous than many other jobs, but is also appallingly common to precarious work under postfordism more generally. (If we include the household as a site of unwaged work as well, the rate of workplace injury and death increases dramatically.) Apostolidis mentions briefly an encounter with a nurse who talked about the dangers of working

intimately with bodies in need, and this certainly squares with the literature on other forms of care work, especially of home health aides (one of the fastest growing jobs in the U.S.), whose privatized places of work, and complex as well as under-regulated employment relations, can easily render workers unsafe.

Publicizing this issue is difficult because, as Apostolidis notes, the problem of workplace death and injury is strangely absent from popular consciousness. Public awareness is only occasionally peaked when massive disasters are reported: ‘intervallic evocations of shock enable an overall scheme of normalization’ (p. 3). The anarchist polemicist Bob Black, in his 1985 essay ‘The Abolition of Work’, speaks to this normalization – using his own inimitable brand of sarcasm in a bid for attention to the issue – by claiming that we have made homicide a way of life: ‘We kill people in the six-figure range (at least) in order to sell Big Macs and Cadillacs to the survivors’ (Black, 1996, p. 245). In her book on Emma Goldman, I was struck by the effort with which Ferguson (2011) attempts to make visible the violence that capital and the state used against workplace organizing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which was rarely reported at the time and remains largely absent from our history books. Ferguson (2011, p. 22) even offered, to powerful effect, a visual aid in the form of a six-page list, a ‘bloody ledger’, of what she could find of the documented instances of violence levied by public and private armies against striking or resistant workers. For the most part, this spectacular, overt wielding of force and violence over workers by the state and capital has been replaced by brutality meted out through the tools and within the routines of the labour process, such that the perpetrators are typically less directly involved or clearly identifiable.

I agree with Apostolidis when he argues that anti-precarity political activism requires ‘a self-conscious, strategically eclectic, affectively inventive *politics of the body*’ (p. 145). The trick, as I see it, is how not only to publicize but also to politicize the issue of bodily harm, given how extensively the idiom of health has been rendered amenable to the logics and aims of biopolitical management. What vocabulary can be used when the seemingly most obvious and most legible candidate, the language of health, has become so tightly sutured to measures of productivity and complicit with the ‘workplace wellness’ programs dedicated to its restoration and maximization? Although it may still be a language through which the problem of work-related death and injury can be publicized, particularly in light of the ways it is currently deployed to pathologize various modes of indiscipline, I am less certain that the individualizing and biologizing vocabulary of health can be used as a tool of work’s politicization.

The second aspect of the analysis that I want to consider once again draws on the day labourer as both a specific figure and an archetype of precarious work in order to think further about how to conceptualize a political subject adequate to a broad anti-precarity politics. The case of day labourer activism would seem to lend support to the proposition that the Marxist category of the *Lumpenproletariat* is

once again resonant. The concept is not offered as a form of self-identification, but rather as a mechanism of conceptual articulation, particularly across lines of gender, race, and citizenship, that might serve as alternatives to the analytical and political categories of proletariat and working class. Famously disparaged by Marx and Engels as the sub-working class, or, more precisely, a de-classed and disparate collection that includes vagabonds, former prisoners, pickpockets, brothel keepers, porters, tinkers, and beggars (Marx, 1981, p. 75), the *Lumpenproletariat* was negatively contrasted to the upstanding ‘labouring nation’ exemplified by the economically and socially integrated – hence, powerful and politically reliable – industrial proletariat. (Although it should be noted that Marx and Engels include some discards from other classes as well, including the bourgeoisie.) Even the unemployed members of the industrial reserve army were posited as fully inside capitalist relations, as opposed to the surplus population relegated to the outside: that subaltern, disorganized, and politically untrustworthy non-class of people ‘without a definite occupation and a stable domicile’ (Engels cited in Draper, 1972, p. 2287). Engels included day-laborers in his list of the *Lumpenproletariat*, and those who have since tried to reclaim and revalue the category – most notably, Bakunin, Fanon, and the Black Panthers – have added as well various modes of petty criminality, maids, sex workers, and ‘the millions of black domestics and porters, nurses’ aides and maintenance men, laundresses and cooks, sharecroppers, unpropertied ghetto dwellers, welfare mothers, and street hustlers’ with ‘no stake in industrial America’ (Brown, 1992, p. 136).

While I am interested in the category as a way to make particular connections among prison workers, domestic workers, day laborers, sex workers, laborers in various underground economies, and undocumented migrants, it has also been used to identify linkages among a host of precariously employed people (see, for example, Bradley and Lee, 2018). Indeed, refusing the original distinction between proletariat and *Lumpenproletariat*, the latter category could serve as the general designation that links the *Lumpen* to the proletariat through the hinge category of the precariat. Engels once criticized Kautsky for using the label proletariat as inclusive of what Engels sought to set apart as the *Lumpen* class; Kautsky’s proletariat was a ‘squinty-eyed’ concept because it looks in both directions, thereby blurring an important distinction (Draper, 1972, p. 2288). Perhaps today the *Lumpenproletariat* could serve as a squinty-eyed, broad category, more adequate to a U.S. political economy where the difference between formal and informal employment, employment and unemployment, work and nonwork are breaking down.

The specific advantages of this formulation of the *Lumpen* category include its breadth. Stallybrass (1990, p. 72) notes how the *Lumpenproletariat* is often described in terms of the ‘spectacle of multiplicity’ it evokes in contrast to the unified sameness of the conception of the proletariat. This heterogeneous breadth would seem especially appropriate to a political economy in which, as Apostolidis

notes, rather than determine who exactly counts as a precarious worker, ‘the better question might be: who *does not* belong to the vast population of the precaritized?’ (Apostolidis 2019, p. 4; emphasis in original). Another attraction of the concept is how Marx and Engels’s pejorative characterization of the *Lumpen* class betrays some of the ways that the moralized understanding of work and family – recall the description of the *Lumpen* as lacking or marginal to the stabilizing force of both occupation and family – haunts their analyses. For this reason, some, myself included, are interested in how the *Lumpenproletariat* can, as Thoburn (2002, p. 435) notes, be figured as the ‘class of the refusal of work’ – and, I would add, the refusal of family. Finally, I am interested in how it was conceived as politically unreliable in a way that seems more realistic than the tendency for some to posit some kind of special ‘wokeness’ to the working class, only to be disappointed when they turn out to be politically erratic, sometimes acting against what are taken to be their class interests.

The third and last point of particular interest for me in Apostolidis’s theorizing about the politics of work today was the argument about the worker centre as a mode of labour organizing for precarious workers. In thinking about analogous organizational innovations two examples come to mind. Both share some resemblances with the worker centre even if they are associated with more privileged workers. The first is what might be characterized as a dystopian version of the worker centre that goes by the label coworking. Interestingly, coworking originated from below as activist projects to create spaces of community and collaboration among elements of the white-collar precariat, but as de Peuter *et al.* (2017, p. 692) note: ‘inside a decade, an innovation from below was drawn out of the margins, harnessed by capital and imprinted with corporate power relations’. Today, by way of these global real estate ventures, capital can both appropriate the value waged workers create and charge them rent, just as we pay for the households where so much of our free reproductive labour is enacted. But what might seem quite distant from the worker centres Apostolidis describes comes a little closer if we take seriously the contradictory (Merkel, 2019) or ambivalent (de Peuter *et al.*, 2017) status of coworking, which may provide opportunities for the convivial mutualism that Apostolidis finds in the worker centre while also interpellating members as entrepreneurial individuals, and which ‘is animated by a tension between accommodating precarity and commoning against it’ (de Peuter *et al.*, 2017, p. 689). I am left with a question that I think might be worth pursuing: is coworking best understood as a specular image against which we can recognize the progressive potential of the worker centre, or is it a cautionary tale about its potential to be co-opted?

The second comparison is to a very different model of labour organizing for precarious workers. This is a project based in New York City called WAGE, an acronym for working artists in the greater economy. It started in 2008 as a project committed to help artists to be remunerated for all the work they do with non-profit

arts organizations and museums. Their ‘Womanifesto’ says they demand payment ‘for making the world more interesting’ (WAGE, 2020). Among other initiatives, WAGE’s efforts involve knowledge production about various arts organizations and the contracts they make with independent artistic workers, the development of a platform that helped artists negotiate fair compensation, and a certification for which arts institutions can apply. This approach to organizing precarious workers is comparable to the model of the worker centre in the sense that each of the projects seeks at once to facilitate work and to acknowledge anti-work critical languages and agendas. One of the questions that the comparison with this project raises is whether the forms of convivial mutualism and politicization Apostolidis found in the worker centre require the kind of ‘embodied social interaction’ (p. 34) and face-to-face encounters that platform models of organizing do not necessarily prioritize.

Kathi Weeks

Making feminist sense of precarity

In 2010, I co-authored a book with Catherine Eschle entitled *Making Feminist Sense of the Global Justice Movement* which sought to make visible, audible and intelligible a strand of feminist anti-capitalist activism that was being consistently ignored in the International Relations and social movement literatures (Eschle and Manguashca, 2010). Driven by the conviction that taking the words and deeds of the women engaged in these struggles seriously would yield not only a more intricate and complete empirical map of the movement, but also prompt a re-conceptualisation of its meaning and trajectory, we embarked on fieldwork in several countries as well as interviews with 80 activists over a period of several years. By seeking to expose the gendered power relations that marginalise women within the World Social Forum process, as well as in the academic literature about this movement, and by choosing to speak to and from the feminist struggles that emerged to confront them, the book was written in solidarity with feminist anti-capitalist activists.

Paul Apostolidis’ book *The Fight for Time* encapsulates a very similar kind of intellectual–political project as it also seeks to capture the self-understandings of migrant day labourers in their everyday struggles, to reflect on how they resonate with contemporary critical theoretical concepts and to learn how, taken together, these empirical and conceptual insights may lead us to a renewed vision of what a left politics might look like for our age. Like our book, Paul’s is unashamedly political in intent and, as such, it embodies a form of ‘militant research’, which ‘activates enlivening moments of contact between the popular conceptions of day labourers and scholars attempts to describe and account for precarity in socio-structural terms’ (p. 21). Like our project, Paul’s research wants to bring what has been rendered marginal, both politically and academically, to the centre of our

scholarship and theorising. And like my own work, more generally, Paul's is driven by a commitment to revitalising both the theory and practice of *left* politics.

In my contribution to this Critical Exchange I will draw out the points of contact between our respective approaches as well as tease out what I take to be our differences. In doing so, I aim to underline not only what is distinctive about Paul's efforts, but also the shared challenges that we face as critical theory scholars attempting to chart a path for the theory and practice of a collective, transformative politics. More specifically, I want to highlight two broad lines of inquiry that emerge when undertaking this kind of politicised scholarship. The first line of inquiry seeks to open up a dialogue about the challenges that implicitly accompany the quest of constructing a critical theory that can simultaneously speak to and from 'the exception' and 'the synecdoche', or, to put it otherwise, that can light a path from the particular to the universal. The second theme concerns the role of utopian thinking in galvanising and giving direction to a radical left politics that is inclusive and that is fit for purpose in the 21st century.

Turning first to the task of critical theory, understood in Marx's terms as the self-clarification of the wishes and struggles of the age, it is imperative that one grounds one's analysis in the practices and aspirations of a particular marginalised subject. Elaborating on this point Leonard (1990, p. 14) states, 'without the recognition of a class of persons who suffer oppression, conditions from which they must be freed, critical theory is nothing more than an empty intellectual enterprise'. Now, while Apostolidis and I agree on this, and both of us have chosen 'addressees' that are subjected to oppressive power relations that undermine their life chances and denigrate their ways of knowing and feeling, the conditions and experiences which give rise to and shape their respective ideas and practices are significantly different. Indeed, despite some important overlaps, the radical politics and utopian imagination that emerge from each constituency – precarious labourers, on the one hand and feminist activists, on the other – diverge considerably. So, what are these differences, and what lessons might be drawn from this comparative analysis for those of us seeking to develop *a* comprehensive critical theory that seeks to move seamlessly from the exception to the synecdoche?

Apostolidis' chosen addressee is the migrant day labourer living precariously from day to day in a hostile environment in the US. Framed as an exploited class, Apostolidis' chosen subject wages his struggle for survival and dignity on the terrain of labour relations. While Paul rightly recognises that day labourers, as a group, are also gendered and racialised subjects, his study remains primarily focused on the collective efforts of male labourers to resist forms of denigration and harm that mark their lives as workers and to overturn the destructive and exploitative practices of an unregulated capitalist economy, more generally.

By contrast, my feminist interlocutors were relatively privileged economically in comparison to other women in their respective societies – and certainly to the day labourers of Apostolidis's book. Moreover, most of these women were well

educated and, although many lived precarious professional lives (e.g. their NGO funding was secured year on year), the women themselves were, in the main, leading comparatively secure lives both materially and socially (they had families and belonged to social movement networks). Finally, all of our activists were already politicised and involved in consciousness-raising activities (e.g. our fieldwork in Brazil exposed popular education as a common practice) and, to this extent, were engaged in a form of feminist praxis that quite self-consciously and explicitly sought to transform the world they lived in. In sum, *pace* Apostolidis' claim that precarity is a 'near universal complex of unfreedom' (p. 2), it is not the obvious starting point for conceptualising the challenges faced by these women.

Given these different starting points, what kind of politics emerges from each constituency, what utopian visions accompany them, and to whom are they directed? For Apostolidis, an anti-precarity politics demands a 'post-work' future, one in which we all refuse to assume the responsibility for facing up to and accepting the consequences of precarity as an inevitable condition of life. Instead, we are entreated to engage in a 'politics of demand' that seeks to reclaim our wages and our time ('for what we will') from predatory capitalist powers. More concretely, Apostolidis outlines several attendant policies, including the introduction of a universal basic income and the creation of affective spaces of embodied social interaction, including multiple work centres. As he puts it, 'If all working people could gain access to workers centres like those that are inspiring such utopian effulgence ... such a politics could well find masses of adherents and assume more fully developed form in our common precarious world' (p. 34). This is a resolutely anti-capitalist vision of a transformed world demanded by and imagined for all workers. Or, to put it in Fraser's (1994) terms, this is a bold call for a social politics of redistribution.

Turning to the feminist activists of my project, we find an alternative vision of what a better, more just future looks like. And while it is also anti-capitalist in orientation, it refuses to centralise either the realm of 'work' or 'workers' as its central axis of liberation. Instead, the politics of demand that emerges from this politicised subject targets, not only capitalism as a systemic power relations but also patriarchy and racism. In this context, all three systems of power are understood as interlinked and pervasive to the extent that they cut across all social realms (economy, society, political, cultural) and are reproduced in both the public and private sphere. Each however is also *sui generis*, and therefore, requires specific strategies to be overturned.

Moreover, on the affirmative side, our feminist interlocutors articulated their vision for the future in terms of two sets of demands. The first took the form of multiple proposals for policy change that seek to address context specific problems, such as violence against women, reproductive health, labour rights *including the women's right to work* and environmental degradation. The second was normative and universal in nature and revolved around the identification and defence of a set

of ethical values – bodily integrity, equality, fulfilment of basic needs, peace and respect for the environment – that go beyond the concrete wish lists of different groups and pertain to all human beings. Thus, the feminist anti-capitalist activism that I explored embodied a self-consciously intersectional politics in which demands for material redistribution and social justice were combined with equally important claims for cultural recognition.

Thus, here we have different struggles, different self-understandings and different visions of a progressive left politics. But if, as Apostolidis suggests, ‘we need a politics that merges *universalist* ambitions to change history, which are indispensable to structural change, with responsiveness to group *differences* that matter because minimizing them means leaving some people out’ (2019, p. 14; emphasis in original), then how do we knit together these connected and yet distinct visions of emancipation? How do we move from the exception to synecdoche if we have multiple exceptions, each with their own sets of experiences, analyses and aspirations? After all, linking ‘universal ambitions’ to radical social change requires that we have a shared understanding not only of which structures of power need to be transformed/challenged the most, but also of how we go about building a common struggle. And whatever the intellectual synergies, programmatic overlaps and emotional affinities between the struggles of day labourer in the US and that of women worldwide, their utopian dreams would take us along very different, perhaps even incommensurable, paths. Given this challenge, the question becomes one of deciding whether we need multiple critical theories running parallel to each other animated by different kinds of oppressions and degrees of marginality or whether we are still looking for a singular revolutionary subject, the one catalyst for change who is able to be both an exception and a universal exemplar, thereby embodying all the demands of the oppressed? This is not just a quibble about who gets to lead the charge: it is about what radical, progressive change should actually look like.

As a feminist scholar seeking to find and defend space for an intersectional politics that refuses to be contained and streamlined in any way, I think it is imperative that critical theorists resist the temptation of elevating one concrete subject to that of a universal one. Instead, we must engage in far more patient, painstaking ethnographic work of the kind that Apostolidis has undertaken on male migrant day labourers, with a range of other addresses or marginalised subjects (e.g. the experiences of female day labourers are, as Apostolidis suggests, one good place to start). It is only once these varied, complex mappings of power and resistance are drawn, with the recognition that they cannot be easily merged, that we can begin to look for connections across them and identify possible sites of bridge building which may lead to a convivial politics of the left and to the emergence of a collective dream. Whatever it ends up being, my sense is that it will have to take the form of a coalitional politics, one in which *sui generis* struggles fight alone and together for radical change.

The second theme is the role of utopian thinking in galvanising and giving direction to a radical left politics. Despite being burdened by a ‘relentless presentism’ that does not allow them to think about, let alone strive for, a better future, it is clear that Apostolidis believes that the ‘demand’ politics of day workers is suffused with utopian aspirations (p. 68). Drawing on Coles (2016), Apostolidis describes their aspirations in terms of a ‘visionary pragmatism’ (p. 221) that combines an overt disruptive politics, that makes them visible and audible to the wider public, with more mundane, everyday practices of solidarity, mutual aid and self-government.

Interestingly, this view of utopian thinking as granular, incremental and cumulative, as well as eventful, unruly and confrontational, resonates very strongly with the dreams and impulses of feminist anti-capitalist activists. In fact, we deployed the notion of ‘principled pragmatism’ as a way of capturing their mode of action, in general and its pre-figurative orientation, in particular. For what became clear to us as researchers is that our feminist activists were concerned with articulating not only the political substance of their alternative future and the values that underpin it, but also an ethos by which this future should be brought into being. In this way, the ‘principled’ part of principled pragmatism sought to underline the highly ethical nature of both the goals/ends of their mode of action, as well as the means designed to achieve them. Moreover, we found that this normative mode of action embodied a specific temporality, which was open ended and processual as well as nonlinear. This is, in part, due to the commitment of feminist activists to enabling women to speak and act for themselves, a project which, by its very nature, is unpredictable. It is nonlinear because its pre-figurative orientation demands that the future be lived out in the present. In this way, principled pragmatism is anchored by the imperative of getting things done in the ‘here and now’ of everyday life, without giving up the goal of radical change in the future. As a mode of praxis that pursues incremental, context specific change, feminist anti-capitalist activism presents us with an inspiring alternative to the clichéd dualism of reformism and revolution. The question here is whether the ‘visionary pragmatism’ of day workers is generalizable to other forms of contestation and, if not, in what ways it might be different from the ‘principled pragmatism’ of the feminist activists outlined above and what might be at stake in these differences.

Whatever our different starting points, what all the contributors to this exchange share is an abiding interest in generating explicitly normative, politicised scholarship or what Apostolidis refers to as ‘emancipatory scripts’. In other words, we all resist the path of what McNay calls ‘socially weightless’ theorising, referred to by Andrew Schaap in his introduction to this Critical Exchange, opting instead to grapple with the messy world of politics, the material social conditions that hold it in place, and the suffering it engenders. To this extent, we all believe that what we write about and how we conceptualise it matters, not just intellectually, but also politically. For in the end, the stories we tell about the world and ‘politics of

resistance’ that bubble up within it, can contribute to opening up (or closing down) the spaces of possibility for its realisation. Pursuing this intuition is becoming harder, however, not only because academia continues to extol the virtues of scientific knowledge, but also because of changes in the political landscape. With ‘populism’ now elevated as the threat *du jour*, all resistance against the status quo is in danger of being discursively contained by politicians and academics alike. Moreover, the increasingly trenchant calls to drop the left–right distinction in favour of other political cleavages (e.g. ‘people vs elites’, ‘people from somewhere’ vs ‘people from nowhere’) are making it harder to reclaim a politics *for* and *by* the left. In this context, critical theorists of all ilks need to stick together, learn from each other and engage in a form of ‘epistemological coalition building’. While it may not be the only route to progressive change, as Paul rightly points out, it is one worth sustaining, in my view, and Critical Exchanges of this sort provide one step in this direction.

Bice Maiguashca

Fighting from fear or creating collaboration across economic divides?

In *The Fight for Time* Paul Apostolidis offers readers a powerful meditation on the problem and politics of precarity. He contends that precarity is a global problem shared by virtually all who toil in the global economy. Through his study of Latino day laborers in the US, Apostolidis argues that day laborers present a proxy for the precarity of laborers worldwide (pp. 4–5). Through his portrait of the cruel trials faced by day laborers, Apostolidis wisely proposes that work centers for all, popular education practices and consciousness raising, as well as a ‘demand politics’ for better and safer labor conditions, fair pay, and flexible time are necessary to improve the lot of all laborers everywhere. His valuable work thus provides a vision of collective practices that might, if we are persistent and lucky, ease the plight of billions of precariously placed workers across all walks of life worldwide. Along with my admiration, this book’s fine and yet familiar tones raise for me two questions that I pose here in the spirit of conversation and in sharing in Paul’s quest for the best ways to realize global prosperity and peace that recoups the time that all human beings need to explore and express their best qualities and capacities.

My first question is whether inviting widespread personal identification with precarity – as opposed to identifying with peace, justice, or other motivating concepts – is a necessary step to ignite awareness and action for economic change that recoups time for all (pp. 4–5)? A recent National Public Radio/Harvard University poll shows that in the US, the majority of both the wealthy (62%) and the poor (75%) already share the view that extreme economic inequality is a widespread and serious problem that presents risks to everyone in the global

economy (Harvard, 2020). While wealth and poverty are facts of a balance sheet, precarity is experienced as a feeling or state of mind. This is acknowledged implicitly by Apostolidis in his application of Lauren Berlant's concept of 'cruel optimism', in which precarity is not considered as economic hardship alone, but is an 'affective syndrome' (p. 5). Thus while wealth and poverty shape experience in material ways, the *feeling* of precarity is a choice to embrace and/or identify emotionally with a fearful state of dangerous insecurity.

But is the choice to identify oneself with the feelings and fears of precarity wise or helpful? Dangerous insecurities may arise for anyone, and even the comparatively well off may feel fear of sudden destitution. Yet as Frankl (2006) observed in *Man's Search for Meaning*, the responses that we choose to a threat – particularly one's capacity to choose *not* to succumb to fear – is a central factor in securing human freedom under any conditions. As Frankl himself exhibits, even in the life-threatening conditions of a Nazi concentration camp, his humanity and true freedom could not be extracted from him because freedom lies in our capacity to choose our own responses to violent and destructive conditions, even unfathomable extremes.

Thus, in contrast to Berlant's cruel optimism, Frankl's observation is that even within the vicissitudes of illness, exposure, and hunger, those who faced the concentration camps with dignity, self-worth, and courage were far more likely to survive, and eventually escape those conditions, than those who surrendered to a mindset of fear-based terror and precarity. In short, our chosen mindsets under hardship also shape our prospects for resolution and escape from extremity for better or worse. Thus, to choose to embrace affective fear and precarity may ultimately undermine the strength and survivability of the self. If fear of precarity is widely embraced, this may in turn subvert the capacity for collective action in pursuit of economic justice and the reclaimed time that all workers, as Apostolidis deftly shows, so desperately need.

Beyond Frankl's philosophy and experience, neuroscience also illuminates the possible hazards of self-identifying with a precarity mindset. In LeDoux's (1996) influential work on the interface of emotion and human physiology, the emotion of fear, particularly mortal fear, triggers neurological subsystems of the body that enable rapid responses by bypassing and making temporarily inaccessible the neocortex – the brain-centers of conscious reflection – which are too slow to address risks to mortal safety. In other words, when humans are in fear, we cannot physically access our capacity for conscious reflection until our fear subsides (LeDoux, 1996, p. 128). Instead, when in fear, the human body defaults to operating on autopilot through whatever neurologically encoded scripts the emergency systems of a given body happens to have for its fear responses, typically including, fight, flight or freeze. Arguably, this can be seen in chapter three of *The Fight for Time*, in which Paul shows day laborers – fearful of missing out on even an extractive job in their precarious conditions – inflict violent harm on one

other in a ‘surly wrestling match’ as a car approaches (p. 118). Does such fear-based reaction help? Not as much as it endangers people, fosters increasing fear and dissention among laborers, and drives away would-be employers. Yet this kind of scrum is not a poor *conscious* choice. Instead it is a scripted embodied impulse that is the anticipated neurological consequence of adopting a fearful approach to experience and thereby hobbling conscious response. On this analysis, choosing a precarity mindset risks disabling physical access to conscious, thoughtful reasoning and response in fearful moments in favor of fear-based impulses and reactions that are attendant to moments of fear.

These risks of identifying with precarity raise my second question. What blind spots might exist in the familiar narrative of economic reforms championed in *The Fight for Time*? The proposed path to reform invites readers to embrace work centers for all and collective action based in common experiences of deprivation that address intra-group biases and divisions along the way. This is an inherited social script that is long-treasured and often invoked. As a common social inheritance among scholars and activists alike it has been portrayed eloquently before in such powerful retellings as that of *Salt of the Earth*, the once blacklisted film narrating a famous 1951 New Mexico labor strike. In this valuable and familiar approach, echoed here by Paul, laborers come together to confront and overcome their mutual biases, and then pursue together demands for better wages and benefits. Paul’s recruitment into one work center’s ‘theatre of the oppressed,’ intended to help workers address their biases, is an example of this longstanding approach in action (p. 29). In this script, rich capitalists appear as universally greedy and cruel hoarders whose victims, the long-suffering poor, must now muster the courage to see their commonalities within divisions of race and gender to demand a fair shake from capitalists. This story is rewarding. And it is true that workers everywhere would be better off if this familiar scenario were consistently fulfilled. Yet the gains of this approach over time have been slow, sporadic, labor intensive, and often hobbled by the stubbornly persistent biases, suspicions, and enmities of many laborers – as well as owners – weaknesses to which all of humanity is still often prone.

In contrast, from a Chicana feminist perspective, such as that of Gloria Anzaldúa, the enduring problem of economic inequality does not call only for looking *within* worker’s groups for sources of intra-group conflict and dissention. It also calls for searching *across* polarized social divides – of workers and owners, of the haves and the have nots – to explore and create the conditions for peaceful resolution of economic inequality. Although venerated in death, Anzaldúa was at times scorned in her lifetime for proposing that true peace and justice required people to eventually come together to work across trenchant social divides: people of color working with whites, women with men, immigrants with non-immigrants, and so on (Anzaldúa, 2002). This Anzaldúan Chicana feminist perspective urges us to not overlook the possibility of working generatively across the divides among workers

and owners, a possibility in the blind spot of the *Salt of the Earth* narrative in which economic benefits must always be fought for and hard won rather than produced through collaborative vision and effort.

Following this traditional script, *The Fight for Time*'s focus on work centers and the fight of traditional labor activism implies that attempts to collaboratively bridge the worker-owner divide may be futile, naïve, or at best irrelevant. Yet among the ultra-rich, practices of large-scale philanthropy are emerging which suggest that there is more transformative common ground between laborers and some owners than the traditional *Salt of the Earth* viewpoint can yet acknowledge. If so, then attending to this common ground may help remedy the lack of time, economic freedom, and financial stability needed by everyone more quickly and effectively than the fights and struggles of work centers, strikes, and direct actions have historically achieved. Specifically, in recent years Carnegie's (1889) assertion that successful capitalists should ideally end their financial careers by giving away all of their wealth, retaining only a personal competency – defined by Carnegie as enough wealth to meet their own life needs and that of one's family – has been gaining a following. Reflecting this view, in 2010 two of the world's wealthiest billionaires, Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, created an organizational structure called The Giving Pledge (2020), in which ultra-wealthy people across the world pledge to give away the majority, or at least half, of their wealth in their lifetime or upon their death.

To date, over 210 ultra-wealthy individuals and families have made this pledge, including five of the top thirteen billionaires on earth (i.e. Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg and MacKenzie Scott). In July 2020, these five pledgers command a combined total net worth of \$410 billion USD (Bloomberg BI, 2020), representing an estimated philanthropic giving over time of at least \$205 billion USD by those five pledgers alone. If a growing number of the ultra-rich are voluntarily committed to giving away their wealth for the benefit others, then – by adopting an Anzaldúan perspective on working across economic and other social divides – it becomes valid to explore beyond the familiar *Salt of the Earth* script hailed in *The Fight for Time*. Doing this would involve considering how engagement *across* social divides of workers and owners may help direct emerging philanthropy into social justice philanthropy that could potentially ease global financial inequities more quickly and resoundingly than the efforts of work centers and traditional labor actions have done to date. Such a move could potentially recoup both time and transformative possibilities for the benefit of laborers, as well as owners, and provide sustainability benefits for the planet from a revised economy.

By shining an Anzaldúan Chicana feminist perspective into the blind spots of *The Fight for Time*, Apostolidis's project is not abandoned, but augmented by bringing unforeseen possibilities into view. New possibilities might arise from organizing *with* willing and openhearted owners, rather than fighting against them as a class to retrieve the time and financial freedoms precious to all. In moving

beyond the view that labor and owners are always divided (rather than only often so), it becomes possible, for example, to imagine efforts in large-scale social justice philanthropy that could, for example, provide everyone on earth with a Carnegiesque financial competency. For the sake of discussion let's imagine that such a personal competency would be \$2 million USD per person worldwide. With 7.7 billion people now on Earth, the core funding for a \$2 million dollar safety-trust for each person at present on Earth would require 15.4 billion USD. That sum seems large, yet it is less than 7% of the combined *minimum* pledge, of the five of the 210 signatories to The Giving Pledge named above. Of those five givers, MacKenzie Scott herself is committed to giving away all of her \$59.5 billion, a sum that alone could handily endow a universal personal competency worldwide.

Thus at least in terms of core capital resources (even accounting for the illiquidity of many assets of the ultra-wealthy), a universal competency could be funded by a small fraction of the funds *already pledged* for giving by the world's ultra-rich. In this context, self-identifying with fearful precarity and fighting for traditional reforms through work centers and labor actions for the changes so urgently needed in the (now pandemic-stricken) world may be worthy in our traditional socially inherited script of *Salt of the Earth*-style social change. Yet this accustomed approach arguably now may be less wise and expeditious than other emerging options. If so, it is worthwhile to explore the limitations of our commonplace labor-related scripts and to confront as needed our own potential blind-spots regarding the diversity among the ultra-rich that could – in an Anzaldúan manner – help us to better see new possibilities for bridging economic divides and opening ourselves to collaboratively producing transformations that can benefit *all* people and the planet upon which we reside together.

Is resolving the pain of global poverty through philanthropic giving so far-fetched? It is not as implausible as so often thought. Alongside the kinds of labor actions hailed in *The Fight for Time*, in recent months one US billionaire chose to pay the college debt of an entire class of Morehouse College totaling over \$35 million USD. Another man paid the college debt of his Uber driver, a single mother, thereby enabling her to finish her college degree. By chance, the latter giver is a well-off white man and the recent graduate an African American woman. Meeting as strangers by chance, the two have now become friends and their story has gained popular attention. If giving to strangers in need is not merely feasible but also appealing, why is it perhaps emerging more visibly now? It may be because many humans are learning that beyond a meaningful competency, wealth does not necessarily create happiness, but that human connection and giving often do. If so, then a season of transformational giving may be on the near horizon.

If these events reveal a nascent turning of the tide, there are still many obstacles on the path of philanthropic giving-for-global-prosperity. If a pathway to funding a universal competency could be created through social justice philanthropy, for instance, this would also need to involve further measures for healing the poverty-

related traumas so aptly described in *The Fight for Time*. Beyond a basic endowment, provisions would be needed to provide for new learning, safeguards, and other supports for recipients in order to truly solve the lingering problems of precarity. Why? Because those who come into sudden wealth from poverty and lack often risk experiencing poverty once again through missteps, fraud, or other hazards arising from a rapid change in economic conditions. Thus even if furnished with a financial competency, in the context of hazardous grafts, frauds and other pitfalls that remain mainstays of US culture (Young, 2017), Latino day laborers – like the vast majority of other workers alluded to in *The Fight for Time* – would need additional training to cultivate the skill sets and mindsets needed for living with meaningful wealth after having had little or no prior knowledge or instruction in how to hold, manage, or grow the would-be competency that could furnish them at last with time and freedom from extractive labor.

Is the idea of philanthropic solutions to global economic inequalities simply another example of ‘cruel optimism’? By Berlant’s (2007, p. 33) definition, optimism is cruel only if the desired change is truly ‘impossible or too possible and toxic’. Clearly, however, changes are emerging that make meaningful large-scale social justice philanthropy possible, even if those changes are growing in the shadow of predatory economic practices. With these changes in view, it is worth asking whether Paul Apostolidis’s fine call to ‘fight’ to retrieve time across all laborers might be best served by extending our willingness to also seek common cause not only among diverse workers, but also among those openhearted wealthy owners who are willing to give back their wealth to benefit the well-being of all humanity. If so, it may be worth our time not to *fight* for time, but instead to work collaboratively and creatively for time and wealth to become equitably available to everyone in unexpected ways.

Edwina Barvosa

Whose politics? Whose time?

Traditionally, political theory has not co-theorised. It has spoken from on high among ‘male, pale, stale’ companions. Hence my defection from these ranks. In this dialogue with Paul Apostolidis’ *The Fight for Time*, I would like to recognise the attempt to co-theorise. In this work some migrant day labourers’ voices, described as Latino, are represented through ethnographic moments. Bodies, presumably cis-male, are portrayed in struggle. This day labour is proposed as ‘synecdoche’ – the part that stands for the whole – by which is meant precarity on the grand social scale (p. 248). Thus, the collective fight for time is staged. Demands include: a politics that goes beyond seeking marginal relief from overwork and instead fundamental alternatives; a repudiation of the work ethic that prescribes personal responsibility in the face of desperation; the demand to restore

time as well as wages to the people; a refusal of work ‘as the axial concept that constricts working people’s social and political imaginaries’ (p. 243). I can only respond from outside of the social and political world the book portrays. I am not Latinx/Latin@ (hence the unsatisfactory use of terms that are, themselves, the site of struggle), but white, cis female, and belonging to many other privileged social locations. From my vantage point I explore struggles for migrant justice and against austerity and precarity at the intersections, drawing on lessons from Black feminism and Indigenous scholars writing in the context of the ongoing violence of settler colonialism. I ask: Whose politics? Whose time?

Whose politics? Whose knowledge counts as the basis for politics? I cannot accept proposals, as in this book, to radiate outwards from some bodies and experiences – people presented as cis-gender Latino men, workers – as the part that stands as the whole, the synecdoche. This is a project of inclusion: generative themes are based primarily on these experiences, to which others must then align. This story has been told before. It is of a linear, sequential march toward ‘justice’. Some are at the centre, in the lead, and others need to wait their turn to then be included. Add and stir.

Who must wait their turn? In this work, this sounds like (presumably cis) women domestic workers who are mentioned but peripheral to this study, as well as those who experience misogyny and harassment at the worker centres (pp. 87, 124, 226) that are to be the incubators of progressive alternatives and the collective fight for time. We could add here the women who founded and run the worker centres in this book, who are barely visible but are also key protagonists of anti-precarity and antideportation struggles. Those who must wait also surely encompass male-presenting others who do not identify with what are referred to in the book as the ‘normative’ masculinities deployed in the worker centres (p. 161).

What happens when the political knowledge of queer, non-conforming, differently gendered actors is parked for consideration later on? What politics is generated when these experiences and these intersections are named at the end of a book (pp. 249–250), after the contours of struggle have been determined *against precarisation* ‘as the array of social dynamics that structure these settings’ (p. 243)? It becomes possible to call for ‘workers centres for all workers’. And thus a space for the resistance of some is built on the oppression of others. Theorising this as synecdoche does not name the problem or open up the space for resistance to multiple, intersecting oppressions. It does not centre as *part of the theory* the messy and vital struggles of workers’ centres to change representation on governing boards, to reconfigure resistance to border control in recognition of the specific brutality experienced by LGBTQ migrants (p. 249) and to bring into focus *all* forms of work (p. 250).

This call, ‘workers centres for all workers’, chills me without scrutiny of all gender relations and all gendered labour – and I mean all, beyond gender binaries, at multiple intersections. What can the ‘repudiation of work’ mean without naming

CIS heteropatriarchal relationships of domination, in ableist and racialized capitalist systems that pervade all ‘public’ and ‘private’ realms?

This book asks how various groups of workers articulate terms of their consent, how regimes and discontinuities of body-time on the job vary between different groups. But this undertaking is impossible without articulating at the same time the terms of consent to CIS heteropatriarchal relations in and outside of the workplace. Oppressors are not only employers. They are also other workers, community and family members, who are cis men and women embedded in hierarchies that include gender, class, race and legal status.

What would it look like to build a politics for migrant justice, against austerity and precarity *starting with* the knowledge of experiences of a matrix of oppression (Hill Collins, 2000)? This is no synecdoche. It is the challenge of forging justice at the intersections.

These are not new lessons to learn and there is no way to do justice here to all the illustrations of this kind of politics in practice. From my past work, one example from France in the 1990s, may provide purchase on US-based challenges. In Paris, Madjiguene Cissé led movements for the regularisation of ‘sans papiers’ – people ‘without papers’. She described the ‘struggle within the struggle’ by women ‘*sans papières*’ (the feminised version of ‘sans papiers’) for gender equality within the movement, as well as regularisation of immigration status. This was a struggle against patriarchy as well as the racism of the French mainstream. The knowledge that *sans papières* women imparted in the struggle meant that they were in charge of their own thought and politics but without excluding others (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 18), and they did not project separatist solutions to oppression because they were sensitive to how these same systems oppress others (Hill Collins, 1986, p. S21). Women revitalised the movement and kept it together: ‘a role of cement’ (Cissé and Quiminal, 2000). Cissé explains how women kept the group together particularly when the government attempted to divide them, by offering to regularise ‘good files’ of some families, but not of single men. *Sans papières* very firmly opposed this proposal, arguing that if single men were abandoned, they would never get their papers.

Migrant justice, anti-austerity and precarity politics look different when built at these intersections. The difference lies in who is present and also in what results. Care and self-care are centred as ‘an act of political warfare’ in a system in which some were never meant to survive (Lorde, 1988). Self-help, self-care and self-organising are alternative, sometimes complementary spaces, and an important source of personal support, resilience, information and community, beyond white-dominated, politically raceless, misogynistic anti-austerity/precariety spaces (Emejulu and Bassel, 2017). No part can stand for any whole when other spaces are unsafe and sites of violence rather than a collective fight for time.

Whose time? In our work exploring the activism of women of colour across Europe, Akwugo Emejulu and I have argued that epistemic justice is about women

of colour producing counter-hegemonic knowledges for and about themselves to counter the epistemic violence that defines white supremacy (Emejulu and Bassel, 2017, p. 30). Epistemic justice is not a correction or adjustment to ‘include’ unheard voices, but a break away from destructive hierarchical binaries of European modernity. It is a break away from the ‘persistent epistemic exclusion that hinders one’s contribution to knowledge production’ (Dotson, 2014, p. 116) and renders women of colour invisible, inaudible and illegitimate to both policymakers and ostensible social movement ‘allies’.

Epistemic justice at the intersections makes settler colonialism visible, whether in the United States of this study or so-called Canada, where I grew up. This means going much further than the possibilities briefly flagged in the book: kindling a critical sense of historical time and orientation to the future that is fuelled by an awakened sense of historical injustice (pp. 216–217). It is necessary to go much further because the fight for time cannot be founded on Indigenous erasure. Erasure does not create a path toward solidarity ‘with other colonised populations who understand their past experiences in somewhat parallel ways’ (p. 217).

This book discusses workers turning a day-labour corner where jobs are fought for in Portland into a space of musical performance. These are important moments to explore and co-theorise. But when they are described as transforming the space into a ‘site of freedom’ (p. 217), Indigenous struggles are erased. These performances are taking place on stolen land in what is now referred to as ‘Portland’. Tuck and Yang’s (2012) key work ‘Decolonisation is not a Metaphor’ rattles the kind of settler logic that allows for this erasure. They discuss the Occupy movement and argue that

Claiming land for the Commons and asserting consensus as the rule of the Commons, erases existing, prior, and future Native land rights, decolonial leadership, and forms of self-government. Occupation is a move towards innocence that hides behind the numerical superiority of the settler nation, which elides democracy with justice and the logic that what became property under the 1% rightfully belongs to the other 99%. In contrast to the settler labour of occupying the commons, homesteading, and possession, some scholars have begun to consider the labour of de-occupation in the undercommons, permanent fugitivity, and dispossession as possibilities for a radical black praxis ... [that] includes both the refusal of acquiring property and of being property (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 28).

The fight against precarity and for migrant justice must be reconfigured, if it is to be in solidarity with Indigenous struggles. This means changing whose understanding of time *and* labour are at the centre of analysis. The land where this study took place is not an ‘immigrant-receiving country’ but a settler colony, founded on Indigenous genocide, dispossession and slavery. When time is decolonised, the refusal of work is recast in relation to the refusal of the settler colonial state

(Simpson, 2014) and the formations of race, class, gender that it engenders. These formations, rooted in settler colonialism, shape the lives of the migrant day labourers who are ‘here’ because the United States was ‘there’ (Sivandandan, n.d.) and must contend with entangled colonial legacies from different social locations.

This requires a shift in vocabulary, when ‘migrants’ are in fact settlers. But with this comes also a shift in politics. In *Undoing Border Imperialism*, Walia (2013) shows how movements such as No One Is Illegal (NOII) in what is now called Canada have reconsidered their understandings of migrant justice. This has required recognizing the ways in which their actions have been premised on an understanding of sovereignty and territory that perpetuates the colonial legacy that has dispossessed and disenfranchised Indigenous peoples (Walia, 2013). NOII activists consequently re-centre ongoing colonialism and reconfigure understandings of land, movement, and sovereignty when claiming that ‘no one is illegal’. Specifically, activists have tried to consider how their calls for ‘no borders’ undermine Indigenous struggles for title and against land loss, to reclaim land and nation. Solidarity means reshaping the political agenda of NOII beyond token acknowledgements, to move from a politics of ‘no borders, no nation’ to ‘no one is illegal, Canada is illegal’ (Fortier, 2015).

And now? I asked two questions here: Whose politics? Whose time? They remain unanswered. But they are a path to solidarity rather than solutions. So it goes in the messy world of politics, not political theory.

Leah Bassel

Representing precarity: Health, social solidarity, and the limits of coalitional epistemology

In her contribution to this Critical Exchange, Kathi Weeks poses an unexpectedly timely question about how to politicise precarisation in the form of heightened bodily risk at work. Writing prior to the coronavirus outbreak, Weeks echoes my observation in the book that, apart from the temporary rush of reporting when an occupational safety and health (OSH) disaster strikes somewhere in the world, ‘the problem of workplace death and injury is strangely absent from public consciousness’. How quickly things can change. I am writing this response in April 2020 in London, now in its fifth week of ‘lockdown’. In this context, Weeks’s reflections prompt two questions: first, in what specific ways has the COVID-19 crisis made workplace threats to life and health newly legible? Second, what ramifications do state and employer responses to the pandemic have for the pressing issue of how ‘to politicise the issue of bodily harm given how extensively the idiom of health has been rendered amenable to the logics and aims of biopolitical management’, as Weeks aptly puts it?

I still see the outlines of an answer to the second question in the politics of solidarity around OSH matters that day labourers have developed through worker centres. Today's work-culture construes the task of sustaining the worker's health as the worker's personal responsibility, which the worker also exercises as a productivity-oriented social duty. Many day labourers abet this tendency through their own themes of meeting the 'risk on all sides' by individually keeping their 'eyes wide open'. Yet day labourers also demonstrate how health-related language, desires and practices can be cathected with a different figuration of social and individual conscientiousness: responsibility as autonomously collective solidarity.

Day labourers pose this alternative in three main ways. First, through convivial relations at worker centres, day labourers bolster one another to stand up to abusive employers, to refuse dangerous jobs and to de-throne work and income from their primacy in everyday affairs. Second, day labourers contest biopolitical power-knowledge by fusing their own analyses of work-hazards to responsive practices of their own devising, as they teach one another about risky work processes, materials and employer conduct through popular education. Third, day labourers are hatching visionary ideas about how distinct working populations can recognise their common stakes in ending the bodily precaritising dimensions of work, such as by organising with, not just against, their middle-class employers.

In all these ways, at day labour centres, the talk of putting 'health' first mobilises a complexly social vernacular. One's 'own' health is always a concern, but the worker's understanding of 'health' does not stop with the individual. Instead, this idiom positions health as stemming from social interactions that are contingent on power-differences, which are amenable to workers' collective re-formulations, which, in turn, need not be determined by the ideal of productivity. Politically, these initiatives by day labourers imply that disentangling health-talk from the corporate wellness apparatus depends on autonomous action from below in tandem with cross-class organising. The role of the wizened welfare state in such efforts, however, is not clear – and that brings us back to the coronavirus.

Talk about 'biopolitical management'. The crisis has precipitated massive deployments of state resources to expand public health knowledge-systems and to use statistical probability calculations to foster mass populations' biological vigour and protection from disease, albeit in racially selective and gender-unequal ways. Must this tidal wave of emergency mobilisation re-sediment personal responsibility and productivism as the norms that regulate occupational safety and health? Or, as this surge recedes, could it leave behind institutional beachheads for fighting precarity on the level, and within the sinews, of the working body?

Even as the present apotheosis of biopolitics applies itself globally and to entire nations, it targets micro-practices in the workplace and affects precarity's configuration of work as a zone of bodily hazard. Overall, the COVID 19 crisis reduces to the point of vanishing the already quite faint and episodic awareness of how mounting OSH threats have made the workplace increasingly dangerous to

workers' health for decades, across occupations. *The Fight for Time* discusses how these threats principally entail work-environmental hazards, especially poor air quality as more work is done indoors, ergonomically dysfunctional work-processes, and debilitating stress due to corporate downsizing and rising job insecurity. Ironically, the pandemic's sudden re-framing of the workplace as replete with health dangers focuses on the work environment. It does so, however, in terms that reproduce the moral individualism of the precaritized OSH culture, while occluding the work-environmental systems that generate endemic hazards. Thus the exhaled breath of a single co-worker becomes the respiratory threat, rather than the air circulation machinery in the office or warehouse. Health-conscious bodily comportment means obeying the individual remonstrance to keep six feet away from any colleague rather than ensuring that the ergonomics of work-procedures avoid forcing workers to contort their bodies and overstrain their tendons. The stress of losing one's job, having work hours reduced, or fearing these things because of the virus's immediate economic effects, normalises the ongoing anxiety that is baked into precarious work-life and linked to heart disease.

The hyper-individualisation of OSH hazards in the COVID-19 crisis and the fingering of co-workers as those who pose lethal hazards to us also clearly discourage building safer and healthier workplaces through solidarity among workers. Such miscasting of fellow workers as the culprits whose irresponsible conduct explains why everyone's health is in jeopardy bedevils many day labourers' attempts to rationalise the contradiction between expectations of personal responsibility and the power-relations governing their work. The pandemic further embeds this thought-habit of precarity. Meanwhile, consigning 'essential' workers in some occupations to higher risk exposures while others 'shelter at home' and assemble via Zoom aggravates the difficulties of organising across class lines.

In all these ways, the pandemic has made it harder to dislodge health discourses from their current ensnarement in norms of productivity and individual responsibility. Yet the sheer size and weight of institutional responses to COVID-19 also presents an opportunity to argue that, if states and employers can so speedily muster these titanic responses to this virus, then the capabilities are there, more obviously than ever, to tackle the endemic OSH challenges that constitute the bodily mortifying facets of precarity even in 'normal' times. This will only happen, however, if working people redouble their organising efforts. And that makes the project of founding worker centres for all workers even more vital: extending the scaffolding for leadership development and autonomously collective organisation-building along with new ventures in state-sponsored redistribution, such as a universal basic income.

Bice Maiguascha correctly observes that she and I share aspirations to pursue critical theory in ways informed by the ideas she cites from Marx, Leonard and militant research, and I am glad she sees in my book the work of a fellow traveller.

For us both, this means doing theoretically evocative social research from positions of active engagement within political struggles against oppression and with the aim of contributing something tangible to those struggles. Maiguascha and Eschle's research with feminist anti-capitalist activists also illuminates how political agents quite different from those who occupy centre stage in my book can pinpoint 'systemic power relations', including gender, that are fundamental in their own right and need to be contested both as such and via the demands these women raise.

In response to Maiguashca, let me also underscore that, notwithstanding the near-exclusive focus of my fieldwork on male, Latino day labourers, *The Fight for Time* affirms, explicitly and in its intellectual practice, the need to theorise political-economic power and contestation in ways that attend to the complex gendered and racialised aspects of work. Maiguashca allows that my book 'recognises that day labourers ... are gendered and racialised subjects', but the book does more than this. It probes the masculine ideals woven into these workers' themes, explores how the racial state constitutes precarity through policing migrants, distinguishes day labourers' varied renderings of Latino identity, and draws on my own supplementary field work and secondary literature to suggest how domestic workers' conceptions would likely both differ from and align with those of day labourers.

Maiguashca also implies that the book searches 'for a singular revolutionary subject' and anoints the day labourer as 'the one catalyst for change', but *The Fight for Time* does neither. If my statements in the book to the contrary do not suffice to show this, then it should still be apparent from the book's premise of basing a critique of capitalism on research with workers who, as Weeks notes, resemble Marx's disparaged and heterogeneous *Lumpenproletariat*, rather than the traditional proletariat. I stand firmly in sympathy with the efforts of Weeks and other theorists influenced by autonomism to widen and complicate the notion of 'the working class', as Weeks does by training our attention on women's reproductive labour in households, and as studying day labourers does by foregrounding a liminal and ambiguously gendered realm between productive and reproductive labour.

The analytical rubric that positions day labour as both exception and synecdoche in relation to precarity writ large appears to lie at the heart of what most troubles Maiguascha and Leah Bassel. Let me thus address further what this interpretive framework means, going somewhat beyond what is already in the book. The exception/synecdoche formulation is intended as a strategy of provocation: a prod to imagine how the critical language of one especially benighted group, which has done a remarkable job of building itself up politically, could shake loose new ways of construing overarching forms of power and domination. Such general structures, systems and flows of power and domination exist, and they need to be named in order to be engaged politically. This does not obviate the fact that any act of naming by a situated subject is also bound to yield misnomers because of that person's or group's particularised social location. Moreover, as Mezzadra and

Neilson (2019) argue, capital itself regenerates, accumulates and dominates *both* through systemic processes that integrate the globe *and* through localised ‘operations’ that proliferate heterogeneities of experience, identity and activity (including work-activity).

This, however, makes it imperative to theorise capital on both levels at the same time, through critical procedures that juxtapose the general and the particular, teasing out their resonances and tensions. One models the whole with the help of closely scrutinising an always-insufficient particular, then re-envisions the systemic through considering other concrete-particulars, and so forth. A synecdoche is a part that stands in for the whole, but this notion’s origin in literary theory bespeaks self-awareness that this figuration is a contingent act of representation – rather than a straightforward declaration of truth. Furthermore, critical-popular analysis does not simply infer the whole from a part but rather effects mutual mediations between self-expressions of the part and conceptions of general dynamics. *The Fight for Time* pursues this path by reading day labourers’ themes together with allied concepts from critical and political theory about broad formations of precarity. This is certainly a different way of reaching a provisional sense of society-wide power than that preferred by Maiguashca, but it has its virtues.

One virtue has to do with the temporality and affectivity of collective action that seeks to confront thoroughly pervasive forms of social, political and economic power. Having exhorted readers to pursue with other groups more of the fine-grained ethnographic analysis that my book provides, Maiguashca then cautions:

It is only once these varied, complex mappings of power and resistance are drawn, with the recognition that they cannot be easily merged, that we can begin to look for connections across them and identify possible sites of bridge building which may lead to a convivial politics of the left and to the emergence of a collective dream.

This statement conveys a political temporality of postponement as well as an ascetic tinge, and I question both. If capital and other systemic forms of power are perpetually in motion, always mutating, and never ceasing to employ both universalising and particularising modes of operation, then it makes little sense for theory to hold its own generalising capacities in reserve until it has amassed some critical mass of analyses of situated perspectives (and how could a non-arbitrary threshold be specified?). Strategically, this appears unwise. Affectively, something also seems awry with the gesture of renunciation one must make to defer the invigoration that comes from battling broad-scale domination, while also letting systemically generated suffering endure without being called out as such. The critical-popular approach, in contrast, partakes in the affective spirit of Weeks’s ‘politics of the demand’. This means taking seriously both the re-constituting of desiring subjects in the midst of utopian struggle and the value of fighting for a

‘collective dream’ that is massive and radical – like ‘worker centres for all workers’ or ‘wages for housework’ – but neither totalising, nor conclusive.

Another virtue of the critical-popular approach to theorising the whole, in comparison to mapping specific differences and then building localised bridges, is that the former offers not just an alternative to the latter, but also a prelude to it. My book not only juxtaposes day labourers’ popular themes with academic concepts to theorise precarity writ large and anti-precarity struggle, but also shows how worker centres, the day labour movement and a broader anti-precarity politics all depend on developing popular consciousness and political action-plans through molecular processes and alliance formation. The book’s practical contribution to day labour centres’ popular education programming, through workshops I conducted, as well as a report I wrote with additional dialogue options, further shows this project’s commitment to fostering intersectional interactions of the kind that Maiguashca and Bassel endorse. *The Fight for Time* thus supports coalitional politics as one key mode of struggle needed to define and confront precarity. It takes issue, however, with what we might call a ‘coalitional epistemology’, or the idea that understanding power on the broadest levels and identifying desirable forms of mass solidarity, can only occur through the cumulative, piece-by-piece assembling of particularised knowledges into progressively larger composites.

Along these lines, it bears emphasis that *The Fight for Time* is one of two inaugural books in my publisher’s series ‘Subaltern Studies in Latina/o Politics’, edited by Alfonso Gonzales and Raymond Rocco. I am honoured to have my book involved in this effort to support work that brings together Latino studies and political theory. The series is also promoting research on Latino/Latin-American transnationalism (Félix, 2019), contentious citizenship and gender among Salvadorans in the US, and religion, gender and local agency in Mexican shelters for Central American migrants. Colleagues interested in how my book contributes to more wide-ranging discussions of race, ethnicity, migration and gender, and to coalitional politics, should be aware of this context.

For the most part, my responses to Maiguashca, and defence of the critical-popular method above, comprise my answer to Leah Bassel as well. Bassel shares with Maiguashca a similar orientation toward critique and political action, which Bassel describes as embracing ‘the challenge of forging justice at the intersections’. Bassel argues, however, that rather than either encouraging consideration of other oppressed groups’ experiences or incorporating such analysis into the book, *The Fight for Time* suppresses and erases such experiences. I strongly disagree. As I have explained, there are good reasons for understanding the logic of the synecdoche as evoking provisional renderings of broad power dynamics in ways that invite – rather than discourage – contestation. Readers hoping to join a ‘linear, sequential march toward “justice”’ will search in vain for marching orders in my book.

Bassel also does not mention how the book frames day labour as both exception and synecdoche in relation to precarity writ large. This dual optic makes basic to the book an appreciation for the specificity of day labourers' social experiences. It thus signals clearly that attentiveness to situated subjectivity is a *sine qua non* – though not the sole legitimate basis – of critique. In this way, my book underscores how the forms of precarity thematised by day labourers reflect, for instance, their particular position in the urban construction economy and their specific vulnerability to the racialized and gendered homeland security state. This implicitly affirms the value of hearing what other groups of workers, situated distinctly, would say about precarity.

At the same time, Bassel's commentary neglects a different problem with which my book grapples: the need to challenge the invidious naturalisation of assumed group differences. White middle-class Americans, for instance, certainly need to understand better what makes the lives of working-class migrants in the US both different and harder. But the former also need a better grasp of how their own economic, political and bodily fortunes resemble those of the latter much more closely than most would like to admit. Anderson (2019) calls for 'migrantizing citizenship' as a tactic for waking Britons up to how the shrill demand to save 'British jobs for British workers' has precaritized work for everyone. In a similar spirit, *The Fight for Time* appeals for precaritized workers throughout society to recognise their shared stakes in a common struggle, even while observing how the stakes are graver, and different, for some than for others.

I do see it as a limitation of my research that, although it delved into the complexities of day labourers' commentaries and traced their interactions with an eclectically convened set of theoretical interlocutors, it did not include substantial fieldwork with other precaritized workers. Thus, I could not critically compare such workers' generative themes with the themes spotlighted in the book. The conception of critical-popular research is in its formative stages, and Maiguashca's and Bassel's comments, have fuelled my interest in exploring how a future project could bring such critical moves into the heart of the inquiry. Planning such work with migrant and indigenous subjects (including indigenous migrants) would offer one attractive pathway for doing this, especially given the anti-capitalist trajectories of leading critiques of settler colonialism, which prioritise spatial and temporal politics that may both align and conflict with migrant endeavours (Coulthard, 2014).

In the meantime, I appreciate Maiguashca's and Weeks's invitations to speculate about how day labourers' themes and organisational spaces might relate to those of other groups. I see an affinity between feminist WSF activists' embrace of an 'ethos' whereby organising processes 'prefigure' radically altered social relations and the day labourers' anticipatory enactment of the 'refusal of work', – even as they desperately pursue jobs, and even though the day labour network takes no stand for such a refusal. As these lines suggest, however, day labourers pursue

social change by generating transformation from within, and by virtue of acutely contradictory circumstances. I wonder whether a similar catalysis of power-from-contradiction plays a role in the WSF activists' undertakings, or whether perhaps these women's class privileges permit a more confident sense that an ethically consistent programme of action is possible in ways that are precluded for day labourers. That said, it would be intriguing to know if the activists in Maiguashca's research feel subjected to class-transcending temporal contradictions of precarity, such as the clash between oppressively continuous and jarringly discontinuous patterns of work. Even if precarity does not furnish the express 'starting point' for these women's advocacy, it might still provide a basis for solidarity with the day labour movement in the broad fight against capital.

Barvosa asks whether encouraging people to identify with the timorous mind-state of precarity might be politically counter-productive, given how fear induces corporeal responses that shut down complex thinking, induce self-preserving automatism and impede cooperation. As the book shows, however, the emotions that pervade precarity include not just fear but also guilt, hopefulness, self-satisfaction, resentment, boredom, numbness and compassion, and more. Precisely because precarity is so emotionally plural, it both acquires compelling force and spawns opportunities from within itself for its own contestation.

In addition, precarity is more than a 'state of mind'. It is also a socially and politically constituted condition that stems from the convergence of protracted welfare-state austerity with the transformation of employment norms and institutions. Precarity, moreover, is a hegemonic formation that relies on working people's consent, which day labourers provide, for instance, through the individualism of their generative themes. Yet precisely for this reason and because it is structured in contradiction, especially temporally, precarity can be transformed from within. As my book argues, many workers prefer to see the worker centre-community as just a 'workforce' and in this way 'identify emotionally with a fearful state of dangerous insecurity', as Barvosa fittingly puts it. Yet more day labourers respond to fear – along with confusion, rash self-confidence, impatience and loneliness – by acknowledging these tangled emotions and converting their affective energy into bonds of solidarity.

As to Gates and Buffet, I am glad they are giving away mounds of money and have updated philanthropy's ethical framework, but relying on a programme to broaden beneficent actions does not strike me as a viable response to precarity. As Azmanova (2020) argues, in ways complementary to *The Fight for Time*, the systemic roots of precarity lie in the competitive pursuit of profit, and precarity's structural foundations abide in the re-organisation of work and de-funding of the welfare state. Absent a coordinated and democratic (anti-oligarchic) movement by masses of working people to tackle power on these levels, precarity will persist. The emancipatory script proposed by my book, far from simply pitting poor downtrodden workers against greedy bosses, casts working people at all levels of

the economic hierarchy as potential collaborators in the fight against precarity, which must also be a struggle against gargantuan wealth – and a fight for time.

Paul Apostolidis

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