The Nature of Work In/security: Surfing Precarious Work in London's Contingent Economy

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Abstract

Precarity, precariousness and precarious work have, in recent years, become central to sociological discussions of youth, employment and urban life. In existing debate, precarity is typically described in a split nature, as a form of work and a condition. Through ethnographic investigation, this thesis intimately investigates this relationship, arguing that precarious work is best thought of as a quality of all work, and precariousness needs to be re-evaluated in this light. These themes are developed using the term 'in/security', which draws attention to the security and insecurity inherent to the balance that precarity represents.

Empirically, this project examines the openings, challenges and strategies of those who have come to work in London's precarious job market. Based on auto/ethnographic fieldwork and twenty interviews with denizens of the London precarious job market, the thesis argues for a condition of 'surfing' between jobs as a fairly consistent way of life. When people cannot find permanent work, or need work quickly, precarious jobs represent 'fast work' that is available with little effort. These however are rarely full jobs, but instead are conceived of in the thesis as empty places -a contingent need in the production line or service programme of the enterprise. Workers come to fill in these empty places, but routinely struggle to break out of the borders of the contingent need. As such, they are eventually let go or resign themselves without having altered their original circumstance that led them into precarious work in the first place. This leads to moving from empty place to empty place, gaining little from each. Workers may interrupt that flow with years-long stints in single jobs, or breaking out into industries with better pay or working conditions, but the surfing of precarious work can reinstate itself like a bad habit. In this recurring experience, the nature of precarity in contemporary market-driven economies like the UK is identified, achieving an equilibrium of what insecure options are available.

The core contribution of the thesis is to view precarity not as a form of work or condition but instead as a contingent equilibrium of tenure insecurity, working conditions and personal fulfilment. In being able to smooth out the insecurities of any single job, workers are able to achieve a state of working that they deem preferable to the available permanent work. In this manner precarious workers are at once caught in the pragmatic advantages of precarious work and the limitations and insecurity which comes with it. Work-induced precarity is as much supported by what little securities precarious work provides as it is by what uncertainties are introduced. This changes what questions sociologists ask of precarity. Instead of asking who is precarious or not, or what job is precarious, the question becomes who is allowed to surf and how? Furthermore, who is made to stop in a job that is, while the best they can find, otherwise unattractive? The contribution of this study then is to give texture to precarity in a manner that raises new questions while giving a sounder conceptual foundation.

Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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Each individual is the end of a line that is moving ever-forward. As a line, that which is behind us is always pushing us forward and always a part of who we are.

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1 Introducing the Nature of Work In/security

1.1 A Problem as Old as Capitalism

In this thesis I investigate and analyse work insecurity in London, using ethnographic and interview data collected in 2020-2021. By work insecurity I mean, the insecurities of the job itself - tenure being lost, hours cut, tasks changed- and the insecurities of the worker that ensue - financial distress, emotional wreckage and the deep feeling of living with uncertainty. Work insecurity has, by many accounts (Beck, 2000), been increasing due to changes in and out of work, such as employment deregulation in the form of things like zero hour contracts, or the retreat of the welfare state, which has accelerated dramatically in the past decade in the UK due to austerity. These changes have come to be called precarity (Betti, 2018), emphasising an ever-present uncertainty. This study argues that instead of a quantitatively less secure capitalism of less wages, shorter tenures and greater uncertainty, there is emerging a qualitative transformation marked by new insecurities *and* securities. To frame all of this though, there needs to be some context.

First is the short-term view of recent history. In the past five decades there appears to be an incremental, but continuous, decline to the securities of jobs and workers (Beck, 2000). Today, it seems, 'job insecurity is everywhere now' (Bourdieu, 1998: 81). One does not need to look far to find this. My current officemate is unable to find post-doctorate permanent work and is making-do as a part-time graduate teaching assistant, all the while wondering if he even wants a career in academia. In my home country New Zealand, my semi-retired mother is seeing her Covid-19 vaccination work finally ending and is unsure what to do afterwards. Worlds apart, generations apart, sectors apart and yet there are the same concerns about insecure work which are imbricated with one's notion of being useful, having something to do and progressing in life. This was a concern in the 1980s and 1990s, however recent attention has turned to the term precarity. In academic contexts, beyond the regular articles, there are special issues (Alberti, Bessa, Hardy, Trappmann, & Umney, 2018; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017), book series (Raunig, 2013), dissertations (Bundy, 2019; Choonara, 2018; Galic, 2019), intellectual heavyweights (Butler, 2004) and entire careers (Kalleberg, 2018) all examining the contemporary intersection of less secure work, an insecure life and the social-philosophical implications of a society that seems to have not only abandoned the idea of protecting everyone, but embraced facilitating risk as a mode of normal functioning (Beck, 2000; Lorey, 2015). Work appears to be transforming, and precarity (or risk) seems the new paradigm for developed capitalist economies going into the future.

Taking the long-term view, insecurity in work is normal, after all the essence of liberalism has always been to 'live dangerously' (Foucault, 2008: 67). Capitalism represents a shift from the agrarian, Feudal and self-preservation mode of living to one of *employment*. We are no longer peasants or serfs, but employed workers (Polanyi, 1944). The weather does not make us without, but instead the machinations of the market. Yet, as Polanyi (1944) illustrates, the shift to urban employment created the first contradiction of security: the cities had more wealth than had ever been known before and yet present was a hitherto unseen poverty, along with employment, the inverse, unemployment, had been inadvertently invented too. This followed course, and by the end of the long nineteenth century that preceded our modernity, defined by unbridled economic liberalism (Hobsbawm, 2010), Orwell (2001 [1933]) observes nothing had changed for many in

Paris and London: work came and went, cities were centres of vagabondage and the employed lived materially and existentially insecure.

Then there was a hiccup and security became certain. The mythology goes, Henry Ford could not get workers to stay in their job at his factory, so he doubled their pay rather than deal with high attrition. Decades later this became the model for a new a corporatist management style that would prevail until the economic shocks of the 1970s (Weil, 2014). As Sennett (2006: 20) puts it 'corporations learned the art of stability' through steady national markets, engagement with labour and a gendered division of labour (Vosko, 2010). Capital and labour power were tied together, capital needed workers to operate the factories and mines and then shops and services. Workers organised, and created a third party to the relationship, the labour union, that mediated the balance of power between single workers and the tremendous aggregations of capital. Firms hired more and more, brought more people inside, built towns, economies and countries. Such a tying of labour and capital spread out of the workshop and throughout society, creating new gender and racial norms (Vosko, 2010; Weeks, 2011) and welfare regimes that supported individuals so tightly and securely that developed, consumer economies were likened to enveloping machinations that absorbed all of worker attention and being to the point of pathology (Debord, 2012; Whyte, 2002 [1956]).

Now, instability-as-norm has returned, and nineteenth century liberalism is back as *neo*-liberalism. As Polanyi (1944), and later Foucault (2008), stress, neo-liberalism is not a handing over to the natural inclinations of the market, but an engineered circumstance to create a market that shall govern behaviours as if natural. Scholars have brought forth many facets to this alteration. Standing (2011) emphasises the change to labour regulation, Sennett (2006) the shift from hierarchical to networked management, Kalleberg and Vallas (2017) a manifold of macro-economic forces from financialization to automation and Lorey (2015) the development of neoliberal governmentality as a political device of risk. The best explanation comes from Castells (2010) that it was a manifold of every reason that cannot be deciphered, and what is important is the result being lived in.

This flexibility has been labelled as a source of precarity (Masquelier, 2017) or risk (Beck, 2000) for the citizens of developed economies. Masquelier (2017: 39) summarises that the 'flexibilization of production and labour markets is often described as an intolerable source of uncertainty for ordinary workers'. Where at first precarity was used to describe a kind of exposure, of families that were vulnerable to 'incidents' due to a variety of reasons, not just employment, in the 1990s precarity became more associated with employment in French and other Western European discourse, and in turn with the detrimental changes to work that post-Fordism was bringing, whether that was temporary work or more straightforward low-quality, low pay work (Barbier, 2004; Betti, 2018; Choonara, 2020; Doogan, 2015). This also led to identifying a precarity as an 'omnipresent social background' (Choonara, 2020: 429) for people. By 2008 Neilson and Rossiter (2008: no pagination) could say that precarity was the 'meme of the moment' for identifying the 'epoch-breaking' transformations of work with the concerns and struggles of labour. There has been a process then of labelling the latest economic transformation as one of 'precarity'. The thesis is not just that workers are more individualised (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), facing more flexibility and uncertainty in work (Castells, 2010), but are living with a fundamental and pervasive precariousness to their being.

The macro-economic shift from corporate Fordism and its associated organization of the state raise questions of security and insecurity, and the manner in which economic systems are organised to protect workers or compel them to work. However, the significance of this as normal, specific to our economic management or an inevitable outcome of capitalism produce

significant ambiguity within precarity as a paradigm. The contemporary nature of work needs to be examined against a critical reading of what 'being precarious' really is.

1.2 Setting the Stage

The conditions of precarity, precariousness and precarious work have, in recent years, become central to sociological discussions of youth, employment and urban life.

Certain researchers describe a crisis in work whereby workers are facing greater and greater uncertainty in their jobs and their lives. Terms such as a 'proliferation of precarious work' (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017: 1) or an 'expansion of more contingent structures of employment' (Alberti et al., 2018: 448) are used to describe not just the obvious examples like gig work, but the nature of working across entire economies, including the UK. Such changes represent workers losing their traditional protections of the Fordist-corporatist era (Beck, 2000; Weil, 2014), and so are exposed to more frequent and unexpected changes in work, which flows on to uncertainty in their lives. This is a UK economy that has seen a four-fold increase in zero hour contracts since 2000 (Farina, Green, & McVicar, 2020), an explosion in temporary agency workers over the same period (Forde & Slater, 2016) and the institutionalisation of 'gig work' into the economy, where by the broadest definitions of 'crowd work' up to two per cent of workers acquire the majority of their income (Huws, Spencer, Syrdal, & Holts, 2017). None of these workers get statutory public holidays (although some get a compensation to their wages), severance pay, sick days, annual leave, formal continuance of tenure and are in a far weaker negotiating position over their terms of employment. At the most profound, it is said that the middle class has been economically downgraded (Beck, 2000) or that the proletariat has been replaced by a 'precariat' (Standing, 2011).

The immediate context of this thesis is a rise in public and academic concern with the cost of living and prosperity for ordinary people in the UK. In the UK, the most recent macro-economic period begins in 2010, where the UK's response to the 2008 Great Financial Crisis (GFC) was orchestrated: austerity. Public spending was slashed, again and again, so that not only were the safety nets no longer functioning, but also the ordinary day-to-day functioning of the state has been disrupted. Then Brexit, Covid-19 and the 2022 cost of living crisis began. Corporate executives began fleecing consumers, raising prices and handing the money to their shareholders. All the while, UK real income flat-lined. Since 2008 real earnings, that is those adjusted against the increase in prices, has floated just above or below zero per cent line nationally (ONS, 2023). Some measures show a national decline in real wages overall (Full Fact, 2019). Zero per cent change in real wages masks the issue though, as food banks are seeing up to double the usage from 2017 to 2022 (The Trussel Trust, 2022). Meanwhile, the entire public sector appears to be on strike as people who thought they were middle-income struggle to make ends' meet and demand wages that would return them to a measure of finances they held in the past (Hassan, France, Bulbul, & Knibbs, 2023).

There is therefore reason to believe that, regardless of their work condition, individuals are 'precarious' or experiencing 'precariousness' through merit of political-economic shifts in terms of inflation, education or welfare. Some, like Lorey (2015), have developed this off neoliberal governmentality, that fear is a manner of government practice, a method to drive economic behaviour to the betterment of the nation state. Doogan (2009) calls this 'manufactured uncertainty', a pervasive engineered condition that exaggerates the insecurities present for the betterment of capital. Choonara (2020) repeats this, but says the left has been exaggerating insecurity to re-ignite class activism. The overall notion is that, regardless of the work anyone is in, they will feel less secure today then if they were living in the throes of post-War Fordism.

Amongst this context, the purpose of this study has been to investigate the changes to work in a holistic manner. This means to consider the nature of insecure work in a local manner that recognises material and cultural aspects. At the same time is a need to look broader than at any single job or industry, such as hospitality or academia, and see what patterns emerge across the labour market as a whole. In taking that wider view, one can then examine the workers themselves in the same way, in the labour market as a whole rather than in just one job. This allows the examination of how precarity is lived, how people build lives or careers through this work and what is particular about it to the current economy. In clarifying these aspects, one can see how personal characteristics such as gender truly affect workers, and only then can stratifications that are specific to precarity, and not just an intersectional matrix, emerge.

I approached this ethnographically by working in London. My fieldwork coincided with Covid-19, meaning I had to negotiate this disease practically, ethically and in the field as workplaces were reordered to reduce transmission. I sought to conduct two to three workplace ethnographies for comparison, but found that I was spending a lot more time outside of any workplace: searching for work, having job interviews, applying for jobs and undergoing training. I was in a milieu between jobs, not really unemployed, yet I would not say employed either, but *surfing* from insecure job to insecure job as best I could. Every interviewee had spent considerable time with one employer, but they had also done the same as me at some time: surfing from job to job. The field site had expanded from a two to three workplaces to the segment of London's precarious labour market I was encountering.

The argument of the thesis is to view precarity as a societal change which can lead to diverse uncertainties *and* certainties that are moved through by workers. Precarity might be a quality that arises from jobs, but the only security against it lies in the labour market as a whole. Workers need to, and strive, for a long-term security that will protect them indefinitely. In the meantime, workers are liable to remaining in the state of 'surfing' during which they manage to float above the worst jobs but struggle to ever attain lasting security. Such surfing is supported by facilities typically associated with risk, such as gig platforms or temporary work agencies, that allow the individual to continually renew the terms of their precarity without ever contributing to a more durable and certain security. As such, through the analysis the line between precarious and non-precarious work, precarity and security, progressively fades until there are only matters of scale and intensity across all work and workers.

The main contribution of the thesis is to provide a view of precarious work that is deeply contextualised in the labour market, the options that workers have and the aspirations that workers hold. In this regard, the thesis demonstrates concepts that may be useful for analysing precarious work in a rich manner while dynamically accommodating different local conditions. The thesis speaks to the contemporary state of work, that work is not satisfying nor providing enough, yet by any measure, working in the UK is still likely preferable compared to many other economies (Findlay & Thompson, 2017). This thesis speaks to the realities of underemployment, such as the university graduate who can only find retail work, and the realities of poverty, of never being able to find a job that pays enough and has tolerable working conditions. In doing so, it is hoped the thesis speaks across jobs to the nature of capitalism and the inequalities that are operating.

1.3 In/security

Enveloping this research is the concept of in/security, which aims to decipher the tendency to equate post-Fordism with risk and insecurity. In essence, the / symbol is inserted to emphasise that any insecurity has a security, and all securities are liable to insecurity. In doing so, the use of

this concept is aimed at extending off precarity, Fordism and post-Fordism to examine manners of being in their own right.

When examining the underlying changes to political-economy and the experienced effects and possibilities of such, there is a tendency to see only the eroding of previously held securities (Han, 2018; Kalleberg, 2018). This means that precarity can, in limited instances, become the mere removal of Fordism. This negates the 'new forms and images' that are argued to arise out of economic transformation (Beck, 2000: 70). These new forms, in being durable enough to exist, shall be composed of their limited securities. In other words, forms of precarity and being precarious will always have some contributing security to maintain their being and inform their nature. In/security attempts to address this contradiction by indicating to the factors that contribute to the enablement and maintenance of a state of being that is considered to be unstable, insecure and uncertain.

To expand on this, one can consider the nature of being secure. Typically, security and insecurity are used to describe relative states of being. A sufficiently complex computer password is called 'secure' and a relatively simple one is called 'insecure'. In terms of work, a permanent contract is deemed 'secure' and a temporary contract are deemed 'insecure'. These only make sense in relation to some measure, that of a certain type of worker and a certain type of life. The same is for precarity, where the yardstick of secure and insecure are attached to descriptions of ways of being that tend to rest in an idea of corporate, statist Fordism of the most binding (Vosko, 2010; Whyte, 2002 [1956]). As such one becomes blind to the securities that maintain an insecurity. For example, the irregular pay-cheque that secures precarity to continue another week. The irregular income provides security in the short-term, but it is also the medium-term insecurity of having no guaranteed income. While work short of permanent and full-time work with a full welfare safety net is considered to be insecure and precarious, when that type of work is not available new ways-of-being need to be achieved.

In/security builds on the mutually-constitutive relationship between security and insecurity to explore how security is as important as insecurity to precarity and being precarious. Lorey (2015: 20) reflects, 'The conditions that enable life are, at the same time, exactly those that maintain it as precarious. All security retains the precarious; all protection and all care maintain vulnerability'. The structures that generate precariousness are the same as those that are holding that state-of-being in place, that are making precariousness a *certain* outcome. This means to draw attention to the securities that make precariousness possible and maintain such a way of being. As Han (2018: 352) puts it, 'the tensions that the term precarity bears in terms of its deployment as a master concept also reside within the affirmation of the good'. In other words, to describe and develop precarity, one has to also be able to identify the 'good', which is briefly defined as 'life-affirming terms' (Han, 2018: 341). For the purposes of precarity specifically, the good can be understood in broadly that manner, as terms that affirm the life. This does not mean to take these 'good' points as an opposite to the heightened risk, but as part of the heightened risk in terms of them having the same source and contributing to the same state of being.

In/security proposes that uncertainty in society is 'built up' by social structures. This means that instead of individuals being Fordist subjects exotic to uncertainty, they are post-Fordist subjects *endemic* to uncertainty. Both are of and experience uncertainty, but the latter is one-in-the-same with that uncertainty. The contemporary form of uncertainty, precarity, is not just a matter of what is lost or put at risk, but is also a matter of what has been added to the 'scales of balance' which precarity is describing. In doing so, one can examine the social structures that keep one precarious not through risk, but through the productive power of constructing social structures, of giving one the means to live insecurely.

1.4 Outline

The thesis is divided into three parts divided between literature, methodology and theory, and third, analysis.

Part One 'What Precarious Age Have We Built?' examines the precarity literature through two centres of analysis: jobs and workers. The section examines both what changes have occurred and what intellectual tools have been developed to track that change.

Chapter Two examines the 'job-centred' literature and data concerning the transformations underlining contemporary work as understood in the precarity paradigm. The chapter begins with a discussion of the sociology of work, positioning the thesis in this literature. Many researchers have recognised that work is getting worse for employees in terms of pay, benefits, scheduling, and long-term tenure. Measurement has focused on so called 'non-standard' contracts, which has definite but limited growth. However, most definitions of precarious work are far broader than contractual change. By many national-level measures, there has been none or minimal long-term decline to macro indices of worker security or job retention in the UK (Choonara, 2020; Doogan, 2009; Fevre, 2007). Meanwhile, there are concentrated forms of precarious work with great uncertainty and poor working conditions. Altogether, the job-centred literature and evidence paints a mixed picture of macro-economic transformation but limited observable change to jobs at the national level.

Chapter Three examines the 'worker-centred' literature that focuses on the individual and precariousness. Drawing on the philosophy of Judith Butler (2012; 2014) and a re-reading of earlier sociology researchers have developed the notion of precariousness as a consequence of precarious work and of the decline in protection in developed economies. Such a notion raises the prospect of social location and social context as an intersectional increase in risk or protection for workers (Campbell & Price, 2016; Vosko, 2010). This results in individuals for whom precarious work does not result in precarity (Antonucci, 2018; Campbell & Price, 2016). A worker-centre reveals new insecurities of social or economic position, such as feeling unsure about one's progress in life. Overall, a need for a personal approach becomes clear as workers may be protected by things like family support, while still feeling insecure about their future. Chapter Three ends with a conclusion to Part One that discusses the significance and nature of the job and worker centres together.

Part Two 'Re-tooling Precarity Thinking and Methodologies' discusses the concepts and methodologies used to investigate precarity in London.

Chapter Four presents the methodology used. The research design was shaped by the need to study both the conditions inside of workplaces and the 'precarious spaces' between them, the job searching, the hiring and the sitting at home waiting for work. This led an innovative ethnographic project of taking multiple precarious jobs and being 'moved' by the landscape as it was reshaped by the fluctuating pull of Covid-19 and consumer demand. This was supplemented with twenty-two interviews with people selected from the field site focusing on those without guaranteed hours. This produced multiple perspectives of the contingent landscape in London that workers traversed.

Chapter Five describes the theoretical framework. The first section takes a closer look at the 'objective' and 'subjective' domains of precarity. Borrowing a term from Ettlinger (2007) I discuss the progressive 'unbounding' of precarity from class, to work and then to ontology. I argue this unbounding however means that precarity becomes decoupled from work, while only seeing risk. I then examine the subjective, which in precarity theory is typically a 'passive observer'. Generally this does not introduce problems, but drawing on phenomenology (Charlesworth, 2000; Merleau-

Ponty, 1962), I suggest a number of other avenues to keep in mind where the subjective can affect the objective, and vice versa. The second half of the chapter presents the three main concepts supporting the discussion: contingent landscape, empty places and precarious work trajectories. These three terms refer to the structural conditions of precarity in a phenomenological, encountered manner. Briefly, the contingent landscape is the extent of insecure, short-term options that exist in the economy. Empty places are jobs that have been stripped of all their substance to be a mere shell of wages in exchange for labour. Trajectories are the movement through the landscape and workers' perception of such.

Part Three 'Surfing the Contingent Landscape' contains the data presentation, analysis and discussion.

Chapter Six is titled *The Risk of Getting Hired* and sets the stage for in/security by outlining the dual presence of precarious work as utility and risk. In this chapter I examine how precarious work is, in addition to its characteristic of being uncertain, is the 'fasted' and 'easiest' way to get hired. Precarious workers may be hired 'instantly' over the phone to begin the next week. In light of these characteristics of speed and ease, I examine how from the perspective of the interviewee's location in the contingent landscape, precarious work comes to be the rational decision. Overall, this chapter maps the contingent landscape and gives detail as to what precarious is in support of the following analysis chapters.

Chapter Seven is titled *Filling In*. This chapter examines the workplace realities of precarious work from the perspective of the 'automatic factory' (Marx, 1990) and cyborg theory (Haraway, 1987) whereby workers are controlled by the labour process. In filling an empty place, precarious workers lose their autonomy and are 'inserted' into the machine of the enterprise as if they were a tool. Workers may eventually overcome this restriction by gaining seniority and 'stepping up' to conduct more advanced duties such as training or supervising staff, running production lines or managing the temping process. This discussion examines the interplay between being a 'tool' and being a 'human' (Haraway, 1987) that precarious workers struggle with.

Chapter Eight is titled *Surfing the Landscape* and examines the long-term existence of the precarious worker from job to job over durations as long as multiple decades. The chapter turns on the observation that for many precarious workers, the insecurity of remaining and staying in work generally is of equal or greater in importance to staying in any single job. Workers therefore are not in a precarious *job*, but are in precarious *work*, surfing through a chain of jobs that is more secure than any single job. Over multiple jobs, workers achieve an equilibrium of income, working conditions and humanization that keeps them sustained. In doing so, they remain as a tool filling empty places while struggling to find something ideal in the contingent landscape.

Chapter Nine is titled *Continuation, Exit and Recursion* and ends the analysis by an account of interviewees' progression through and exit from the contingent landscape. Precarious workers who have elected to continue to surf the landscape are characterised by seeing no way out, or no way to substantially improve their career. This is concomitant with the perverse reality that the precarious work they can find is better than any permanent work. These workers are therefore held in their equilibrium by the relative drawbacks and benefits of permanent and precarious work. The final discussion section examines ends to precarious work and exits from the contingent landscape. Workers may 'upgrade' their area of the contingent landscape to work for better wages and in better conditions. They may find a job that has a sense of not just permanency, but also heading in the 'right direction' towards indefinite and ever-growing security. However, a recursion back into precarious work is always possible.

Chapter Ten is the concluding discussion. The chapter discusses the key limitations and boundaries of the discussion, and makes recommendations for further research from those

limitations. It then answers the research questions. I then discuss the contributions and theoretical implications of the analysis. This is spread over several discussions of precarious work, autonomy, materiality and the specific nature of precarious work in the Global North. The final discussion elaborates the consequences for how sociologists can reappraise their understanding of capitalism as a process that at times aims to keep workers at arms' length, as interchangeable tools to fill empty places.

Part One

What Precarious Age Have We Built?

2

Work and Flexible Economies

2.1 Introduction: Mapping the Two Centres of Precarity Literature

Over this and the following chapter I map out and discuss the precarity literature in relation to the sociology of work. The chapter begins with a short discussion of the sociology of work where I contextualise this thesis and the following literature on precarity. It could be said that sociology began as the study of work, as the focuses of Marx, Weber and Durkheim were on the new capitalist form of working and the societies that creates. There are two main reappraisals of classical sociology of work. First are the re-evaluations of the transformation of economics that occurred from the 1970s in late-modern theory. Second are more philosophically-inspired re-evaluations through post-structuralism/humanism and feminism. This thesis draws on precarity theory to evaluate the lived experience of work in light of the economic changes of the past five decades with an emphasis on the meso 'structures of diversity' (Castells, 2010) that are impactful, interacted with and compose experience.

While the word precarious has been used in social analysis since the eighteenth century (Betti, 2018), the neoliberal economic transformation fifty years ago ignited a new relevance among Continental European social scientists in the 1980s (Barbier, 2004). Subsequently precarity was firmly associated with flexible working arrangements and labour union movements fighting the erosion of corporate Fordist securities. Meanwhile, precarity became a paradigm for society itself as study turned to the 'social and political implications of precarious work' (Arnold & Bongiovi, 2013: 298). At this intellectual junction the breadth goes far beyond work as 'precarity differs in that it seeks to identify and signify a new phase of capitalism that is qualitatively different from previous eras' (Arnold & Bongiovi, 2013: 298). From one perspective then, precarity is the study of the working condition under late-modernity (Kalleberg, 2018): the transformation of working, social and political life as commercial activity no longer roots worker, enterprise and capital in place to one another (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 2000; Castells, 2010; Masquelier, 2017). As Kalleberg (2018: 17) puts it neoliberal and late-modern literature 'identifies many of the social, economic, political, and cultural forces that have led to a pervasive sense of vulnerability and insecurity'. However such emphasises on late-modernity need to be balanced against the inherent exploitation of all stages of capitalism (Weeks, 2011).

The precarity literature is typically divided into two distinct, although tightly interwoven centres of analysis: that of the 'objective' changes and the 'subjective' (Alberti et al., 2018; Waite, 2009). The objective strain is most associated with labour sociology, which since the 1980s has been tracking changes in employment away from Fordist a job-for-life to a more fractured and flexible form (Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000; Weil, 2014). This literature is supplemented with critical and Marxian authors (Choonara, 2020; Doogan, 2015) who question the narrative of increasing precaritization of work. The 'objective' is only half the picture. Precarity authors pair the objective with what is typically called the 'subjective'; the subsequent feeling or condition of precarity that is labelled precariousness. Of particular relevance to precariousness are the innovations by Judith Butler (2004).

In the following literature review I adapt the objective and subjective split as two centres -job and worker. The subjective and objective sides of precarity are deeply intertwined, yet also rest on their own theoretical tendencies, methodologies and empirical evidence. Furthermore, one tends to be privileged over the other depending on the author's background. The terms objective and subjective can be misleading, too. Examinations of 'objective' tend to involve measures of perception (I.E. perception of job loss) (Kiersztyn, 2017). Meanwhile, the subjective is always a perception of some 'objective' change to work or environment. In practice the objective describes a change of continuity and security centred on jobs, and subjective a change centred on the worker. In either case there is an objective and a subjective component to either.

The two centres pose different pictures of precarious work and precarity. Job-centred analysis gives a very clear indication as to the immediate contours of precarity, and what a precarious job looks like empirically. However, statistical measurement shows minor change at best, making the strongest arguments for precarious work appear exaggerated (Choonara, 2020). However, there undoubtedly is change, but not a straight-forward decrease in certainties of work. Worker-centred analysis completes the picture by focusing on how individuals are more or less vulnerable to all uncertainties, including those behind precarious work. This raises the prospect of an insecurity of social or economic position, such as a low-quality but nonetheless 'secure' job that renders the individual precarious.

2.2 A Sociology of Work

This section composes a brief discussion of the sociology of work in order to contextualise precarity and this thesis. In many ways, sociology began as the sociology of work (Halford & Strangleman, 2009). This is because the scientific insights that created the sociological imagination were used to study the biggest social change of the time that can be seen in three related processes: capitalism, industrialization and urbanization. The authors that are most commonly looked back on today -Marx, Weber and Durkheim- can all be understood as examining society through capitalist work.

2.2.1 Classical Sociology

During the post-war revision of sociology, Marx, Weber and Durkheim were highlighted for their contributions to understanding emerging European society that can be described as modern, industrial, urban, and, *employed* (Grint, 2005). I structure this section around three key discontinuities that can be seen in each author's work.

Marx was committed to examining the structure and dynamics of capitalist society that maintained the bourgeois class (Giddens, 1971). While there are many entry-points into this theory, the capitalist labour process can be centred on as the key discontinuity of capitalism (Burawoy, 1982). The capitalist labour process is determined by particular relations of production, whereby one party owns the means of production and other sells their labour power (Burawoy, 1982; Giddens, 1971). The capitalist labour process enables the owner of capital to appropriate whatever value is added by the labour power, less productions costs and wages. Workers, with no capital of their own, have no choice but to enter into this relationship. In identifying this 'surplus value' Marx achieved identifying the nature of work in capitalist society by one's relationship to private property (Giddens, 1971). From a Marxian perspective, no matter the terms of employment -pay, sector, conditions- the individual who has to sell their labour power is always subjugated because they do not receive surplus value, but maybe more importantly, because they consent to this exploitation (Burawoy, 1982). Examining such 'consent' (Burawoy, 1982) leads to the cultural, non-economic aspects of Marx's theories. As Giddens (1971: 41) explains of Marx,

'the dominant class develops or takes over ideological forms which legitimate its domination'. In other words, capitalist exploitation is made natural, fair and unquestionable. This is the most nebulous aspect of Marx's theorisation, and it has been developed in various manners as society has evolved, such as Gramscian ideological hegemony (Forgacs, 1988), the spectacle (Debord, 2012), manufactured consent (Burawoy, 1982), and in the language of risk, manufactured uncertainty (Doogan, 2001) that all work in different times and places to enable the capitalist exploitation.

If Marx's theory is abstract, Max Weber can be appreciated for theorising much closer to experience through familiar constructions like *bureaucracy* or *work ethic*. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber (2013) discusses a second discontinuity from pre-industrial to industrial work: the establishment of an ethic grounded in economic individualism (Giddens, 1971). For the Marxist Weeks (2011: 40), the ethic is a 'story about the primitive construction of capitalist subjectivities'. The protestant ethic is a motivating worldview whereby one is self-compelled to maximise their economic activity and wealth (Giddens, 1971). Weber (2013) argues that in capitalism, work is no longer the means to end, but to work becomes the end itself. Such beliefs enmesh with economic rationalism to create a 'work society' (Weeks, 2011) whereby the rationalism of economic activity is underpinned by '*irrational* value-commitments' to work (Giddens, 1971: 131). Weber also argued that the nature capitalist work is shaped by rationalization (Giddens, 1971). In capitalism, work is now governed by rational rules that determine authority and responsibility, furthermore the employer is a hierarchical bureaucracy with a clearly distinguished interior and exterior (Giddens, 1971; Grint, 2005). Such a model of employers, more or less, held (Burawoy, 1982; Whyte, 2002 [1956]) until the advent of post-Fordism and the network enterprise (Castells, 2010; Sennett, 2006) described in the next section. Weber (2010) also has comments on class, pointing out the non-economic aspects in contrast to Marx (1990). Weber (2010) argues that there is a status to work distinct from the economic aspect, a concept developed by Bourdieu (1984). In one reading, this stratifies the Marxian proletariat by degrees of wealth and cultural distinction, adding significant colour to the image of capitalist work.

Durkheim's project could be summarised as examining the relationships between individuals and society, looking at how either helps produce the other. This involves seeing how individuals are 'producers' of society through their commitment to ideals, as active and passive agents of culture and commitment to the societal structure (Giddens, 1971). Durkheim's (2013) division of labour is the third discontinuity. Durkheim argues that industrial society involves a process of diversification as 'generalist' peasants, nomads and free peoples (Scott, 2017) are replaced by specialized workers that complement each other as if one organism (Durkheim, 2014). Workers, Durkheim (2014) argues, in their specialization, have a 'functional independence' that binds them together as a society (Giddens, 1971: 77; Grint, 2005). Where Marx (1990) and Weber (2010) focus on groups, Durkheim (2014) tracks the concomitant rise of individualism in industrial societies (Giddens, 1971). This creates a tension as the desires of individuals need to be balanced against that of the group. Thus, Durkheim (2014) develops notions of normative rules, morality, and eventually law, that governs behaviour and the relationship between different occupations, and to an extent, even Marxian and Weberian classes (Giddens, 1971). From the Durkheimian perspective, work is a manner of being an individual and participating in society, which is enmeshed in the norms of that society.

In relation to work, the classical authors can be summarised by three discontinuities: the capitalist labour process, work ethic and division of labour. They each show how individuals are embedded into the collective through work. These ideas would be challenged by the progressive disembedding processes of late-modernity.

2.2.2 Late-Modernity

A second body of literature engages with a paradigm shift in the organization of work in developed economies. Late-modernity has multiple facets focusing on rationalization, liquidity and technology.

Giddens (1991a) highlighted the role of rationality. Late-modernity is distinguished for its dynamism and reflexivity (Giddens, 1991a). This is understood as the belief that rationalism can deliver final answers has been lost as a philosophical point and as a recognition of the failures of technological progress in things like climate change (Giddens, 1991a). Replacing that finality is a constant search for improvement and an inability to settle on any state of affairs (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1991a). Therefore, late-modernity is not just a questioning of modernity, but the introduction of perennial change (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1991a).

Bauman (2000) develops on these themes with his theory of liquid modernity. For Bauman (2000), the key is the decoupling of workers and capital from the rigidities that Marx theorised. While Bauman mainly spoke about *being*, his comments regarding work are poignant. Where under a Marxian-Fordist framework, Burawoy (1982), as late as the 1980s, could safely argue the autonomy of the capitalist labour process in its effect on workers, under late-modernity, one has to revert that assumption,

> work has lost the centrality which it was assigned in the galaxy of values dominant in the era of solid modernity and heavy capitalism. Work can no longer offer the secure axis around which to wrap and fix self-definitions, identities and life-projects. Neither can it be easily conceived of as the ethical foundation of society, or as the ethical axis of individual life. Instead, work has acquired – alongside other life activities – a mainly aesthetic significance. (Bauman, 2000: 139)

Thus, where work appeared to set your position in society in the industrial era, Bauman (2000) argues one's position may be drawn by another category, which itself is of course in the throes of reflexivity. Bauman (2000) paints an image of indecisive *consumers* constantly unsure about who they should be or what their place in the world is. The lack of finality in this 'liquid' modernity lead individuals to a focus on aesthetics and their place in discursive frames (Cannizzo & James, 2020). In other words, work has become aesthetic, yet it also flows out of its typical categories and is thus flexible, individual and uncertain.

Building on these assertions of discontinuity are theorists who examined neoliberalism and technological change much more closely. Most significantly is Castells (2010) who coined the term *network society* to describe the *post*-industrial society. To understand this, Castells (2010) echoes Lefebvre (2003) to describe post-industrialism not in terms of any specific change like a new machine or way of thinking, but the mode of economic activity. To Castells (2010: 30), the effect of information technology is not 'an exogenous source of impact' but is a change in 'the fabric in which such activity is woven'. For Castells (2010) this fabric super-charges economic transformations, such as globalization and establishment of networked institutions over hierarchical ones. A similar herald of change is Ulrich Beck who focuses on neoliberalism and the so-called Brazilianization of the West. This is to Beck an irreversible discontinuity. Beck (2000: 70) argues that the forces of late-modernity, technological change and neoliberalism lead to a firm transition in the form of a risk regime that 'rules out […] any eventual recovery of the old certainties of standardized work, standard life histories, an old-style welfare state, national economic and labour policies.' While Beck (2000) sees this process as progressive and heterogenous, that very heterogeneity is considered to be now uniform in the same manner as liquid (Bauman, 2000) or reflexive (Giddens, 1991a) modernity represent continual alteration.

Altogether these authors paint an image of continual change being pushed from many different angles. The technological and economic is considered to have accelerated the reflexivity of late-modernity (Castells, 2010) while discourses and institutions lose their ability to be cohesive (Bauman, 2000). There is much more to say, and many critical viewpoints (Atkinson, 2010), but the general argument of a re-evaluation of rationalised (Weber, 1978), economic (Marx, 1990) and specialised (Durkheim, 2014) labour is clearly made.

2.2.3 Post-Structuralism, Post-Humanism and Feminism

The third set of thinking I want to discuss is post-structuralism/humanism and feminism. While this thinking largely predates late-modernity, it has in some ways taken on a resurgence most recently. Furthermore, grouping these three together is unusual, but I have done so out of their similar origin in philosophical critique. Post-structuralism and post-humanism regard applying new philosophical tools derived from linguistics and hitherto overlooked theorists like Nietzsche or Spinoza to examine the new post-war order, and in many regards to move on from Marxism. Namely Foucault (2009) and Deleuze and Guattari (2004) developed notions of neoliberal governmentality or capitalism as an almost totalising process that constitutes subjects and defines the prevailing orthodoxy of what is possible. Furthermore, they identified forms of power, such as biopolitics (Foucault, 2008) or control (Deleuze, 1995) that operate through developed capitalist societies in the same way that classical sociologists identified forces like rationalization (Weber, 1978). These theorists enabled one to examine capitalist and modern domination through a lens that is not Marxist, and in doing so, supported budding discursive and immaterial critiques.

Finally are theorists who have examined the most social aspects of work in aspects such as gender and ethnicity, while also drawing on theories of affect, emotion or free work. Much of this work originated independently and before the theorists immediately above, but theorists of biopower and affect have brought these analyses to the centre of sociology. Feminism shows the individual attributes of the worker In a different light to any other lineage while also showing how work itself is affected by discourses of identity such as gender. In simple terms, while there might be a proletariat, a division of labour or a protestant ethic, these are gendered and ethnic constructions, and one can also consider age, disability, education and even in reciprocal terms, class (Walby, 2013; Weeks, 2011). For example, the Fordist work ethic of hard work for reasonable pay and security was a white and male bargain (Vosko, 2010; Weeks, 2011). This breaks the absolute economic logic of work derived from Marx (or status by Weber) and demonstrates that discourses of gender, class and ethnicity are not just impactful or stratifying, but should be thought of in the same way as technology, globalization or rationalization as ‘organising’ the nature of work.

Feminist approaches to work have shown non-economic aspects to such as extent that one can question the economic-centrism of much literature. Most famously is Arlie Hochschild (1979) who described the emotion-management of work. This emotion-management can be a part of work as one has to engage in emotional labour, such as in smiling to customers to make them feel welcome (Hochschild, 2019). Hochschild was a pioneer of these approaches, and it would not be for some decades that a true ‘affective turn’ could be identified in frameworks like non-representational theory (Thrift, 2008), affective atmospheres (Anderson, 2009) or the aforementioned interventions by Deleuze and Guattari (2009). This leads to identifying the affect that workers are expected to either exude as part of their labour (Farrugia, Threadgold, & Coffey, 2018; Kolehmainen & Mäkinen, 2021), or the affect the one feels while working. These later approaches speak to the individual experience of work beyond the collectives emphasised by classical authors, while showing how workers are not just dominated by economics, but by emotional and affective interventions.

2.2.4 Conclusion: Positioning in the Sociology of Work

This project aims to examine the palpable and experiential aspects of contemporary work. In this regard, the macro-theory described above has a strange relationship to individual experience and local manifestations, and vice versa. On the one hand, is the need to label and generalize the nature of change. Whether it is neoliberalism (Beck, 2000), informationalism (Castells, 2010), reflexive modernity (Giddens, 1991a) or the work ethic (Weeks, 2011) the changing nature of work is firmly identified and labelled. On the other hand is a heterogeneity, such as Castells (2010: 244) stating the need to see the 'cultural, historical and institutional diversity' of change in work occupations or Weeks (2011) framing the work ethic between five antimonies. This is the meso layer of heterogeneity, where work and the ensuing flexibility of it, becomes real and lived. That is the scale where the security and insecurity that workers may be facing shall lie.

This leads to two ways forward which this study is positioned in. The first is to critically evaluate work today in the context of neoliberal flexibility. This means to examine what work is really like today and how much and in what manner does it differ from the ideal-type of a highly rationalised, in the Weberian sense, deeply integrative form of work. In a manner this means to identify, in micro terms, what working in a 'network enterprise' (Castells, 2010) or a 'Brazilianised' (Beck, 2000) labour market is like and what that means for uncertainty or feeling precarious. The second is to inquire into what structures or theories can be identified or created to fill in that 'layer of heterogeneity', or in the language of Castells (2010), identify the 'structures of diversity' that constitute the cultural, historical and institutional diversity. As risk and flexibility are central to recent changes to work (Beck, 2000), this means to investigate what are the structures of insecurity *and* security for workers. As structures that diversi*fy*, these are local, dynamic and even prone to inversions, such as rigidity rather than flexibility. In people's efforts at attaining security or avoiding insecurity, their motivations and actions shall be acting upon these structures of diversity making them central to the study of experience and inequality in contemporary work.

To gain insight into these structures of diversity, I draw on the precarity literature in-depth for its focus on the practices and experience of neoliberal/post-Fordist work (Betti, 2018). The following discussion proceeds with an examination of changes to work through the precarity paradigm. This aims to identify the theoretical focuses and the empirical pain points of the insecurity of work. This allows one to avoid sweeping generalizations about work (Findlay & Thompson, 2017) and speak directly to the 'pockets' of insecurity and security that exist. Following this literature and the methodology, such a programme is continued through discussing the theoretical tools. These are meso-level incarnations of political-economy that are the material filter of era-defining changes such as globalization or labour market flexibility. As the material filter, these are the palpable mechanisms that workers interact with and work within and which, through the quirks of their mechanisms generate contradictory, localised and intensive in/secure outcomes that differentiate by individual characteristics such as age, class, gender and ethnicity.

2.3 Job-Centred Analysis: The Rise of Precarious Work?

I Begin examining precarity with the job centre of analysis. Job-centred analysis combines a long body of literature that has examined work through the lens of Fordist employment, and then reactions to this view from critical scholars. It is the study of *jobs* completely. In the neoliberal era related to precarity this analysis has turned to the pace, extent and significance of the flexibilization, or Brazilianization (Beck, 2000) of jobs. Initially a concern about the rise of 'bad jobs' (Kalleberg et al., 2000) or a 'no long term' value dominant in American corporations (Sennett, 1998) the English-speaking literature soon embraced the term precarity to emphasise

the detrimental and entrenched aspects of these trends (Galic, 2019; Kalleberg, 2012; Neilson & Rossiter, 2005; Standing, 2011).

I begin the job-centred literature by briefly mentioning the economic transformation from Fordism to post-Fordism that underpins precarious work. While this thesis has many problems, the overall picture is clear, through de-unionisation, globalization and changes to management techniques, work became more flexible, uncertain and fragmented (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). This is a point well-documented by Human Resources Management academics in their own 'post-modern' turn (Marchington, Willmott, Rubery, & Grimshaw, 2005). Second I discuss definitions of precarious work. An ideal-type of the Fordist job forms the yardstick by which all other employment is subsequently measured, and by many descriptions, anything less is precarious. Nonetheless, there are three main components to the 'composite definition' of precarious work: general uncertainty, diminished job securities in a variety of concerns and diminished non-work social protections like universal credit (the current UK social welfare programme). Suffice to say, this leads to measuring and identifying precarious work being an interpretative exercise.

In practice, most job-centred analysis focuses on so-called 'non-standard' contracts. Broadly, these are any employment contracts or arrangements that are not permanent and full-time. Non-standard contracts are easy to measure and have the best historical record. However, their growth has largely been negligible -a few per cent- which does not reflect the scale of the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005) and the forces that job-centred researchers refer to, such as globalization. Therefore, one has to argue for a more general change to work, that all work -standard and non-standard- is undergoing a general, yet textured, process of precarization. I move on to examine 'concentrations' of such precarization, jobs that conform the most to definitions of precarious work. Often precarity researchers will turn to these concentrated jobs in their analyses (Smith & McBride, 2021). Zero hour contracts (ZHCs) stand out here, for not only lacking securities, but tending to conform to other aspects of precarious work (Farina et al., 2020). Here the precarity thesis is clearest, but for small minority of workers. I end the review by noting the high turnover through concentrated precarious jobs -ZHCs, gig work and employment agencies- which would suggest over a multi-year period much more people encounter these jobs than the 'spot' one-year statistics suggest.

Overall, job-centred paints a mixed picture and it becomes clear why precarity is engaged with to complete the picture. It is undoubtedly the case that the structures governing work have changed dramatically, yet actual jobs -on the national statistical level- look remarkably similar to those forty years ago. Nonetheless, there are definitely some very uncertain jobs in the UK that are likely to be becoming slowly more common. However jobs alone is not enough to explain or drive precarity, one needs to examine how the broad precarization of work is occurring in practice, and in interaction with workers. However, for now, the focus of discussion is just on changes to jobs.

2.3.1 Political-Economic Transformation: The Precarization of Work

To define precarious work and precarity, one has to be clear about the security which such terms are being compared against. The job-centred literature is responding to a political-economic transformation in developed economies in the second half of the twentieth century, typically labelled neoliberalism or post-Fordism (Beck, 2000). This has been an extensive area of study in itself (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Castells, 2010; Doogan, 2009) and so here I shall only briefly examine what the core ideas are of this change to provide a firm background for discussing precarity.

Labour sociologists from quantitative and qualitative backgrounds see a general precarization of all work in developed economies (Beck, 2000; Standing, 2011). Precarization suggests either a spectrum or heterogeneous space of such precarious jobs (Campbell & Price, 2016; Herod &

Lambert, 2016; Kalleberg, 2018). Inspired no doubt by the discontinuities of late-modernity (Beck, 2000), these scholars see a broad, and generally universal, change to jobs to be more 'precarious'. For example, Kalleberg and Vallas (2017) state 'Precarious work has made the availability as well as the quality of jobs more risky and uncertain'. Similarly, Alberti et al. (2018: 448) describe a broad-based political-economic shift, that 'labour's situation relative to capital has worsened' driving real and perceived changes among workers. This perspective therefore argues a corrosion or 'chipping away' at the traditional securities of employment in a more granular and nuanced manner than broad flexibility or Brazilianization (Beck, 2000).

In various guises, this is a transformation of political-economic change away from the corporate Fordism (Whyte, 2002 [1956]) of large, integrated firms operating in national markets that can support a 'job a life' and cradle to grave state care (Weil, 2014). This is Fordism understood at the broadest, far beyond the idea of a factory and to a highly integrative society that provides securities of work, welfare and certainty about the future. By the post-war era, Fordism had evolved with corporatist elements to reach its apotheosis. A confluence of state-support, expanding markets, pricing power and new inventions meant that Fordist firms could expand their hiring and continue to provide benefits for their workers (Weil, 2014). Vosko (2010) and Weeks (2011) note the gendered aspects, that there were strong gender roles of who works and who does not, and an accompanying welfare state that guaranteed various securities. Goddard (2017: 4) argues this was a time when 'workers were included in the projects of capitalism and the state, and seemed to encapsulate a shared commitment to stability and the pursuit of a secure and satisfying way of life' – a point echoed by Bauman (2000) in identifying 'solid' modernity. Workers were secure because they were integrated into stable, hierarchical corporations in a rigid manner (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Sennett, 2006). In many respects for the analysis of precarious work, the significance, or even reality, of corporate Fordism is not in what was lost, but is in its role as ideal-type in defining what precarious work is.

Employment conditions under this, largely ideal-type Fordism, have come to be known as the standard employment relationship, or SER. Kalleberg (2018) defines the employment relationship as the, 'implicit and explicit contractual arrangements between employers and employees'. So it includes legal aspects like breaks, hours, pay but also informal aspects such as treatment or duties. Employment relationships are generally recognised as a base unit, that 'possesses causal powers that can be expected to shape the experiences of individual workers inside and outside of the workplace' (Campbell & Price, 2016: 318). The *standard* employment relationship entails a complex constellation of guarantees, benefits and expectations for workers.

Standard is where employees are deeply integrated into firms through a number of contractual obligations that create a relationship that is far more integrative than just the exchange of labour for wages. Standard employment operates on the idea of consensus between employee and firm, whereby the employee's dedication and motivation to work is acquired through aligning the employee's and the employer's interests (Whyte, 2002 [1956]). Part of this alignment of interests is achieved through 'internal labour markets' which offer the worker 'certainty in employment, an established profile of wage or salary increases over time, and fairly clear expectations of what was required to retain employment and advance in the organisation' (Weil, 2014: 38). Therefore, the SER not only involves certainty in the job, but also certainty of career and income for life in terms of regular pay increases, intensity of labour and promotion. Internal labour markets can be thought of as a shield against market forces, as they are 'not affected directly by supply and demand conditions in local labour markets, but rather by the institutional practices that emerged within the firm' (Weil, 2014: 38). Altogether, standard employment involves both practical (such as contractual obligations) and ideological aspects (aligning employee and employer interests) of work that are considered the gold-standard for worker certainty.

This blending of corporatism and Fordism is the most common understanding of post-war work in developed economies. It's sturdiness and weight are characterised as 'solid' by Bauman (2000) and have a clear similarity with the 'iron-cage' of bureaucracy (Weber, 1978). However, there are significant shortcomings with this viewpoint that mean one should only see corporate Fordism as an ideal-type or a particularly influential discourse that shapes worker expectations and action. Firstly, Fordism was a racial and gendered system in the countries that it operated in, white men were working, white wives were house making and other ethnicities and women were working outside the SER (Vosko, 2010; Weeks, 2011). Generally viewed as a period of security, Betti (2018) suggests this may due to commonly held assumptions about Fordism, which in turn influenced research priorities which meant 'insecurity' was rarely applied during this era or to these employees when maybe it should have been. This sets a very limited extent of what security actually existed under Fordism or what it looked like. Furthermore, only a few countries ever implemented corporate Fordism, with most of the world still operating in, what was termed in an almost derogatory manner, 'informal work' (Han, 2018) without a contract and outside a corporation. While problematic as a historical concept, Fordism is significant because its demise sparked the contemporary interest (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 2000; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005) in political-economic change and precarity while remaining the key concept that precarious work is measured against.

A number of economic shocks and political reforms led to firms restructuring significantly from the 1970s onwards (Beck, 2000; Sennett, 2006) which contributed to 'triggering' an interest in precarity and precarious work (Betti, 2018: 281). A nexus of economic change (Castells, 2010), from the 1970s oil shocks, the establishment of financial markets, globalisation of supply chains and Asian competition, domestic policy changes about welfare and employment, saturation of manufacturing demand, increasing use of IT and a cultural shift in management all appeared to change the way capitalism functioned in developed economies: to be less Fordist with an emphasis on market integration and hierarchical control and more post-Fordist, with an emphasis on core competencies (shedding any employees not directly involved with the corporate goal, such as cleaners) (Weil, 2014), flexibility in staffing (Standing, 2011) and networked control (using a flatter hierarchy) (Castells, 2010; Sennett, 2006). While standard employment is regarded as slowly ebbing, the new breed of jobs that seemed to arise from this transformation were given many labels such as 'bad', contingent and non-standard, eventually though they were called precarious, too.

What differentiates this body of literature from other theories of economic transformation is the concept of 'work-induced' precarity that such jobs are theorised to create. The modifier *work-induced* is used to differentiate this from other formulations of precarity. This argument takes various guises, but the general point is that a pervasive work insecurity (Bourdieu, 1998) makes workers preoccupied with their insecurity, such as losing their job, being on low wages or having their hours cut. Therefore, insecure employment is argued to lead to a more general sense of precariousness, as the insecurity of employment comes to almost 'infect' every aspect of life and the subconscious of the person. Many authors cite a published speech from Pierre Bourdieu (1998: 82) to substantiate their claims, where he argues, 'the awareness of it [precariousness] never goes away'. This is an induced insecurity. Bourdieu (1998: 82-83) continues, it is to 'give all those in work the sense that they are in no way irreplaceable and that their work, their jobs, are in some way a privilege, a fragile, threatened privilege'. Such uncertainty is theorised as complete, engendering something similar to the worker-centred ontological precariousness, which I explain later. Bourdieu (1998: 82) surmises the complete destruction of the individual: 'the destructing of existence, which is deprived among other things of its temporal structures, and the ensuing deterioration of the whole relationship to the world, time and space.' Such themes have been taken up by not just academics, but the labour union movement across Europe. As such, precarious work extends beyond typical ideas of there being good and bad jobs, but also argues

there is a work-induced condition of precarity (Butler, 2012; Choonara, 2020). More developed interpretations of the precarious condition are discussed in Chapter Three.

2.3.2 Defining Precarious Work

While often deployed as a part of precarity, precarious work can, and typically is, identified separately. Work-induced precarity originates from this so-called precarious work. Definitions of precarious work aim to identify what has been taken away from employment that make workers be and feel insecure. These are attempts to identify the contours of employment in some definitive way that makes it secure or not. As a result of attempting to grapple with the complex idea of an insecure job, these definitions amalgamate three aspects: general uncertainty, dimensions of the job and institutional protections.

Definitions of precarious work tend to refer to the three aspects in which a job is short of the SER (Herod & Lambert, 2016; Vosko, 2010). For example, Kalleberg and Vallas (2017: 1) define precarious work as that which is '*uncertain*, *unstable*, and *insecure*', then add that the employee bears the risks of work and receives limited protections. Vosko (2010: 2) mirrors this, saying precarious work is 'characterized by uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements'. Herod and Lambert (2016) prefer to identify precarious work through four areas: low earnings, low social wage (healthcare, pensions, etc.), little regulatory protection and little autonomy over work arrangements. Such definitions are representative of their Fordist roots by including the lack of social protections or union representation as part of the 'job'. While centred on the job, one can see how the two centres of precarity is present. This is most notable in 'general uncertainty' that only has relevance to a worker.

To examine precarious work, one needs to look at what these three aspects add up to. Together they form an image of a job that has a lot of inherent instability or poor working conditions, little opportunity for re-course outside of work (such as welfare or a union) that add up to a generalised uncertainty (living with erratic income, job duties, hours of work, etc.). In many ways, the broadest definitions are attempting to reach for precarity itself, and so begin to spread further and further. Nonetheless, these aspects are centred on the job. General uncertainty and non-work institutions are a function of the job in terms of their presence or importance (a bad job makes one need union representation and welfare). This leads to intensive scrutiny on the second aspect: the dimensions of work insecurity.

The most developed and durable aspect of the definitions are the dimensions of work insecurity - these are effectively different things about a job that can be uncertain and are the clearest for observation. Vosko (2010) refers to tenure security, employment relationship type and composition (I.E. permanent contract, gig-work, agency, etc.), the design, application and enforcement of regulatory protections, and control of the labour process, consisting of conditions, wages, intensity, and then the aforementioned position in protective institutions. Standing (2011) has seven dimensions which are largely similar to Vosko's, but also include the labour market position that moves out of the job itself and onto the individual. In practice what this means is that the dimensions of insecurity encompass low pay, bad working conditions, abusive management, not having one's employment rights respected, etc. These are all unified by being argued to introduce uncertainty into either job or the individual's life.

This suggests a significant ambiguity or heterogeneity, depending on your perspective, to defining precarious work. The source of this is that definitions of precarious work are either hanging by themselves -as any insecurity- or defined negatively -as anything short of the SER (Herod & Lambert, 2016; Vosko, 2010). As a result, labour and work researchers of statistical and qualitative backgrounds have argued that work is generally becoming 'more precarious' in a very general sense (Alberti et al., 2018; Beck, 2000; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017). However these 'insecure' jobs

are not necessarily comparable, a part from they are all less than the SER. This means one is left trying to compare very different instances of precarious work, such as a factory to a knowledge worker (Lobato, Molina, & Valenzuela-García, 2018). Furthermore, assertions of 'less than SER' miss the new non-Fordist 'securities' inherent to some of these precarious jobs. Some labour sociologists take a more conservative approach, urging there is a mixed-picture of increasing and decreasing security (Findlay & Thompson, 2017; Hipp, Bernhardt, & Allmendinger, 2015). Meanwhile critical theorists, who tend to lean towards Marxism, question the entire thesis by noting the ideological advantages of exaggerating the insecurity of work for both the political left and right (Choonara, 2020; Doogan, 2015).

Definitions of precarious work tend to build on three key aspects: general uncertainty, dimensions of work insecurity and social protections. The dimensions of work insecurity are further broken-down into many different aspects of a job, from wages, duties to contract type. All of these is working against an idea of what the SER is: certain, has no dimensions of work insecurity and integrated into extensive social protections. Such broad and extensive definitions lead to two measures. Either a generalised 'precarization' of work into a many different forms of precarious jobs or a certain concentration of the definition into a much more homogenous single type of precarious job. In what follows I examine the real instances of precarious work as either a general increase that is producing heterogeneous precarious jobs or the more focused view of 'concentrated' precarious work which conforms to most of the composite definitions.

2.3.3 The General View: Heterogeneous Change

With a definition of precarious work in mind, I now proceed to analyse the evidence for both the precarization thesis and the prevalence of precarious work in the UK. This is in the context of detailed national statistics about work that are collected frequently in the UK. In this section I discuss how this data is used and what the different conclusions drawn from it are in regard to a larger-scale, national increase of precarious work that has been theorised to occur.

Moving from the composite definition of precarious work to something measurable from these national statistics necessitates a reduction to standard or non-standard employment contracts. As Kalleberg (2018) puts it, 'social scientists usually identify types of precarious work as various forms of *nonstandard employment arrangements*', and I tend to agree. Vosko (2010) centres her analysis around examining the genealogy of employment relations and proceeds to measure contract type. Meanwhile, Standing (2011) differentiates between a salariat and a precariat based on their employment relations. In a qualitative context, Alberti et al. (2018: 450) do not identify contracts, but instead lead their framework with the imposition of 'particular contractual forms' on workers. In practice, these non-standard contracts are anything short of the SER. This category therefore includes part-time, zero hour, temporary, self-employment (gig and freelance) and term contracts.

In the UK, non-standard employment compose a not insignificant and growing proportion of jobs. The Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) indicates that around 20% of UK workers are not in full-time regular employment. Furthermore, by various accounts, non-standard work has grown faster than standard work from 1995 to the mid-2010s in the UK (Coulter, 2016; Hipp et al., 2015; OECD, 2015). Hipp et al. (2015) state that from 1996 to 2011, standard employment fell 1.1 per cent, and non-standard employment increased 2 per cent. These statistics are generally considered to indicate that 'something is undoubtedly going on in relation to precarious and insecure work' (Findlay & Thompson, 2017: 125) but this is probably the only statement that can be agreed on.

Critical and more conservative researchers however question the conformity of non-standard contracts to precarious work. The first domino to fall was part-time work. While part-time work

composes the main driver of non-standard contract growth (Doogan, 2015), by some dimensions of work insecurity these contracts are contributing stability to the overall picture. Part-time workers have been found more likely to be satisfied with their hours (Fevre, 2007) and in the EU the length of part-time tenures has increased, making the contract a source of *increasing* certainty (Doogan, 2015). Fevre (2007) and Doogan (2015) use these points to argue that precarization as conceptualised in its broadest sense is a dead thesis. Similar points can be made about self-employment. While self-employment obviously has no guarantees, many self-employed roles pay well (Kalleberg et al., 2000; Tomlinson & Corlett, 2017). In response however, Kalleberg and Vallas (2017: 8) say that these critiques are based on an 'unduly narrow definition' of precarious work yet, they themselves continue to focus on non-standard contracts in their analyses. Meanwhile, what I call 'conservative' labour sociologists have pointed to the heterogeneity of non-standard employment (Findlay & Thompson, 2017; Hipp et al., 2015). These authors therefore see the problem to be more about localised inequalities than an epochal shift.

Alternatively to non-standard contracts, specific dimensions of work insecurity can be examined. There are three main dimensions examined: perceived job insecurity, job tenure and working conditions. First is subjective job insecurity, how worried workers are they could lose their job. As per precarization, this should be increasing, yet national-level perceptions of job insecurity follow economic cycles rather than a general increase indicative of precarization (Green, 2009). In other words, job insecurity increases during recessions and recedes during growth periods. The second key piece of data is average job tenure, which is expected to decrease. In Kalleberg's (2018) book-length analysis of developed economies, he states average job tenure declined among men aged 30-50 from ten to eight years between 1992 to 2014. This segmented statistic is only applicable to men however, because for women, who have largely entered the labour market during this period, average tenure has increased, pushing the overall average tenure either flat in the UK (Choonara, 2019) or up in the EU15 (Doogan, 2015). Therefore, in terms of tenure, the statistical evidence of precarization is minor, while only applying to middle-aged men, who are the traditional workforce of standard employment. Finally is job quality. In a credible UK study of 'job status' insecurity amongst UK workers, Gallie, Felstead, Green, and Inanc (2017) did find increasing, and widespread, up to a third by their indexes, insecurity regarding wages or autonomy in the workplace. These changes are however quite minor overall, and more importantly, as Findlay and Thompson (2017) point out, do not map neatly onto non-standard contracts suggesting a much more complicated picture.

In summary, while the regulatory environment and empirical direction of travel are towards greater insecurity in work, these are mild and heterogeneous. Most researchers agree that work is changing in some manner similar to precarization, just not in the manner of a universal or one-direction change. For example, Castells (2010: 236) concludes that 'Granted, the majority of the labor force in the advanced economies is under salaried conditions' but also that one has to remain open to the new diversity in work that is emerging. Precarization is not so much contested as true or false, but instead over how to conceptualise it. For example, Findlay and Thompson (2017: 122) state 'We need to be more careful about how trends are translated into overarching theoretical constructs', drawing attention to how changes in work are understood. The decrease of standard contracts and the increasing stability of part-time work are indicative of some 'insecure security'. Marxists like Choonara (2020: 437) are far more critical, and he summarises the state of precarization best when he says that 'it is the stability of employment that requires explanation'. So, this does not mean that work is unaffected, there are trends pulling at work, and the 'fabric' of work has been absolutely altered (Castells, 2010), however this is not leading to a uniform and overt increase of uncertainty, insecurity and instability.

2.3.4 Concentrations of Precarization: Precarious Jobs, Temporary Contracts and Beyond

The national picture was inconclusive for a universal transformation, but showed many concentrations of precarization. Therefore I put forward the additional unit of the 'concentrated precarious job'. These jobs exhibit intense precarization with characteristics such as low wages, erratic working hours, poor working conditions or no or ineffective union representation. Often, this is what many researchers mean when they say, 'precarious job'. This is in many ways a qualitative -a 'I know precarious work when I see it' (Herod & Lambert, 2016: 6)- approach, that a job lacks so much that it can be called 'precarious'. The only other method is to define the concentrated precarious job by the worker, asking, is the worker's well-being adversely affected by the uncertainty of job? Yet, this again introduces more problems of perception and worker circumstance discussed in the next chapter. Nonetheless, there are contested *conventions* of what concentrated precarious work is. This also raises debates as to whether there is 'one' precarious work (Standing, 2011) or a heterogenous space of precarization (Alberti et al., 2018).

The main characteristic of any job relating to uncertainty is the income earning potential. As wages are often at the statutory minimum rate, this leaves differentiation of hours and tenure. A job that does not provide a stable income, either because the tenure or weekly hours are uncertain, is going to introduce significant additional uncertainty to the worker in terms of being unable to make essential payments. Therefore temporary contracts, ZHCs and 'bogus' self-employment (Findlay & Thompson, 2017) such as gig and crowd work that do not offer certainty of weekly hours or tenure are typically equated to be precarious jobs. In the parlance of labour statistics however, these are typically labelled 'temporary' work, however I prefer the term from Farina et al. (2020) of 'no-guaranteed-hours-contracts' (NGHCs) for reasons that will become apparent. Adding to the concentration of precarization, NGHCs tend to include some of the other dimensions of work insecurity, such as unionization, working conditions or low wages.

In identifying concentrations of work insecurity, statistical researchers tend to lean on these 'temporary' contracts, identifying effectively all non-standard employment except part-time work. Looking at temporary work, the UK rate has fluctuated between five and seven per cent between 1985 and 2014 (Kalleberg, 2018), overall showing little increase in this statistic. Looking closer at ZHCs, the Labour Force Survey (LFS), collected quarterly by the Office of National Statistics (ONS), has asked workers whether their 'main job' is zero hour, and in 2017 this had reached 2.8%, a four-fold increase since 2000 (Farina et al., 2020). However, an employers survey, asking employers if they had zero hour employees, implied nearly double the LFS rate (Farina et al., 2020). Examining the curve of ZHC growth in the LFS, nearly all growth occurred between 2012 and 2016, and has since only grown moderately[1]. There is however a lot of heterogeneity even in this sector of 2 to 5 per cent of workers on ZHCs. Koumenta and Williams (2019: 23) found in their statistical analysis of LFS data that 'two-in-five ZHC employees classify their job as being full-time, while two-in-three report having permanent contracts'. Thus, it appears there is a kernel of concentrated precarious work in the UK that is growing, but those with the least protections, ZHCs, show tremendous stability from one -the worker's- perspective.

Looking closer at other forms of NGHCs. There is 'bogus' self-employment (Findlay & Thompson, 2017), better known as gig work. Huws et al. (2017: 10) surveyed 'crowd work' a term that encompasses slightly more than the term gig work (Prassl, 2018) to include 'casual, on-call, temporary or other forms of contingent work' that is done through a platform. They found that 2.7% of people got more than half of their income through crowd platform work. Part-time work can also be broken down further, to look at those who want full-time work. The percentage who

[1] The exact reason for this is unknown, nor whether it even represents a growth of ZHC. However speculated reasons are greater public awareness of the term 'ZHC', improvements in data collection by the ONS, and an unknown real growth in ZHCs (Farina et al., 2020; Koumenta & Williams, 2019).

were part-time wanting full-time (PTWFT) peaked in 2012 at 6.5% of total employment, and has lowered progressively to 4.7% in 2017 (Bell & Blanchflower, 2019). Altogether, there is 2 per cent here, 3 per cent there, a part-time group and a proportion who see their NGHCs work as permanent and full-time. Unfortunately these percentages cannot be added together into one NGHC group as there is likely to be overlap and movement between the groups, but one gets the general picture of five to ten per cent of all 'main jobs' (a self-report definition) are NGHCs.

These NGHCs also show a concentrations of other dimensions of work insecurity, such as low wages or working conditions, that make the case stronger. The LFS survey collects some relevant details that can be matched to the self-report contract of the respondent. ZHCs tend to have worse working conditions and lower pay than standard contracts (Farina et al., 2020; Koumenta & Williams, 2019). By nature of being a ZHC, these jobs lack many of the other securities of employment such as 'paid leave, sick or maternity pay as well as training opportunities and career development' (Findlay & Thompson, 2017: 125). Those in gig or crowd work are self-employed, and so lack any benefits or assurances from their 'employer'. Meanwhile, qualitative data describe how those on certain NGHCs contracts can face a confluence of poor working conditions combining insecure work, abusive managers, no control, low wages, etc. (Baines, Kent, & Kent, 2019; Smith & McBride, 2021). Therefore while those on NGHC may consider their jobs to be full-time and/or permanent (Koumenta & Williams, 2019) they may still be exposed to other dimensions of work insecurity.

What this adds up to is a fairly self-apparent image of what have sometimes been called 'bad jobs' (Adler, 2020; Kalleberg, 2011), but I am more critically labelling concentrated precarious work to denote jobs that conform to many aspects of the composite definition of precarious work. Qualitative research demonstrates that these uncertainties, or lack of power relative to the employer, mean this concentration has an adverse effect on the well-being of the worker (Smith & McBride, 2021). This represents an intersection of many different uncertainties, but the main ones are no guaranteed hours, low pay and poor working conditions. These tend to occur in certain sectors and groups of individuals, for example, ZHCs are highly concentrated in the personal service and elementary sectors and amongst young and migrant workers (Farina et al., 2020; Koumenta & Williams, 2019). Nonetheless, there is tremendous debate over how homogenous these jobs are, the workers in them and the experience of being in these jobs relative to the concept of 'precarious work' and precarity.

The final data to examine is one that is typically overlooked: turnover. The UK's very deregulated labour market (Kalleberg, 2018) means that people enter and exit temporary contracts at a high rate. This is measured in surveys as a percentage of temporary employees in year A, who transit to a permanent job in year A+1. Amongst the OECD the UK has the highest transition rate, at around 50 per cent in 2007 and increasing to over 60 per cent in 2013 (Kalleberg, 2018). While a function of insecurity, this also means temporary contracts have tremendous throughput that means their significance may be much higher than the 'spot' rate of a single survey. For example, the same dataset reports that around 6 per cent of workers are in temporary employment, in one year 60% of those workers will leave (and be replaced). This means that over two years, 9 per cent of workers are in temporary contracts at some time. This is likely inflated by transitions out of 'probation' periods in permanent contracts, but the pattern continues through other forms of work. Other data, such as that focusing on ZHCs and gig work show similar high throughput. Mizen and Robertson (2017) report half of ZHC *agency* placements last less than three months. Farina et al. (2020: 522), using LFS data found that, 'just over half of those on a ZHC in any given year were in either full-time or part-time non-ZHC employment one year earlier' -in other words half of ZHC workers in any year have been so for less than one year. Finally, while less than 3 per cent of workers used gig work to earn over half their income, Huws et al. (2017) found 9 per cent of UK respondents had at one time ever worked through a crowd platform, and found that 4.7 per

cent did crowd work weekly overall. Together, this suggests that, while only 5 to 10 per cent of workers at any given time are in concentrated precarious work, the proportion of all workers who have had to at some point (or more importantly, for example, in the last three years) needed to work in these jobs could be much higher. Such throughput meets the typical image of youth underemployment (Côté, 2014).

A question remains as to the heterogeneity of these concentrated precarious jobs, that is, to what extent do they represent one experience. Most influentially is the precariat class. Standing (2011) argues the population which works in concentrated precarious jobs are living a consistent experience of precarity, which has been translated into a class in itself, dubbed the 'precariat'. The precariat composes workers who are subject to precarious terms of employment. The key argument (and Achilles heel of the work) is that precarious worker has a consistent enough experience that they can be grouped together into a new class. Therefore this is arguing that the concentration of precariousness is intensive enough, and the experience of such consistent enough when combined with people's real lives, that sociologists can replace the proletariat with the precariat. That experience includes a combination of material troubles in not being able to afford to live comfortably or care adequately for loved ones, and more existential concerns such as a detachment from the future (Standing, 2011).

While the precariat thesis has been a rallying cry and a political device, it is also the most often dismissed aspect of precarious work thinking. Alberti et al. (2018: 448) ask if there is a precariat and answer, 'surely no'. Aforementioned autonomist Marxist Choonara (2020: 432) calls Standing's effort an 'extraordinary conflation of disparate categories'. Yet, I believe these critiques are a disservice to Standing's work. Standing (2011) does note that the precariat are heterogeneous in much the same way precarity is, so it does seem possible that there is some consistency in experience and position, even if that were just precarity itself. In the UK however, the proportion of workers in concentrated precarious work is too small, suggesting this is not a dominant experience of contemporary capitalism. Therefore a key line forward is to consider to what extent precarious work is unified and stratified, and along what lines.

In summary, while precarious work is very broadly defined, researchers tend to emphasise jobs defined by a constellation of insecure hours, low wages and bad working conditions. These are most identifiable by the use of a non-standard contract, usually defined by ZHC, temporary contract, or 'bogus' self-employment. However, even then, the measurement is imprecise. These contracts display moderate growth in the UK, but represent only a minority of jobs. The people in these jobs are typically thought of as a precariat class (Standing, 2011) by many authors (Neilson & Rossiter, 2005), yet this is highly contentious (Alberti et al., 2018; Choonara, 2020). Finally, a high throughput of staff in concentrated precarious work suggest that many more workers than the 'spot' percentages may encounter these jobs over a longer period of time.

2.4 Precarious Work Conclusion

The study of precarious work identifies that change is occurring, but the idea of a uniform corrosion of the SER has become an untenable conclusion (Choonara, 2020; Findlay & Thompson, 2017). Instead is the mitigated neoliberal argument of a wholesale change to the fabric of work that is manifesting progressively (Beck, 2000; Castells, 2010). The UK economy is probably one of the most shaped by all the forces of precaritization -labour deregulation, financialisaton, de-unionisation, globalization (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017)- yet the changes to work are extremely uneven with unclear concentrations. Where more rigid economies like Spain have very high rates of temporary employment (Kalleberg, 2018), the UK's liberal market economy, in redefining the terms of 'standard' and 'non-standard' employment, has from one view contorted around the

notion of precarious work to appear more certain than it really is. Yet, even looking wider, at the EU15 for example, critics can collect convincing statistics of employment overall moving in the opposite direction (Doogan, 2015). However, the most ardent supporters (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017; Standing, 2011) of precarious work, and the definitions they propose, are right that labour is much less regulated today, but are not able to show the direct translation into the terms of work (Findlay & Thompson, 2017).

The best view of precarization and precarious work is 'trends, not universals' (Findlay & Thompson, 2017), but also disparate and disconnected concentrations. This fits the view of neoliberal flexibilization described some twenty-five years ago (Beck, 2000; Castells, 2010) of an economy wholly transforming but showing great heterogeneity in the outcome and mode of that. While it could be said that the 'fabric' (Castells, 2010) of work is becoming more flexible or work is characterised by a risk regime (Beck, 2000) in universal terms, the palpable result -the state of affairs that impacts feeling or being secure- appears to be textured by concentrations and even inversions of new rigidities. The question becomes, are these heterogeneities big enough to significantly alter the precarity thesis? By one measure, recent net job growth in the UK has been of the 'non-standard' type (OECD, 2015). There are concentrations of precarious work in NGHCs and sectors like care work, services and logistics that are much worse than the average UK job (Koumenta & Williams, 2019). These are identifiable and explainable with precarious work thinking, yet remain fuzzy because there is no single dimension to identify them, they are instead a concentration of the composite definition of precarious work. Yet even here, there are questions as to variety in terms of jobs and in terms of experiences within them. Above these concentrations, average job tenure amongst men is slightly lower (Kalleberg, 2018), there is job security concern during recessions and some anxiety over job quality (Gallie et al., 2017) -but these instances of precarization are too weak or diffuse to be explained by the economic transformation that occurred from the 1980s. It is logical that there are 'standard' jobs that also exhibit some precarization, but without any method to soundly delineate that, they can only be identified or measured by some metric of 'too many' dimensions of precarious work, such as Lewchuk (2017) has done.

The concentrated precarious work viewpoint describes discrete and localised constellations of working, which raises the question as to why someone is in that concentration. Each concentration is a constellations of work insecurity dimensions, industry, contract type, skill-level, pay and general stability. There is a question of each individual's exposure to any single concentration and why they are in one and not another, let alone in permanent and stable work. One does not need to look far, work is gendered, ethnic and classed (Weeks, 2011). Through childcare commitments, commuting distance, employment skills and experience, job searching ability, persons are limited to very discrete sets of employment. This is more than being a fast-food worker or a freelance photographer, it is about why are these people in these specific positions and why is the fast-food worker unable to leave. Only then is precarious employment present in a consequential manner. In other words, precarious employment is a highly localized intersection of employment and person.

Altogether, the pattern is a widespread change that is interacting with other factors to result in concentrating in certain jobs, of which particular individuals are vulnerable to. For example, Hipp et al. (2015: 367) state there is 'flexibilization at the margins while maintaining job protection for core workers' and Doogan (2015: 59) has a similar conclusion, saying scholars need to 'recognise the generalised increase in job tenure and the growth of long-term employment alongside the specific deterioration of labour market conditions for particular groups'. While these views appear to be a compromise on precarization as a whole, they are ultimately a rejection. Rejecting precarization for being unable to grasp both sides of the dynamic, tendencies for flexibility and stability. A concept like in/security has value here then for noting the structures that enable one

to live insecurely, it is logical that part-time tenure should increase (Doogan, 2015) as the overall work environment becomes riskier -greater risk means you stick with what marginal security you have.

Centring on jobs gives an excellent viewpoint of how *jobs* are changing. Identifying the structures of change, from labour deregulation, globalization to corporate structuring techniques (Weil, 2014) provides a rich view of changes in work. However, missing is how this is all being filtered through the real world into concentrations and through worker's behaviour into actual precarity. Evidently, precarization is being affected by the existing formations in the world that are giving a great deal of inertia to the driving forces, such as employment deregulation. Meanwhile the previous regime of work is also pooling precarization into particular sectors, such as care work and particular groups of people. Improved examinations of precarization need to be filtered through non-job aspects, such as a worker's access to jobs and job satisfaction (Findlay & Thompson, 2017) or discourses such as gender (Weeks, 2011) or youth (Farrugia et al., 2018). Job-centred approaches are not blind to this filtering, but evidently precarization is undergoing transformations away from the pure increase of uncertainty when it becomes an actual job and labour market.

This literature therefore suggests a goal to pursue: stratifying and unifying precarization. The first point is to understand how precarization, that is labour deregulation, automation, gig economies, etc. affect jobs differently. It needs to be recognised that precarization has not just eroded the SER, but has *created* occupations and ways of working that did not exist before that may very well be in/secure. Yet in doing so, one should not just disaggregate these concentrations into self-contained pools of disparate experiences. Knowledge workers here, carers over there. Accepting the concentration thesis entirely is to reject precarization altogether, instead precarization needs to be adapted to identify what aspects are driving consistent change across the economy and amongst the concentrations. In making my investigation here so far though, there has been missing a key part of the precarious work thesis, the idea that separates it from run-of-the-mill dual-labour market theory that posits worse and better jobs, that is the presence of uncertainty that wrecks not just the job, but the individual. To this, I turn to a wider state of affairs, that examines insecurity centred on the worker.

The following chapter examines the 'other half' of precarity theory, that of precariousness centred on the worker. Precarious work scholars have come to embrace the idea of precariousness as the consequence of precarious work, however this analysis in itself leads to many different directions of investigation.

3

Insecure Workers

3.1 Introduction: Bringing the Worker In

In this chapter I shift the centre of precarity from job to worker. Strongly influenced by ontological precariousness developed by Judith Butler, this approach examines the uncertainties of the individual. In this literature the precarious job is generally retained as the biggest contributing factor, but effectively the dimensions of work insecurity are replaced with new dimensions of the individual. This literature is therefore concerned with whether the forces that underpin precarization of work, are also, or instead, driving a precarization of the individual. It examines what it means to be living with greater uncertainty of life itself, and in doing so, questions some of the assumptions behind what is 'precarious' about precarious work.

In this regard, labour researchers taking a worker-centred perspective have interrogated the link between precarious work and precarity. While a job might be 'precarious', when we are centred on the individual, many other factors can influence well-being and 'stabilize' the individual (Antonucci, 2018; Campbell & Price, 2016). The worker-centred approach makes additional insecurities apparent. These are uncertainties of one's position in social and economic structures. Such dimensions include feeling unsure about one's career progression and narrative (Armano & Murgia, 2013) or being in a job for which one is overeducated (Worth, 2016) or being in work one dislikes overall (Motakef, 2019; Worth, 2016). Therefore, this aspect refers to the workers' position in the labour market and their access to work, their vulnerability to being in precarious work and vulnerability to the insecurities of precarious work. The discussion of worker-centred approaches ends by examining workers who use precarious work to pursue their goals, therefore finding some in/security in these structures (Schilling, Blokland, & Simone, 2019; Wong & Au-Yeung, 2019). The discussion on worker-centred analysis concludes that the study of precarious work needs to be 'personal' to the worker, this means to always consider what insecurities does the job create for the worker, and under what conditions.

This chapter ends with a closing discussion of Chapters Two and Three, bringing the two centres into discussion as the single body of literature that they are. The work and subject centres of analysis are typically combined into single frameworks (Alberti et al., 2018; Kalleberg, 2018), however their combination has been criticised for empirical inconsistencies that suggest a better examination of the relationships is needed (Doogan, 2015; Kiersztyn, 2017). To overcome this, I suggest two movements derived from either centre: the stratification of precarization and the personalisation of precarious work. This is conceptualisation of precarity that engages with the job-centred analysis -low wages, short tenure, erratic hours- while adjusting to the workers' capital, abilities and position. These goals are achieved in the next chapter, for now though, the discussion turns to the worker-centred approach.

3.2 Subjects and Precariousness

3.2.1 Ontological Precariousness and Differential Vulnerability

Behind and beyond the changes to work described in the previous chapter are the linked worker-centred approaches of ontological precariousness and differential vulnerability. In some regards these are a consequence of precarious work, but the approach has its own research foci. The other half of the precarity equation is differential vulnerability, a far broader notion of precarity than the purely 'work-induced' precarity suggested in the last chapter. This is the argument that precariousness is immanent as mortality, and therefore all institutions are involved in the extension (or retreat) of protections from precariousness. The nature of form of those institutions is 'precarity'. While typically holding its own intellectual and empirical tradition, either centre inter-mesh with the notion of precariousness being often mentioned by labour sociologists and other precarious work scholars, and ontological precarious theorists refer to the precarization of work.

In developing this body of theory, political scientists (Lorey, 2015), feminists (Worth, 2016) and geographers (Ettlinger, 2007; Waite, 2009) have been inspired by Judith Butler to develop an interpersonal approach to precarity. Subsequently, this theory has been integrated into the frameworks of precarious work and work-induced precarity by labour sociologists (Kalleberg, 2018) largely filling-out the 'subjective' aspect of precarity (Alberti et al., 2018). Altogether, ontological precariousness describes the entire contemporary political economy, of which precarious work would be the main factor, as a matter of human systems exposing or shielding individuals to/from the ontological condition of human fragility or mortality (Butler, 2004, 2012; Ettlinger, 2007; Worth, 2016). Where Beck (1992) theorised sheer risk, or other theorists change and uncertainty (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1991b), Butler's notion speaks more directly to the emotional aspect of fragility of being. Originally developed in her reflections on the September 11 attacks and the ensuing War on Terror by the USA, Butler identifies an ontological category of precariousness in our interdependence on each other (Butler, 2004, 2012, 2016). In doing so, Butler (2006, p. xiv) establishes vulnerability as a constant, arguing there exists a 'primary vulnerability to others'. Human fragility of existence is universal and shared by all of humanity: 'We struggle in, from, and against precarity' (Butler, 2012: 150).

Butler's notion has been used by a wide-range of scholars who seek to establish ontological precariousness as a core unit of analysis (Worth, 2016) while developing and echoing it. For example, Neilson and Rossiter (2005): 'precariousness is an ontological and existential category that describes the common, but unevenly distributed, fragility of human corporeal existence'. Or Ettlinger (2007: 320) in her *Precarity Unbound* treatise aims to detach precarity from labour altogether: 'I wish to present precarity as a condition of vulnerability, relative contingency and the inability to predict.' The influence of this is such that ontological precariousness is often paired as the other side of precarious work (Han, 2018), albeit often with other theory (Kalleberg, 2018). However, more importantly, this forms the basis for a theory of differential vulnerability.

Butler (2004) initially used precariousness to investigate the moral response to the September 11 attacks, seeing precarity as the threat of mortality and danger, or lack of support, from others. In subsequent texts, Butler developed this in line with precarious work theses, turning attention to neoliberal governmental reforms, a perspective echoed by Lorey (2015) and the general scholarship in the area. For example, in a journal article, Butler (2012: 147-148) takes precariousness from the presence of violence to the political-economic terms of work-induced precarity,

> Precarity only makes sense if we are able to identify bodily dependency and need, hunger and the need for shelter, the vulnerability to injury and destruction, forms of social trust that let us live and thrive, and the passions linked to our very persistence as clearly political issues.

Following on the next page,

> our precarity is to a large extent dependent upon the organization of economic and social relationships, the presence or absence of sustaining infrastructures and social and political institutions.

In this piece, Butler brings precariousness in line with precarious work and work-induced precarity (Bourdieu, 1998) by referring to infrastructures and social institutions that have become less protective; presumably this is direct things like welfare, unions and employers but also indirect factors such as municipal amenities. This reflects the interests of authors like Beck (2000) who describe a Brazilianization of the West. Therefore, the precariousness of the War on Terrorism is brought into line with the political-economic observations of the past fifty years. In doing so, Butler links her broad existential claim -that everyone is united in their similar vulnerability of corporeal existence that relies on others to exist and survive- with the prevailing *image* of today's neoliberal society identified in work-induced precarity and precarious work: that social institutions are receding.

This framework of precariousness of mortality coupled with social institutions add up to a framework of differential vulnerability, a term infrequently used that I am applying to this area of research. This is intersectionality rooted in an immanent vulnerability. This leads to a double movement: Precariousness is everywhere in its pure form, yet distributed by manifold social structures that are now dubbed 'precarity' (Han, 2018). This is done by aiming to understand the specific circumstances afflicting or 'immunising' (Alberti et al., 2018) certain individuals to precariousness. This is a study of institutions exposing and protecting different people to different extents depending on their 'education, age, family responsibility, occupation, industry, welfare, and labor market protections' etc. (Arnold & Bongiovi, 2013: 290). This understands that precarity is a multi-dimensional concept of diverse forces that cause material circumstances and/or subjective feelings of precarity (Della Porta, Hänninen, Siisiäinen, & Silvasti, 2015). This can either be the application of forces that make one more precarious, such as a zero-hour employment contract, or the retreat of facilities that protect one from precarity, such as welfare. Yet, while largely intersectional analysis, differential vulnerability retains the political-economic view that there is a general process of 'precarization' driving greater inequalities of precarity. For example, feminist geographers Ferreri, Dawson, and Vasudevan (2017: 247) state: 'Precarity here names the experience of induced insecurity that is of a piece with contemporary neo-liberalism'. Similarly Strauss (2018: 625) describes, 'human societies and economies are organized in ways that render some lives more precarious than others.' Thus, another way of conceptualising differential vulnerability is as intersectionality with the assumption that economic circumstances are worsening.

Despite the breadth to precariousness and differential vulnerability, the different intellectual origin, and the apparent break from precarious work, a key part remains on changes to work. For example, Lorey (2015), who broadens the analysis to neoliberal governmentality retains work as the base unit. Additionally, Alberti et al. (2018) blend precarious work and precariousness into a framework of 'precarization' that includes non-work aspects like migration, but nonetheless leads the empirical section with a discussion of non-standard contracts. However, Judith Butler herself has little to say about jobs directly, and Choonara (2018), in his theoretical dissertation, actually excludes Butler for this reason. There is also the matter of these changes to protection providing some form of *reduction* in vulnerability, an area discussed later and which in/security aims to

address. Therefore these extensions that aim to make work central are treading new ground, but in extremely brief encounters of a section of a journal paper. So, precariousness and differential vulnerability extend precarity and precarious work without necessarily making clearer the link between the two. At the broadest level, one can follow the concept of 'work society' by Weeks (2011), where work is the distributive mechanism of resources. There, the general degradation of work would exacerbate uncertainty and poverty. Yet, the precarities created in such a situation are very different not just by exposure to mortality but how one lives with the uncertainty (Lobato et al., 2018). There are class, gender and ethnic dimensions to how one is exposed and adapts to precarious work (Knox, Warhurst, Nickson, & Dutton, 2015; Lobato et al., 2018). To establish the link then requires to examine the nature of the uncertainty in work specifically and the nature of the individual in a modal, qualitative manner instead of the single vulnerability-safety axis that differential vulnerability rests on.

Ontological precariousness and differential vulnerability make two promises. First, while it was difficult to define a 'precarious' job due to the many dimensions and the differences of the individuals in their work sector and experience, a clearer picture may be found through centring on the worker and the single dimension of ontological precariousness, of which many factors can be brought to bear upon through differential vulnerability. Secondly, is to dramatically expand and give more clarity to the idea of insecurity beyond being less than the SER. Where measuring and examining precarious work seemed like a stretch, looking at subjects who are or feel insecure is firmer terrain. In response to the precarious work approach, Alberti et al. (2018: 448) say 'Such an approach [precarious work] has the value of enhanced measurability, but has evidently proven too limiting for many sociologists, for whom precarity clearly has to be understood in a more qualitative way'. Comments of enhanced measurability aside, the assertion speaks to how uncertainty really exists on or within the individual.

3.2.2 Social Context and Location Mediate the Precariousness of Precarious Work

Precariousness opens a critical line of thinking onto precarious work, Campbell and Price (2016: 316) ask, 'To what extent is the precariousness of work transmitted to the worker?' – this question reflects the change in centre while interrogating the significance of precarious work. Similarly, Kiersztyn (2017) asks to what extent is work insecurity 'conditional on various characteristics of workers'? In other words, is the individual's material or subjective position is insecure in some way other than due to work. In the work-centred approaches this is a given, however centring on the subject leads to consideration of personal characteristics that may mitigate or exacerbate the insecurity of a precarious job. Vosko (2010) presents a useful terminology here, the worker can be thought of through social context (occupation, sector, city) and social location (gender, citizenship). Furthermore, working closer to Butler, one can inquire into the interdependent relationships of the individual (Worth, 2016). These loosely describe the differential aspects of the worker that shape their vulnerability to precarious work. This can either be the application of forces that make one more precarious, such as only having access to concentrated precarious work, or the retreat of facilities that protect one from precarity, such as state welfare protection or independent wealth.

Interestingly, the application of this thinking has not been to show how precarious work is amplified, but mitigated. Instead of examining a job that appears to only be 'slightly precarious' making the already vulnerable worker very insecure, social context and location have been used to show the mitigation of work-induced precarity. Researchers have examined the economic support available to precarious workers who were simultaneously in education, arguing that while the job may be precarious, the worker may not be. Campbell and Price (2016) examined the jobs of high school students. They point out that while the jobs have enough dimensions of work insecurity concentrated to be deemed a precarious job, the workers cannot be deemed insecure

due to the overall protected status of being an adolescent. Meanwhile, Antonucci (2018) studied university students and the 'welfare mixes' available to them. She found that most of the interviewees had welfare or family support that mitigated the work-induced precarity that might have occurred due to their precarious jobs. Furthermore, it was only those who lacked non-work support, and so could only rely on the labour market, who could be called precarious. Now, both of these cases are not necessarily an empirical example of secure precarious working because they both deal with edge cases of people in education, but they illustrate the role of social location and context.

Another study from Knox et al. (2015) examines different workers who feel comfortable or uncomfortable about the same job. This is explained in terms of overall social and political economic position. This study was not conducted in the language of precarity, but in that of job quality, setting out to measure how perceptions of job quality differ among hotel room attendants in Glasgow, London and Sydney. By the dimensions of work insecurity, these hotel room attendant jobs were cases of concentrated precarious work, with low pay, few benefits and unreliable hours. This would be a job that should make anyone feel uncertain, undervalued and wanting to leave, however, depending on the overall life situation of the worker, some felt the job was acceptable. To explain this, Knox et al. (2015) form a matrix of four groups that are distinguished by being willing/unwilling and trapped/transient. For example, the 'willing and trapped' group were willing to do the job, but had no prospects to leave. These workers tended to be family focused without qualifications. Meanwhile, the 'unwilling and transient' group did not want to do the job, and took it out of a short-term need, and were expected to move on, these tended to be younger, pleasure-focused people with wider employment options. This analysis demonstrates how insecurity is not just a function of the job, but is a function of the individual's social context and location and their perception of it.

Another component of context and location to consider is the relationships to others. Worth (2016: 601) examined the role of relationships to others, and how those relationships affect 'whether work feels flexible or precarious'. For example is economic support or the reflective concern for others. This complicates the idea of *autonomy*, which has implications for individual reflexivity. It shines light on the assumption of the fully autonomous individual who creates their own destiny. As such, Worth (2016: 611) calls for a 'relational understanding of agency in our working lives'. This is probably most applicable to 'life' instead of the precarious job. Worth (2016) is focusing on the aspects that follow-on from the conditions of a job, such as household income or childcare. These are affected by the job but are not governed by the employment relationship in terms of the employer determining childcare or including/excluding sources of household income. The significance is that these follow-on aspects relate to the wider political-economy and all-inclusive circumstances of the individual. These follow-on aspects could be alleviated regardless of the nature of the job through state provision of benefits, housing allowances, controls on house price or rents or childcare benefits or subsidies. These follow-on effects therefore relate to the entire individual and not the job in the strictest, conservative sense.

This work interrogates the link between precarious work and uncertainty, concluding that the effects of precarious work are contingent on the social context and location, and that the leap from precarious work to work-induced precarity or precarious worker should be resisted. In her statistical analysis of European data, Kiersztyn (2017: 118) concludes that 'individuals in non-standard working arrangements are subject to differing levels of economic risk'. This seems obvious, but is only apparent when examined from a subject-centred perspective. From the job-centred perspective, the job is inherently insecure or risky for lacking the dimensions of security, unfortunately by definition. Yet, this leads to an apparent contradiction that the jobs are nonetheless recognised as insecure, yet the workers' insecurity is conditional.

Most importantly for social context and location mediating uncertainty, is that the job is still deemed 'precarious' (Antonucci, 2018; Campbell & Price, 2016) – it retains all of the dimensions of uncertainty, only those dimensions have been neutralised by the worker's characteristics. However, this neutralising does not mean that the effects of the precarious job are null. The dimensions of precarious work are still exerting an uncertainty upon the workers, driving them to relying on other non-work forms of security, such as family or state support (Antonucci, 2018). Such forms of support could be seen as an in/security for not necessarily solving the insecurity present, but making it liveable. In other words, the protections of social context do not mean that precarious work stops existing or changing the situation, that the workers do not exhibit 'precariousness' just means that they have found some form of in/security, and the job still has its uncertain characteristics to be contended with. Therefore, instead of seeing subjects unaffected by precarious work, we see subjects who have adapted, through dependent relationships on family and state welfare.

What this approach means is to look at the job in context and reconsider what it actually means for the individual. Kiersztyn (2017: 118) suggests to 'further conceptualize and study the links between contract type and insecurity for individuals under different conditions'. Similarly, Campbell and Price (2016: 316) ask how is insecurity 'transmitted' to the worker. What this means is to conceptualize insecurity of work in a manner that adjusts with the circumstances of the worker. One can go a step further than the analysis here by looking at how the circumstances of the worker not only neutralize but also exacerbate insecurities. To do so, leads to examining the social and economic position that the job places the worker into.

3.2.3 Uncertainty of Social and Political Economic Position

Other researchers have drawn attention to the insecurities of one's social and economic position, and that of the individual's future. These are insecurities of being in a certain kind of job or work circumstance. For instance, one dimension of a precarious job is insecure hours, but the subject-centred approach draws attention to the individual's perception of themselves as financially insecure. In other words, the individual is insecure, furthermore, their self-image and their image of the future is uncertain. Put another way, the social context and location is a vulnerability in itself. That is, the job the individual has, where they think they are going, the fields that the job places them in and the class-image (expectation of labour type and position in society) that the worker can derive from the job. While this has tended to focus on young adults, who are attempting to establish themselves in work, this uncertainty could affect people of any age.

When analysis is centred on the job, subjectivity is perceiving the dimensions of precarious work, such as the immediate economic vulnerability in the form of job and income loss. In contrast, subject-centred approaches raise the objective and subjective insecurity of social and political-economic position. In precarity research, assertions of class have been heavily contested in reference to the precariat class and frameworks that integrate it (Savage et al., 2013; Standing, 2011). This is further compromised by the dominant assertions that all work is precarious as a matter of being a capitalist process (Alberti et al., 2018; Beck, 2000). Therefore, assertions of a precarious class position, IE being concerned about slipping from middle-class to lower-class are rarely made. Nonetheless, individuals may show anxieties with synergies to class, such as being unable to attain work in a specific sector, earning power, lifestyle or major assets like a home. These four concerns mentioned show the complexity of identifying any single class anxiety or movement. Typically, precarity research describes specific anxieties by workers that are conducive to certain images of what I have called 'social and political-economic position' -a deliberately generic term that describes positions in social structures without the connotations of power, privilege and cohesiveness (Bourdieu, 1984; Giddens, 1971) that class refers to. However,

these positions, in being political-economic, do refer to a systemic security in the nature of labouring and earning power.

One 'uncertainty' of precarious work is not in the job itself, but is in the social and political-economic location which that job puts the individual in. Researchers have drawn attention to the more limited political-economic opportunities that appear to exist today. Brown, Lauder, and Ashton (2010) describe how tertiary education was effectively oversold in recent decades as the expected number of associated jobs not only never materialised, but began being siphoned off to developing economies. Savic, Vecchi, and Lewis (2019) say: 'In 2017, 21.7% of those who graduated before 1992 were overeducated, whereas the corresponding figure for those who graduated in 2007 or later was 34.2%', so overeducation is a common problem, and more so among young adults. Meanwhile, Côté (2014) describes how the political economic position of young adults, as measured by their earning power relative to earlier generations, has decreased substantially. Such a position could make one feel 'insecure' about their future as the present work seems to be insufficient.

These uncertainties of political economy put pressure on other dimensions of social position, such as home ownership or even consumption patterns. Therefore instead of just facing the dimensions of precarious work, people are facing uncertain home ownership, education choices, family formation, and, in the end, economic class (Bessant, Farthing, & Watts, 2017) as a function of that precarious job. MacDonald and Giazitzoglu (2019) develop this by packaging together the many relatively less desirable positions that people may be in,

> People working less than they might wish to and employment in jobs for which they are over-qualified are two obvious examples, but we can add the sort of insecure 'low-pay, no-pay' cycle described above. All are indicative of an economy that is unable to provide a sufficient quantity and quality of employment to meet the needs and wants of workers.

Such is the insecurity of the worker, a 'precarious job' is now one which does not meet the needs and wants of the worker. Many researchers have described a state whereby workers do not want to remain in a job, or the job is a 'mismatch' in some way that creates a feeling of uncertainty (MacDonald & Giazitzoglu, 2019; Motakef, 2019). Motakef (2019: 169) describes this as 'precarity of life arrangement', whereby workers may be 'trapped in temporary or parttime work, being a contract-worker or having a low income can encroach on one's possibilities to realize their skills, abilities and talents.' In this quote, Motakef (2019) links the nature of one's labouring -the tasks and duties- to what is effectively social class much as Weber (2010) had done. As Weber (2010: 139) says those selling their labour are 'starkly differentiated from each other, according to the kind of services they offer'. Motakef (2019) describes a desire for a more aesthetic form of work that is meaningful (Bauman, 2000; Cannizzo & James, 2020) but also represents a class position with more status. This suggests an anxiety of the type of labouring one does. Thus these anxieties could be highly shaped by the cultural orthodoxy of 'good' and 'bad' labouring. In other comments of position, Worth (2016: 611) says 'feeling insecure can mean you stay in a job you are over qualified for, never even try to apply for work because you assume failure, or stay in a job you do not really like because you fear being unemployed'. Similarly Armano and Murgia (2013) describe how knowledge workers may feel an uncertainty of career trajectory due to the constant stops and starts of project-based term contract employment. These describe an unhappiness and uncertainty with one's place in the world that are related to, but also are largely independent of any of the dimensions of precarious work outlined in Chapter Two. These are cases of people not being able to find the job that they wanted or a job that utilizes their abilities fully, regardless of any inherent insecurity the job may actually have (low wages, insecure tenure, etc.). It is a desire for largely 'aesthetic' work (Bauman, 2000; Cannizzo & James, 2020) that has strong connotations of anxiety over occupational class (Weber, 2010). Furthermore, such

insecurities may be the function of work that is *too stable* which makes the worker 'trapped'. The effects of this can spill-out into many aspects of life, causing 'messy and extended transitions' (Cuervo & Chesters, 2019: 307) into adulthood as young adults struggle to gain a foothold.

None of the above uncertainties are the dimensions of work insecurity (Standing, 2011) of precarious work, they are not some aspect of the job being uncertain like the tenure, hours, or lacking statutory rights. These are insecurities of the subject and their position that are caused by the job, whether that job is 'precarious' or not. Where job-centred approaches focus on the individual being able to find another, similar job, such as the '*degree of certainty of continuing employment*' (Vosko, 2010: 2) or 'retain a niche in employment' (Standing, 2011: 10), worker-centred approaches are, in addition, orientated towards the worker being able to find a job they want. In many regards, this also means a job outside of their current niche or continuing work and into something better or perceived to be better. The uncertainty here is occupying a position in a work-education matrix that is not of sufficient quantity or quality to meet the needs and wants of the worker. The uncertainties of work are therefore not limited to the dimensions of precarious work, but also include the position in society that the job places the individual in. This means that the definition of a 'precarious job' is no longer limited to the job, but can include characteristics of the worker themselves: their position in social and economic fields. This shows a new line of insecurity to precarious work.

The above literature on dissatisfaction with a job has an issue of not fully interrogating the theorised link between precarious work and uncertain position. There is a striving for security, traditional markers of adulthood or meaningful work that precarious work is assumed to interfere with. This means that these jobs which do not aid that mission are uncritically rendered as 'precarious', regardless of their actual characteristics. This is made clear in literature that examines the purposeful use of precarious work in order to *secure* a social and economic position.

Navigating unwanted or uncertain social positions has the potential to invert the entire precarious work construction, so that a precarious job is taken by a worker in order to move to a desired social or political economic position. Wong and Au-Yeung (2019) examined the job choice of young Hong Kong adults based on their aspirations. This could be achieving individual freedom, detaching from mainstream career paths, travelling, studying or transitioning to stable economic independence. These young adults were using precarious work as a trade-off to obtain greater autonomy. Wong and Au-Yeung (2019) frame these as dilemmas between autonomy and precarity whereby it is unclear if workers are in a dominated or free position in choosing to take their precarious jobs. Finally, when they take a stable job, it is framed as losing autonomy in order to gain stability. Here then, precarious work is a method to secure some aspirational social position.

A certainty of social position may be constructed through precarious work. Schilling et al. (2019) describes tactics of *detaching* from impossible pathways into stable work, such as traditional professions, and *gathering* of remaining open to opportunities and combining multiple jobs, gigs or stints into hybrid and flexible constructions. Putting detaching and gathering together, Schilling et al. (2019) describe people jury-rigging livelihoods, taking blind opportunities and combining and developing them into something liveable. For example, an accounting graduate in Abidjan begins delivering bread, then suggests managing the books for the bakery, then gets promoted to an assistant manager. In these cases it is almost the case that the definition of precariousness is the practice of disembedding out of linear and assured pathways.

This leads to the idea of the entrepreneurial self (Kelly, 2006), of which a number of mutations have been published. These combine neoliberal governmentality with late-modernity to describe a selfhood. Walsh and Black (2021: 499) describe 'homo promptus' who is, 'entrepreneurial and strategic; plans adaptively for the future while living life in the short-term; not tethered to a single

place; permanently in 'situational' mode and lives in waithood.' Furthermore is the 'Guerilla Self' that is a 'form of selfhood that thrives at the interstices of capitalism, business and individualisation and walks hand-in-hand with resilience and entrepreneurialism.' (Howie & Campbell, 2017: 73). They describe a kind of state of mind of neoliberalism, a coping mechanism that for lack of any alternative, has to 'embrace' insecurity and risk in order to survive or thrive. In these cases, the individual may be energised by risk, rather than feel precarious. These raise questions as to what the self or individual is. These constructions are repressed but optimistic, squeezed out but finding cracks of possibility. They describe less the direct experience of uncertainty, but of coping and making-do in the face of losing one's social and economic position.

The subject-centred approach reveals an entirely new area of uncertainty with work: that of the subject's position in social and political economic space in the present and the future. People in precarious work may be anxious about the job they have or the job they will have in the future, but this is not just because the job is uncertain, but because of what position that job locates the worker in. However, this is typically framed as not liking a job, of being overeducated, not reaching one's potential (Motakef, 2019), or not achieving normative adulthood markers (Cuervo & Chesters, 2019). Subsequent literature shows how workers may have ideals of being flexible (Wong & Au-Yeung, 2019) of needing to be flexible (Walsh & Black, 2021) or using precarious work as a strategy to achieving a new kind of stability (Schilling et al., 2019).

What this analysis shows is a requirement to provide at least equal focus of precarious jobs with the labour market position of the individual. This has to be done relatively to the worker, however. For example overeducation or a feeling of not reaching one's potential is a function of the position of the job and the capital (i.e. 'potential' position) of the worker. While there are links to class in terms of the type of labouring (Weber, 2010) or general position in the economy, an actual anxiety of class position is rarely mentioned, likely due to the complexity of class theory and the general rejection (Alberti et al., 2018) of Guy Standing's (2011) precariat thesis. For this study, where the focus is on individual experiences, specific anxieties felt by workers are more applicable. What this literature does demonstrate is that a job does not induce precarity just for its inherent characteristics, such as low wages or fluctuating hours, but also for the labour market position it places the worker and the future that the individual sees in it.

3.2.4 Subject-centred Conclusion

Ontological precariousness and differential vulnerability are often made out to be taking account of the worker's resources, perceptions and aspirations, but it is much more than that. In order to account for the characteristics of the individual convincingly, it involves a movement of the analytical centre from the job to the subject. In doing so the job is actually made to be secondary to uncertainty in some analyses (Antonucci, 2018), but it also elaborates on insecurities of social and economic position.

Two lines of literature were explored. The first examined the role of the social context and location on the worker's vulnerability and perception of precarious work. It is noted that no qualities of a job transform definitely into precariousness. The second examined how that very social context and position can be an insecurity in itself as workers feel uncertain about where they are in life. This research has three repercussions for the study of precarious work. First is to be critical of the role which precarious work has in the lives of workers, asking to what extent uncertainty is 'transmitted' from the precarious job to the worker (Campbell & Price, 2016: 316). Social context and location (Vosko, 2010) can neutralise or exacerbate any dimension of work insecurity, such as family wealth negating low wages. A second repercussion is to look at the wider labour market position of the worker and their perception of the future. Precarious jobs drive uncertainties of what station in work the individual is inhabiting, and this is very subjective, such as overeducation or feeling like one is not achieving their potential. Therefore precarious

jobs need to be viewed relatively to the overall labour market. Finally is the analysis of workers purposefully moving through all of this. Data shows that workers are creating stabilities out of precarious work due to the relative position of them. In other words this literature shows how the insecurity of a precarious job is a function of both the worker and the labour market, so these need to be accounted for.

Missing however is clarity of what a precarious job is. It seems disingenuous, and not useful, to label any job contributing to a worker's insecurity as precarious. This would mean that repetitive and menial jobs are considered precarious purely because the worker does not like it or the worker wants to leave, rather than any inherent uncertainty of the job. This is a shortcoming of viewing this literature as 'subjective' because it implies that a structure could be precarious purely because an individual has perceived it as so. These are structures, of a certain 'objective' form, such as a job that has limited promotion prospects or a labour market with limited possibilities, that is perceived as providing uncertain opportunity. Therefore, these subjective judgements of work need to be put against a sensitivity to the job itself.

Overall, what this suggests is a need for a personal approach to precarious structures without going down the unilateral secure/insecure route of differential vulnerability. A personal approach would adjust with the participant's capital and overall current and potential social position. This would mean to take into account not just the vulnerabilities to mortality, but also vulnerabilities to the worker's current objective position and desires for the future. This could then account for how the individual's circumstances may mitigate any insecurity of the job, and how the individual's overall economic and social position mitigate or exacerbate feeling or being insecure. Therefore what might be insecure for one individual might be secure for another, such as an unpaid, but in other ways valuable, internship. Workers' capital may neutralize or exacerbate any dimension of a precarious job, while besides any aspect of the job is the overall labour market position that the worker is in and perceives.

In the final literature section I bring the two centres and the conclusions drawn from either into discussion.

3.3 Part One Interim Conclusion: Uncertainties Abound, But to What End?

The precarity literature is largely split. While authors of precarious work and precarity (Alberti et al., 2018; Kalleberg, 2018) typically refer to both sides, in practice any analysis will need to hew to either the job or worker centre, making the other peripheral. Either the job is fundamentally precarious when compared against the SER ideal-type or the subject is fundamentally precarious by the nature of the social distribution of risk and the individual's own perception. These approaches therefore represent two centres of flexibilization of work that are frequently used together, but not necessarily well linked. It is time to reflect on both the current and the previous chapters together.

Chapter Two examined the 'recent rise of precarious work' (Kalleberg, 2018: 3), which is typically described as objective (Alberti et al., 2018) and has roots in labour sociology, economics, critical management, late-modern (Beck, 2000), and dual-labour market theory. Precarious work definitions are a composite of concerns, relating to uncertainty generally, any number of dimensions of insecurity, and lack of statutory benefits. Amongst all of these different concerns, researchers typically identify contracts. About 20 per cent, a growing proportion, of jobs in the UK are 'non-standard' by the best measures (OECD, 2015). To gain clarity, I distinguish heterogeneous change and concentrated precarious work. The more general precarization of work, whereby precarious work is by some accounts universal (Kalleberg, 2018) or inherent to

capitalism (Alberti et al., 2018) is present but is difficult to identify, by the limited and recent data available (Felstead, Gallie, Green, & Henseke, 2020; Gallie et al., 2017). Concentrated precarious work, that is where precarization appears to have pooled into a single job that has low pay, has insecure hours and worse working conditions, are a small but not insignificant proportion of jobs in the UK. For example ZHCs alone, by the best estimates, account for around five to ten per cent of main jobs in the UK (Farina et al., 2020). However, there appears to be great mobility in and out of these concentrated jobs whether identified as ZHCs, gig work or temporary contracts, which suggests a much more common temporary interaction with precarious work. Across these forms, interview and statistical data suggest that precarious work is heterogenous in terms of the insecurities and experience. While labour has been greatly deregulated and subject to flexible forces, the 'precarization' of work is more limited and heterogeneous than suggested by radical readings of neoliberalism.

This data and analysis leaves one with a mixed and debateable picture of precarity and precarious work in the UK (Doogan, 2015). There is a clear picture of work becoming more governed by market forces in various forms, whether it is deregulatory legislation (Beck, 2000; Standing, 2011), free trade and financialisaton (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017) or corporate and human resource technologies (Marchington et al., 2005; Weil, 2014). These changes are what have drawn so much attention in the first place, yet while internationally or in certain sectors there are big changes in work, the macro change in the UK is far more limited and even displays instances of improving certainty, conditions and lengthening of tenures in the statistical data (Findlay & Thompson, 2017; Hipp et al., 2015). It appears then that while precarization maybe does affect all employment, the manifestations of that effect are local in a profound way.

Chapter Three examines the other half of the precarity literature, precariousness and differential vulnerability, that is centred on individuals in both objective and subjective dimensions. While a lot of this research simply builds off precarious work, the frameworks that do exist (Alberti et al., 2018; Kalleberg, 2018) refer back to Judith Butler's conceptualisation of precariousness whereby insecurity has 'inflected' life worlds (Waite, 2009: 416). First this section examines the ramifications of a subject-centred approach for work-induced precarity, and it comes out that social location and context mediate all the uncertainties of precarious work on the individual's life (Campbell & Price, 2016). Secondly I examined the uncertainty of social and political economic position. Precarious jobs make people feel insecure in their station in life, not just in the job, and so the individual's lifeworld becomes uncertain. However the terms of discussing this are very flexible, reaching into cases where the job is not what the worker wants. If seen purely subjectively, such subjective judgements are liable to being backwashed into the definition of precarious work, expanding it to any undesirable job. Therefore, the analysis of social and economic position could benefit from a tighter integration into the 'objective' area of precarious work itself.

Each centre suggests a movement in how to approach precarity and precarious work. The first movement concerns identifying how precarious work is stratified. Precarious work has a firm basis in the large changes observed in the governing forces of work, but not in any uniform change in jobs. Therefore, there needs to be a recognition of how trends of precarious work are 'stratified' into different concentrations. Part of this is to identify what is similar about precarious work in order to be able to say what is different. The second movement is to make precarious work personal. This has been conducted by others as examining the transmission of insecurity from job to worker (Campbell & Price, 2016) or viewing insecurity as conditional on the worker (Kiersztyn, 2017). This means to examine two key areas: how the social context and location affect the transmission of risk from job to worker. Secondly, it means to examine the social position of the worker. Where does the job position the worker in social and economic structures, and what future does it pose for the worker.

These two movements complement each other -a stratification of precarious work via the resources and social position of the worker. This leads to two major changes in thinking. First is an engagement with structural uncertainties that adjust with the worker's resources and position. While jobs can be relatively predictable and continuous between them, such as a gig job or a permanent job, any pertinence of these differences in certainty is a function of the worker's resources, frame of mind and position. Young adults may prefer insecurity (Wong & Au-Yeung, 2019), develop coping mechanisms that mitigate their perception of that insecurity (Kiersztyn, 2017) or exhibit a selfhood derived from insecurity (Howie & Campbell, 2017). However, this is not pure subjective worker judgement because the notion of a 'precarious job' is retained as a quality that is relative across all work. Therefore, one could say that a worker feels secure in a precarious job.

The second major change in thinking is to examine the relationships between precarious work and the worker beyond ontological precariousness. As Kiersztyn (2017) has found, attempting to couple job and worker insecurities to one another is problematic because there are too many factors impacting any one-to-one comparison; such as, low wages of a job cannot be paired with a worker's economic insecurity. Examining the relationships between job and worker therefore needs to progress down additional dimensions, such as social position or the self-image of such. For example, Knox et al. (2015) displayed how a poor quality hotel attendant job can be threatening or not to one's self-image and social position, depending on whether the worker saw the job as supporting their family or not. In this manner, the notion of a 'adjusting' vulnerability is moving down multiple axes, and the precarization is stratified via the axes of differentiation that are important to workers. For example, if there is a strong welfare state, precaritization will be less stratified by financial concerns and more by additional axes such as the social position or the working conditions.

Precarious work is not necessarily the job, but the job in relation to the individual and their wider life. However, this raises the issue of what precarious work is anymore. Missing from the existing literature is a coherent theoretical account of the multi-dimensional human consequences of precarization, flexible working and insecurity, that maps in an interaction between structural, place-based, and agentic forces in individual trajectories to and through the world of work. To achieve this, in the next chapter I discuss the methodology employed to achieve this.

Part Two

Re-tooling Precarity Methodologies and Thinking

4

Methodology: Walking into Precarious Work

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I reviewed the literature that informed the uncertainty of flexible economies. It was shown that uncertainties of a job are multi-dimensional, and lack much of a solid form as to what a precarious job could be, other than the non-standard contract. At the same time, subject-centred approaches show that people facing uncertainties of the labour market regarding whether they are in the job they wanted and expected to be in. Missing are links between these. The characteristics of a job that makes someone feel uncertain range from financial insecurity (Smith & McBride, 2021) to a matter of it being a lousy, 'dead-end' job that makes the worker feel unappreciated (Motakef, 2019). Yet, these jobs could just as easily be Fordist permanent roles, as post-Fordist temporary ones (Worth, 2016). These two lines of literature call for a methodology that examines both working and labour market conditions, one that traces the movements between workplace and labour market to see how the flexibility of either interacts with the other.

In this chapter I explain how I researched precarious work using ethnographic methods. The project consisted of an eleven month ethnography in the precarious labour market of London. The overall strategy was to move into one to three workplaces sequentially and naturally as I was needed there by the employer. In practice, I found the labour market more fragmented than expected, and I was moved to a greater extent between eight different workplaces, with tenures ranging from one day to two months. Furthermore, the response to Covid-19 was being felt, shaping the fieldwork. That field work formed the basis of the interviewee recruitment. It is common to collect work narratives in interviews (Mrozowicki & Trappmann, 2020; Worth, 2016), but I also attempted to link this to literature on precarious work by asking about working conditions. The analysis of such is an amalgamation of fieldwork and interview data. I began with my experiences of job searching and workplaces, which progressively gives way to the interviews as the scale of analysis expands to trajectories through precarious work as a whole.

The chapter begins with the research design, which was influenced by workplace ethnographies and accounts of precariousness. I then discuss the research setting and effect of Covid-19. This leads to positionality, where I reflect on my own expectations of what precarious work is. I then explain the actual methods of ethnography and interviewing employed. Finally I discuss the analysis strategy, which followed a process of theoretically-informed, iterative theme generation.

4.2 Research Design Influences: Immersion into a Precarious Career

The last chapter identified the united yet ambiguous nature of being and feeling insecure in developed economies across work and workers. It became clear precarious work is a lived experience of working and life planning. Therefore the lived day-to-day of workplaces was crucial, but only hold meaning when considered in relation to the wider picture of precariousness. I

needed a strategy that could bridge these two worlds of the work and the condition of living that life. Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) describe how the research design is a template for how the project is aimed to proceed. It is informed by the literature, but extends this by asking what cases might be useful, what data can be used and how that data can be accessed. For ethnography, one of the key things to consider is the field site, the place that the ethnographer shall locate themselves in (Burawoy, Blum, George, Gille, & Thayer, 2000). Therefore, the research design involves identifying the 'location' of precarity. In this regard, a workplace is obvious, however the precariousness concept and data (Worth, 2016) speak to settings outside of work (Mollona, 2009). The research design therefore had to somehow bridge work and life, which I explain below.

4.2.1 Workplace Ethnography

I first turned to traditional workplace ethnographies for influence. Compared to statistical analysis or sole interviews, the strength of workplace ethnography is to give a view that is both rich and importantly for this study, highly contextualised (Smith, 2001b). The research design was therefore influenced as a traditional workplace study in the first instance; going into a workplace, doing the job and learning about how it works.

Precarious work will always be governed by the make-up and functioning of the workplace. Workplace ethnographies aim to show how the day-to-day actions of working and being at the workplace come to constitute material and cultural milieus that come to be lived by (Burawoy, 1982; Mollona, 2009). They are aimed at the 'unwritten but pervasive rules governing jobs' (Smith, 2001a: 225). Whatever one believes about work conceptually and broadly, it is in the milieu of the workplace that the effects are felt. Typically precarious work is treated as an 'objective' milieu of wages, contracts, and benefits (Alberti et al., 2018), so the cultural meanings of the work are not explicated. Workplace ethnographies (Burawoy, 1982; Mollona, 2009; Orr, 1996) display how such 'objective' conditions and institutional structures are co-opted by cultural processes (Weeks, 2011) that bear upon not only how work is perceived and experienced, but how the 'objectivity' of the workplace actually operates. For example, Burawoy (1982: 63) notes that at first he was 'contemptuous' of his repetitive job, but over time those tasks came to absorb his attention and he learnt there was a 'game' being played of managing the original boredom centred around hitting targets. Spyridakis (2012) points out these cultural layers can be constructed in relation to the vulnerabilities of a precarious work role. The goal was to understand how insecurity of the type described by precarious work scholars is manifested between individuals in a labour process and if this is significant or not to work-induced precarity or precariousness of the worker.

There are several workplace ethnographies that examine more flexible working conditions, such as working as part of a network of 'fissured' firms (Mollona, 2009), gig economy taxi drivers (Josserand & Kaine, 2019) or poorly paid zero hour workers (Galic, 2019; Smith & McBride, 2021). These studies illuminate the social location and context of the work (Vosko, 2010) that is often treated objectively as something that 'immunises' workers from precariousness (Campbell & Price, 2016) rather than as a meaningful location of what is happening. While immunisation does occur, framing it as objective and flat is an imposition of the researcher's meaning. In the worker's own meaning, the social location that keeps one secure can also be a liability against achieving an aspiration (Schilling et al., 2019; Wong & Au-Yeung, 2019). Like the precarious workplace, social location and context are also co-opted through the process of working. For example, Mollona (2009) locates the workplace in a network of fissured (Weil, 2014) firms, an informal and illicit economy, and post-kinship living arrangements. Such aspects are accessible via interviews, but an outsider may not know what to ask or understand the context's meaning. Rather than just a matrix of vulnerabilities and protections, as work of the workplace milieu, the social context and location are the 'incubator' of the precarious working condition itself. What this means for

precarious work is that ethnography opens the opportunity to see the context and location not just as a temper on vulnerability, but as a source of meaning.

These studies therefore led to the practical point that contextualised (O'Reilly, 2005) and autoethnographic (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011) insight would be important. Achieving this was guided by the ethnographic aim of being 'fully immersed' in the field sites (O'Reilly, 2005; Smith, 2001b). However, such an approach lent itself to an embodied and autoethnographic method of data collection (Denshire, 2014; Ellis et al., 2011; McMorran, 2012). While all ethnography involves some introspection, autoethnography examines the ethnographer and their feelings explicitly as another piece of data. True autoethnography, in the emotional and reflexive sense, has been used extensively in the social sciences to study states of being (Denshire 2014) and precarious work (Bundy, 2019; Galic, 2019). Auto-ethnography works to document the emotional and embodied experiences of social contexts, which are then meshed with other forms of data to gain a complete picture. I discuss autoethnography more practically in section 4.3.4 *Fieldwork*.

Workplace ethnographies draw attention to the worker's meaning that is inscribed on the 'objective' conditions inside and around the workplace, and the value of accessing this from an insider perspective. This means to go into workplaces and do the precarious job with the aim to demystify the dimensions of work security, and examine what meaningful responses are generated out of that. However, compared to traditional workers who are labouring under continuous and relatively 'permanent' conditions (although workplaces are of course sites of contestation and change), precarious workers are in a very different condition of precariousness that exists in the labour market and in one's station in life, so the research design had to go beyond workplace ethnography.

4.2.2 Being Precarious

As examined in Chapter Two, much of the uncertainty of precarious work lies in the condition of precariousness, which is not a characteristic of the job, but of the individual. Being centred on the individual and so broad as a condition (Waite, 2009), feeling (Worth, 2016) or subjectivity (Alberti et al., 2018), or as a structural mutual interdependence (Lorey, 2015) make it difficult to practically consider a methodological site, it is unclear what that location might be or look like. More literal descriptions of precariousness also range from worrying about money, feeling insecure (Kiersztyn, 2017) as a whole or even being deeply satisfied yet materially secure by one's job. Furthermore, as discussed, precariousness tends to de-link from work to consider aspects such as welfare, community, migration, education, housing and family (Bessant et al., 2017). To add complication, some theorists, such as Lorey (2015) describe there is no such thing as a unified single vulnerability of precariousness, instead everyone has their own 'profile' that are incomparable. The challenge is to identify what precariousness means methodologically, or put another way, what activity or what place is indicative of being a precarious worker, *other than working and the workplace*. To answer this I turned to a number of texts that examined being in multiple precarious jobs over an extended period of time, which led to the method of being 'swept with' and located in precarious work.

The strategy to examine precariousness was inspired by accounts of precarious workers by researchers, journalists and authors in literary memoirs. Firstly are in-depth journalistic investigations into low-pay work where the writer did the jobs themselves, such as by Ehrenreich (2010) and Bloodworth (2018). Both these authors sought to examine precarious work like a workplace ethnographer, but were very interested in the impacts on everyday life. Both described being exhausted from their work when at home, which made it difficult to live healthily or gave them a kind of 'tunnel vision' (Ehrenreich, 2010). These works show how the embodiment and subjectivity of precarious work is brought outside of the workplace to affect the worker's lifeworld and being. Meanwhile, both Bloodworth (2018) and Ehrenreich (2010) worked multiple

jobs to see how each compared, however they simply resigned their job after a time and chose the next one purposefully by their journalistic interests. Furthermore, they moved cities to see precarious work around their respective countries. I took inspiration for less formal movements between jobs within the same city from a literary source.

When he was beginning as an author, George Orwell (2001 [1933]) wrote a literary memoir *Down and Out in Paris and London* of a time when he was living, what we could call, precariously. Although the situation was somewhat engineered, Orwell was legitimately broke and out of work but elected to not borrow money from a friend, it does give insight into one form of precariousness. It begins with the unexpected turn of a tutoring job in Paris falling through, then moves to spending time broke and unemployed, getting a menial and hard job, moving to another job that seemed better and that business failing, which left him unemployed again. Orwell then moved to London where he lived as a tramp. Through this chain of events he explains his anxieties, efforts and jubilations that arose from such insecurity. Orwell's account shows how there is a continuity to precarious work that one can, to an extent, insert themselves into. Furthermore, just like with workplace ethnographies, there were meaningful experiences colouring in the 'objective' conditions, not in the workplace, but in the times outside of them. For example, after the difficulties of unemployment, working life for Orwell (2001 [1933]: 90-91) made him feel a 'heavy contentment' of a life 'which had become so simple' despite the long hours he endured in a hot kitchen. What this shows is that the sought-after methodological site of precariousness, at least in terms of work in which the concept is rooted, exist out of multiple jobs and the combination of both uncertainty and the *relief* of that uncertainty that accumulates in one's life.

These texts influenced my idea of where precariousness is located outside of the workplace, and so showed me where I needed to place myself as a *precarious* workplace ethnographer. This reflects the imperative in the anthropological tradition of ethnography to spend an extended period of time in the context of those being studied (Malinowski, 2002; O'Reilly, 2005). This context however is not a geographical place or time, an industry, or a wage tier, but a social space of being in precarious work continuously. The methodology is almost a 'nomadic' (Calvey, 2008) ethnography whereby the ethnographer moves from field site to field site, but with the additional notion of there being an even larger field site under study that was, in a sense, moving me. That means looking for work, working, but then, managing the inherent insecurity of that job that may lead me to being unemployed or having my hours significant reduced. The research design was therefore structured to understand not just how precarious workers do the job they are hired in, but how they do the 'job' of being a precarious worker.

4.3 Methods

The methods were designed to achieve the above design of going into and between precarious workplaces. This was achieved with a blend of being swept with structural conditions, and purposefully choosing employers and interviewees. In the following I first give background information, explaining the research setting, my positionality as to the field site and the identification of a precarious job or worker in the field and ethics. This all shaped how I conducted the fieldwork and interviews.

Research is best led by a set of questions that originate out of the literature and researcher's interests (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). For this project, the research questions remained remarkably similar from the proposal to finishing this thesis. This is likely due to the breadth of the questions that aimed to add nuance, and in some cases challenge, the literature. These research questions are,

1. How do adults experience precarious employment?
2. What are the implications of precarious work for one's personal vulnerability in terms of work, well-being and self-narrative?
3. What are the lines of stratification of the impacts of precarious work?
4. What are the short-term versus long-term consequences of precarious work, and what structural and personal factors alter these outcomes?

These questions can be seen as challenging ideas derived from the literature (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013), while seeking clarification on key questions of security and insecurity.

4.3.1 Research Setting: Lockdown London

Arguably part of the research design, selecting the setting is a crucial part of planning an ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The decision is a balance of somewhere pertinent to the phenomenon and the practicality of access (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Choosing where to conduct the study has different scales, and ultimately comes into contact with what precarious work is as disparate workplaces produce different images (Lobato et al., 2018). I chose a city, London, and then districts in the city to locate myself. The next setting was the workplaces and jobs themselves, which I identified as that with no guaranteed hours. Part of the setting was the presence and response to Covid-19, which shaped the experience in and between workplaces.

A single city study was chosen in order to have enough time to learn that labour market to some degree of depth. London was selected for having a lot of different work opportunities across sectors and contract type. As a centre of business, employers in London are also likely to be at the forefront of new trends in company structure and management, such as gig work. For example, one gig employer I worked for, Handy, is most popular in the South-East. This diversity would also likely impact being a precarious worker there because there are likely to be a lot of choice in which job to take. There is the risk of emphasising, for example, gathering opportunities (Schilling et al., 2019) that would just not exist in a smaller city. However, as it is common to move country or city, many interviewees included experiences outside of London.

London is also a global city, which is pertinent to precarious work for attracting workers from around the UK and the world. Ackroyd (2001) describes how for hundreds of years London has been a kind of beacon for people around the world to come and find their fortune, and that effect was evident among the interviewees. From trailing spouses, EU university students, curious backpackers to graduates from elsewhere in Britain, many of the interviewees were drawn by an opportunity or the allure of the big city. This gave a migratory aspect to the study, and added another layer of temporary-being to those I met and interviewed. In many respects, as a New Zealander, I was in this position too.

London is famous for the distinctiveness of its different boroughs (Ackroyd, 2001). The borough one lives affects living costs, industries that are accessible and the wealth and ethnicity of co-workers. Apart from a few weeks in Seven Sisters, I lived in London Fields and Acton. I lived in London Fields, in a room with no exterior window, to live near the centre of London and have access to the greatest number of workplaces. This facilitated working for gig platform Handy that had me visiting people's homes around the city. Coincidentally, from London Fields is a direct train to Ponder's End, which had an industrial area that I worked in. This alerted me to the importance of living near industrial areas, so I moved west to Acton to be near Park Royal where I worked two jobs and was offered a third. Although there is largely gig, industrial and retail work available from anywhere in London, there is significant ethnic variation depending on location. For example Park Royal's proximity to Wembley (or Wembley's proximity to Park Royal) make either location popular with Central Asian people, which is reflected in the interview sample.

The field site was dramatically altered by Covid-19. Planning for the project began in late 2019 when Covid-19 was still a rumour. By March 2020 Covid-19 had reached the UK and strict control measures were being enforced. The decision was made to pursue the fieldwork once ethical approval was granted and government restrictions were lifted, as occurred in June 2020, however restrictions were then re-introduced at various levels once the fieldwork had begun between September 2020 and March 2021. Therefore the fieldwork occurred with Covid-19 in the background. This dramatically changed the labour market in two ways, what sectors were hiring and the amount of work available. Clerical and hospitality employers were either flooded with experienced job seekers or closed altogether. I initially planned to join a clerical temping pool, working in data entry or other white collar roles, but these ceased to exist in 2020. Therefore I went into gardening, industrial and warehousing work. At the same time, Covid-19 created new sectors of temporary work aimed at the disease, namely testing site staff and contact tracing. I never got one of these jobs myself, but four interviewees had worked as testing staff without a deliberate attempt by me. The second change was the amount of work. I do not know for sure, but with the closure of many businesses it seems likely there were less jobs than normal. However, at the same time, many migrants returned to their home countries and the implementation of Brexit led to reports of labour shortages. Therefore the overall effect on the labour market was a shuffling of businesses and workers.

Covid-19 also had a tremendous societal impact as measures of 'lockdown' (where businesses and public places are closed) and 'social distancing' (where one has to keep two metres from others) were implemented to reduce the number of infections. Covid-19 is mainly spread through people's breath. The 'lockdown' policy aimed to reduce disease transmission by restricting movements and congregations of the public through closing workplaces and public spaces (such as parks, beaches, nightclubs and museums) while restricting private congregations in homes. There were also formal recommendations to wear a face mask and keep two metres from any other person. These policies were strengthened and relaxed throughout the fieldwork period. For example, the UK government subsidised restaurant meals in August 2020 to encourage people to leave their homes only to reintroduce a stricter 'lockdown' only a few months later. All through this, workplaces that remained open introduced significant 'social distancing' rules -these are a formal requirement and informal expectation to keep two metres distance between yourself and anyone else. At Dream Print in early 2021 this meant that in the breakroom everyone had to sit one per a table, facing the backs of each other. Social distancing made the ethnography very different from a typical one where the culture of workplace develops through quips and informal conversation.

At the smallest scale of the research setting are the workplaces. Across the breadth of precarious work there are completely different working conditions, experiences, population characteristics, management styles, etc. It is typical for ethnographers to target concentrated precarious work (Galic, 2019) or particularly precarious workers (Worth, 2016), but this arguably skews the image. Choosing a setting can be a challenging task for ethnographers who may not be able to identify precisely where would meet their research needs (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). While the exact choice of workplace would always be a product of where I could get hired, it is also affected by my own decisions. I knew I wanted to work in multiple workplaces, but needed a strategy to identify their criteria for inclusion and differentiation.

I developed a strategy to focus my research. The first point was to recognise the breadth of precarious work and so therefore I may not have a definite rule as to what workplaces to include. Initially I decided to only include workplaces that hired me on a no guaranteed hours or term contract. This seemed quite limiting however, as precarious work is also that which has poor wages and conditions, which may include permanent contracts. In addition to applying for jobs with no guaranteed hours, I also applied for some similar part-time jobs advertised as permanent. Going the other way, many zero hour employers advertise they are offering full-time ongoing

work with good prospects for promotion, which was initially confusing because these jobs on the surface did not appear to be precarious. In another case, I went to a ZHC job, but found the majority of the employees were permanent, making me question if that was a genuinely 'precarious' workplace or not. These ambiguities meant I needed to explore the job market, but also stick to the simplistic rule of maintaining a preference for jobs with no guaranteed hours. The industries that I worked in was an evolving factor reflective of London itself, Covid-19 restrictions and my own ability to get hired. It is worth noting that, while it is typical for ethnographers to face challenges in choosing the exact research setting (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019), in the case of this study, that challenge became part of the very data and concepts of precarity that are developed. Initially I decided to focus on hospitality and clerical work. In practice these jobs were difficult to come by, so I actually worked in logistics, manufacturing, retail and domestic housework. In addition I applied to a wide range of precarious jobs, including tutoring, court assistant and retail work that I did not get.

All of these focuses, however -London, Park Royal, no guaranteed hours, manufacturing- are only my fieldwork experience. The interviewees had experience of precarious work from all over the UK and the world that have been included and analysed, if an interviewee is talking about work outside of London it is always noted in the analysis. Furthermore, interviewees had workplace experiences from across the economy. In this manner, London and the workplaces I worked at were just the central node of a network of precarious work trajectories.

4.3.2 Positioning and Reflexivity: Experiencing Precarious Work

Ethnography always involves being in context (O'Reilly, 2005), but the ethnographer's relationship to the context has evolved with philosophies of knowledge. Early anthropology is characterised by an external observer who tried their best to blend in (Malinowski, 2002; O'Reilly, 2005), and then the Chicago School brought this style to the Western urban setting with a more participatory tone (Deegan, 2001). Ethnography came under scrutiny as the reflexive turn came to question the representation that was produced (Adler & Adler, 2008; Clifford, 1994; Maso, 2001). For example, Charlesworth (2000) chastises preceding studies of his field site for examining it from the researcher's perspective. The implications of post-modernism meant that ethnography could not claim to be 'objective', and instead was entirely representational (Atkinson, 1990). However, post-modernism also suggested that there is nothing objective about social reality to report anyway (O'Reilly, 2005). Therefore, the issue that post-modernism revealed was not that ethnography is ineffective or biased, but that *claims to objectivity* are themselves ineffective and biased due to privileging the researchers perspective. In this section I explain one aspect of positionality, my interests and perspective. However, writing is also very important to positionality too, which I discuss in section 4.4 *Analysis and Theorising*.

All scientists approach the field, data and analysis from a personal and analytical position that shapes what parts of the world they see, how they see it and what conclusions are drawn from it (Adler & Adler, 2008; Brewer, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Brewer (2000: 127) states reflexivity refers to the 'social processes that impinge upon and influence data', in other words, the situated nature of research of the social world as it relates to me impacts the process and final image that is presented. Whether one believes that ethnographic fieldwork produces a representative or a partial view, researchers need to consider their common-sense assumptions or social position that shape their research agenda, perspective, and field experience (Brewer, 2000; Lichterman, 2017). As such, perspective guides data collection and experience of the field.

Firstly is the intellectual focus that draws attention to certain things over others (Brewer, 2000). For example, a focus on either workers 'trapped' in low-wage income or workers dealing with continual tenure insecurity could both be presented as typical cases of precarious work. Either choice would in turn would lead to different representations and instances of precariousness. An

unreflexive approach to this creates essentialised representations (Adler & Adler, 2008) where one perspective is used to represent all instances of the phenomena under research. Therefore, what I think precarious work is affects what jobs I take as an ethnographer, what precarity looks like, who I recruit for interviews and what questions I ask. This raises methodological issues of being precarious, for example, would a precarious worker not be *seeking* permanent work, and am I acting in bad faith by *choosing* precarious jobs? At the same time, much of the research project is aimed at giving clarity to these problems, and so developing my position on these questions is part of doing the research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Precarious work is recognised as heterogeneous (Campbell & Price, 2016), and precariousness is recognised to have no single existence or type, only localised instances specific to that individual (Alberti et al., 2018; Lorey, 2015). At the same, any identification of either requires a similarity between cases. What this meant is that the social position I was trying to put myself into and the social position I brought to the field would be constitutive of the precarious work and precariousness at the most base level. To achieve this required a mixture of directed action and being moved. As stated, I chose to focus on no guaranteed hours contracts in fieldwork and recruiting interviewees. Beyond this I decided to guide my behaviour as if a precarious worker, by working hard to keep jobs and staying in jobs as long as I could. In effect, aiming to act 'naturally' as someone needing to work.

The question then turns to how did I experience precariousness, and was this similar to predominant accounts. Precariousness is tempered by the workers' social context and location (Campbell & Price, 2016; Vosko, 2010). The day-to-day aspects of insecurity of precarious work were present, such as difficulties being hired or managing poor working conditions. When a job was found, it would suddenly end or would not be renewed, and the process would begin again. I constantly had to respond to these issues, and could confide with interviewees on some of these aspects. The main difference is that I was not under financial duress. While I rarely earned enough to cover my rent and living expenses, the realities of a PhD stipend, personal savings, and ongoing freelance work held prior to the fieldwork meant the feeling of precariousness was never present in the direst terms of finances.

What cannot be experienced is the precariousness of social position. While I could come into contact with the issues of losing a job and trying to find another one quickly, or some other aspect of the 'field' of precarious work, I could never feel the discontinuity of trajectory or the lost feeling that is associated with precariousness (Armano & Murgia, 2013; Worth, 2016). I could understand however the working conditions that led to and fed that feeling. In this regard, evaluations of the narrative aspects of precariousness are focused on the interview data.

In summary, the day-to-day of the methodology was shaped by my attempts to find precarious work and precariousness. At first I was unsure how to 'engineer' this or what the guiding concepts meant in practice. Initially I was guided by working somewhere with no guaranteed hours, which led to a great diversity of encounters with precarious work. However, through the work certain dimensions of precarious work came up again and again from the circumstances and in the interviews, which confirmed these jobs were 'precarious work'. Finally, my positioning could not go into narrative, so this aspect leans on the interviews backed-up by my first-hand experience of the work.

4.3.3 Ethics

The methods were continually shaped by ethical concerns of minimising harm and respecting the participants. Participant observation adds a lot of ethical issues, especially around consent in workplaces with up to one hundred people. Covid-19 added additional concerns of being at risk of spreading the virus and following institutional guidelines.

The participant observation component of ethnography raises concerns of informed consent and unanticipated harm. While participant observation is often equated to being either 'covert' or 'overt' the realities of fieldwork, such as participants understanding what fieldwork is, the sheer number of people in a workplace, mean that overt and covert are more on a spectrum overall, and can change from minute to minute (Roulet, Gill, Stenger, & Gill, 2017). This also means that the ethical considerations need to be managed in a similar way. Calvey (2008) questions and remedies these critiques with his notion of 'situated ethics'. This rests on two points, first that overt ethnography has many of the same risks as covert, and that due to the field these cannot be completely mitigated as new risks will always arise in the situation. That situatedness is important in another way too in that the manner and appropriateness of covert research is contingent on that setting. Ethics is therefore 'contingent, dynamic, temporal, occasioned and situated' (Calvey, 2008: 912). To this end, I managed the data collection with a focus on the dynamics of the workplaces and being as overt as I could.

When entering workplaces or applying for an agency I tried a mixture of overt and covert strategies. When I tried to explain my position employers always assumed that I was a PhD student looking for work, not a PhD student studying work, meaning informed consent could not be gained. In some instances being a student would instantly exclude me from employment that I believe I would otherwise have been able to get, so I towards the end of my fieldwork I simply said I was not a student. This shows the complications of overt strategies, that explaining the circumstances is not easy and participants may agree without understanding the disclosure. Once in workplaces I took two strategies to respect people's autonomy. First I would work to the best of my ability. Second, I took all opportunities to explain my being an ethnographer. During casual discussion of our backgrounds or last job, or if someone asked why I was doing the job, I would then explain the project. In this vein, it was easier to be overt with co-workers than with managers, so I would readily divulge the project to them. In doing so, I was able to offer autonomy to the workers that I met. In terms of interviews, these were more straight forward, and involved, formal consent form (Appendix 2), an information sheet (Appendix 3) and an opportunity for interviewees to ask questions. Furthermore, interviewees were afforded the right to withdraw during and after the interview.

Conducting 'situated ethics' (Calvey, 2008) meant that I needed to limit the extent of the field notes. I could not record everything that I observed, I managed this by respecting autonomy of my co-workers. For example if someone told me something personal about themselves I could not make a note of it due to a lack of informed consent. Therefore, in the first instance the field notes were centred on myself as an autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011). I was primarily interested in how the employment structures affected me and where they took me. However, as Tolich (2012) notes, other people are always going to be a part of the autoethnographer's experience. For example, I could record my feelings about not being called back about a job, but the employment agent is a part of this. This was managed through a depersonalised presentation as a crowd of the individuals in the fieldwork. Altogether, the fieldwork represents an autoethnography of precarious work and the structures that shaped it.

Covid-19 posed significant infection risk and therefore a possible harm to be avoided. While many workplaces were closed during Covid-19, many occupations were deemed essential and so needed to continue working, many of these workplaces used non-permanent contracts. As such, there was an important need to go into these workplaces as under terms of caution and mitigation. In light of Covid-19, a rewritten ethics application was submitted in May 2020, and included Covid-19 as an evolving factor that would be mitigated. The project was planned to go ahead once lockdown policies were suspended and travel was allowed. University guidance at the time was to complete research in a timely manner and that funding extensions would only be extraordinary. The University did not issue guidelines for fieldwork until July 2021, at which point the fieldwork had ended. Fieldwork began during the first relief of Covid-19 in the UK in August

2020, when the UK government was running it's 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme and the guidance was to be cautious, but it was safe to be in public spaces. During this time, mitigation involved seeking immunisations, wearing a face mask, social distancing, conducting interviews online, quarantining after travel and following all workplace rules regarding Covid-19. Furthermore, I did not work as a carer due to the risk of spreading Covid-19 to vulnerable people.

Precariousness is arguably a harmful condition, and is one that people prefer to avoid. To pursue precarious work entails a risk to mental and emotional health. Initially this was mitigated by being aware of it and holding frequent supervision meetings, but at the same time these risks were unavoidable components of the fieldwork. Suffice to say, I endured some duress through the fieldwork that is recorded in the fieldnotes and which enters into the analysis. There were employers that I was not comfortable working for, and I left these positions after a short-time. Furthermore, the process of living in the field, going from foreign workplace to foreign workplace, or being a gig employee, put a stress on me. The causes of duress were also unexpected in where and when they would exactly arise, and so could not be avoided. A job could be fine and then take a turn one minute, only to become fine again. However the key concern is showing respect for my participants, which arguably overrides these personal risks. As an ethical researcher, I could not shy away from what my participants were forced to endure else I risked not understanding them or becoming too much of a 'tourist' through precarious work. I definitely did not experience the worst conditions of precarious work in London, but the limited painful experiences I did have lend me a valuable sympathy and respect for my participants.

The final concern is the actual and potential recording and storage of personal and identifying details. Research through the University of Glasgow is governed by GDPR regulations, which is the strongest privacy legislation in the world. Due to the practicalities of writing field notes, the real names of some places and employers were recorded in the initial fieldnotes, so these files are password protected. As the field work developed, the real names were progressively and retroactively replaced with pseudonyms in the field notes. A similar process was under taken with interview data. The recordings were kept in a password-protected archive file. They were then transcribed, which involved inserting pseudonyms for employers, hometowns and other identifying information simultaneously. As the transcripts often have inaudible portions, the recordings were kept until the completion of the analysis so that researcher could listen again to fill out inaudible sections, if needed. A spreadsheet with the real names and corresponding pseudonyms was created and protected with a password. All these files are stored on enterprise-grade cloud storage and on my own password-protected laptop. In turn, internal confidentiality (Tolich, 2004) has been kept in mind, whereby an insider could identify an interviewee or a workplace by the details published, even when a pseudonym is used. As such details about interviewees or locations have been either left broad or subtlety changed.

The principal risks of this project stemmed from informed consent of participant observation and Covid-19, which were met with a continual 'situated' approach (Calvey, 2008) while avoiding the riskiest activities altogether. This situated approach applied to both risks of autonomy and consent and the physical risks of Covid-19 infection. The extent of the participant observations was always determined by respecting the autonomy of co-workers and employers, limiting what was recorded in terms of details and personalisation. Covid-19 was constantly mitigated against while following national and university guidelines on activities.

4.3.4 Interviewing

I conducted twenty-one interviews. The interviewees were recruited from workplaces, snowball sampling and online contact/postings. The interviews composed of work narratives followed by focused questioning into periods of time and the conditions of certain jobs. The interview sample was purposefully selected to be diverse and able to inform the fieldwork. To this end, I

interviewed people ranging from twenty-something trailing spouses, London locals in their twenties finding their way to foreign-born parents in the forties. Through the interviews unexpected connections come naturally, such as actually having met before in a workplace.

I followed a purposeful recruitment strategy focusing on temporary employment agencies, Handy and concentrated precarious work. Following the criteria of precarious work used in the fieldwork, I interviewed those who had experience of working in a job without guaranteed hours, but with the added criteria of working while not in education. This was to exclude circumstances of working part-time while a minor or university student that have been demonstrated as a significant edge-case to precarity (Antonucci, 2018; Campbell & Price, 2016). I was also limited by language ability, I met many people who I struggled to communicate with beyond very simple conversations in person or over smartphone messaging. This is something I was not prepared for and I also had little opportunity to make contact even if a translator was organised. I used different recruitment methods to approach interviewees across the landscape and generate a diverse sample, this included online classifieds, peer recruitment, LinkedIn searching and fieldwork recruitment.

The sample is centred on temporary employment agencies with a periphery of more diverse experiences in areas such as gig work, knowledge work and work outside of the UK. As such, the sample is theoretically informed (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) by precarious work literature. I recruited three interviewees through peer recruitment in my accommodation in London, and two from online classified ad postings. These interviewees had experience in menial and knowledge work. I recruited five interviewees from workplaces, that while all from Sidewalk, covered both the warehouse and retail sides employed by two different employment agencies. At the same time I recruited one person from the Handy community Facebook group. From here I recruited through LinkedIn, where I could search and message people who had listed themselves as employees of specific agencies and employers. Through this process I searched through the listed employees of seventy firms and messaged forty to fifty people. This led to recruiting nine interviewees who had listed experience at temporary employment agencies. At the same time I put up posters in the industrial area that Dream Print and Sidewalk were in, but recruited no interviewees through this method. Finally, I recruited one personal contact, Foster, who was working as a carer on a ZHC. The interviewees are summarised in Table One below.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender (F)	Birthplace (years in UK)	Years in NGHC while not studying	Circumstances	Career description
Luca	29	M	Italy (4)	0	Corporate	First position was internship followed by dropping out of university. Since then career of 'laddering up' with each new permanent role.
Mormon	29	M	UK	0.5	English ‘drift’	Unhappy with permanent employment. Elect to take on freelance role instead. Covid-19 shut down that freelance role, however.
Raymond	29	M	UK	4	English ‘drift’	Various temp/menial roles since university graduation.
Susan	28	F	UK	4	Precarious careerist	Stable freelance career in NGO sector.
Timothy	27	M	UK	3	English ‘drift’	Worked various itinerant jobs on ski-fields in Canada, and then ZHC roles in London. University graduate.

Arral	33	M	UK	0.4	Corporate	Corporate career, but redundant during Covid-19.
Michael	36	M	Switzerland (10)	2	Precarious careerist	Various freelance, contract, and permanent roles in television production industry. Recently working full-time for Handy.
Aarav	30	M	India (1)	0.5	New arrival	Worked as an engineer in home country. Followed studying spouse to UK.
Jason	30	M	India (1)	0.5	New arrival	Masters graduate following spouse to UK.
Priscilla	25	F	UK	0.5	Corporate	Corporate career made redundant during Covid-19.
Ekeema	25	F	UK	2	English 'drift'	Post-university employment in various freelance and ZHC agency roles.
Macy	20	F	Poland (3)	0	Student	University student working in various permanent part-time roles, and as an agency temp.
Casper	39	M	Hong Kong (0.5)	0.5	New arrival	Career as retail assistant in Hong Kong. Working as a kitchen porter and as a football steward in London.
Foster	33	M	Hong Kong (0.5)	0.5	New arrival	Career in marketing in Hong Kong. Working as carer in London.
Tommaso	22	M	Italy (4)	2	English 'drift'	Agency temp as student, and then one year temping after graduation.
Attaf	43	M	UK	10	English 'drift'	Agency temp on and off throughout much of post-university life.
Lucas	22	M	UK	1	English 'drift'	Agency temp as student, and then one year temping after graduation.
Alice	26	F	UK	5	English 'drift'	Significant post-education temping experience in multiple roles.
Fiona	50	F	Brazil (20)	15	English 'drift'	Retail assistant in Brazil. Worked as cleaner and catering assistant in London.
Brice	36	M	Germany (3)	2	English 'drift'	Work history across Europe in white-collar temporary jobs. Law sector.
Derrick	25	M	UK	2	English 'drift'	University graduate made redundant from job. Working in agency roles past two years. Experienced 'soft' homeless sleeping on friends' couches.
Thomas	26	M	UK	4	English 'drift'	Worked in various agency temporary roles before and after graduation.

With no set way to categorise precarious workers, I have given some general and qualitative information. I have listed the years in NGHCs in Table One. However the conditions of such work varies and is not an indication of low pay or repetitive work. In addition to a textual summary of the individual's circumstances, there are several descriptive groups of 'circumstances'. First are four 'new arrivals', people who have come from another country within twelve months without a job pre-arranged. The second are twelve 'English drift' people who are either born, graduated, or naturalised immigrants in/to England and have been moving between permanent and/or temporary roles without a single career path. For more on drift see Ferrell (2015). The third are three 'corporates' who have corporate careers and worked in precarious roles straight after graduating and/or during Covid-19 due to hiring freezes. Finally are two 'precarious careerists'

who have NGHC jobs but stable careers, they like their jobs and state they earn more than they would in a permanent role.

In such a study, a question is, are these interviewees 'precarious', do they experience precariousness? Many similar analyses work upon precarity directly, identifying and categorising periods of feeling insecure (Mrozowicki & Trappmann, 2020; Worth, 2016) where precarious individuals are interpreted broadly and largely identified as anyone experiencing some type of anxiety or concern about work or financial security. If precariousness is unique and derived off the individual (Lorey, 2015), then the interviewees may all be precarious, but not necessarily in a manner that is the same as another interviewee. In this regard, the interviewees range from a father earning more than he ever has before through gig work to a single parent struggling to find work and concerned about paying the bills. Both of these people are facing the realities of no guaranteed hours work, but their precariousness is very different. Chapters Eight and Nine are dedicated to understanding precariousness, but for now it is simply a function of being in work with no guaranteed hours.

Next are some comments on gender, ethnicity and education. Firstly there is a strong mix of UK and non-UK born people from around the world. However, there are only six women interviewees, I believe this reflects the restricted recruitment of needing to get contact details from people without having time to build rapport or clearly explain why. Gender probably played a factor in online cold-contact too, where through LinkedIn I recruited nine participants, but only two were women. Countervailing this, all the women gave detailed interviews and shared experience from across the spectrum of precarious work, this means their interviews could be drawn upon frequently and so have strong voice throughout the analysis.

The interview sample is also nearly entirely university educated, with three not having attended university (Alice, Foster and Michael), but having other tertiary qualifications. However, many of the non-UK born interviewees could not use their degree due to them not being recognised, poor English or having no UK work experience. Yet they still retained the soft skills and habitus of such education. The overall effect of this unclear, there is no firm distinction between the types of jobs people had the and education of interviewees. Many graduates toiled in menial work for years, and the two without degrees seemed to be in some of the best precarious work of the sample. At the same time, it does appear the sample is more existentially restless (Bauman, 2001), aspirational and mobile than one may typically expect. This suggests that education may alter people's sense of where they belong (Bauman, 2008), and exacerbate a precariousness of social position, but the data does not allow a definitive answer. Therefore, aspects of the analysis that speak to these concerns of aspiration need to be read with the intensity of education among the interviewees in mind.

Every data collection method has advantages and disadvantages, and while interviewing may seem the most generic and general, there are key characteristics to note. Interviews are a very intimate and dynamic data collection method. This gives them the advantage of producing contextualised, complex and individualised data (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The interview allows for a completely full picture can be given that can even surpass first-hand observation. For example, follow-up questions can be asked that 'explore people's perspectives' to round-out the account (Ravitch & Carl, 2019: 126). Interviews are characteristically relational and person-centred (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). In the end, interviews constitute a brief relationship. Especially considering the nature of the questions I was asking -explain to me your life- there was an immediate rapport. This is very powerful in motivating the interviewee to explain what they mean and for the interviewer to understand what is being said.

Interviews however need to be approach very critically because they are partial and temporal (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Furthermore, interviewees shall seek to present themselves in the best

light, miss mundane aspects and construct a continuous narrative. Importantly, the data from an interview only reflects that present moment. For precarious work, this can be important because someone who just started a new job might feel confident and positive, whereas in six months they might feel the opposite. Therefore, one cannot make quick judgements based on the data. The very advantages of interviews in being person-centred and individualised are also a drawback as they are never neutral (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Interview data is mediated by an 'endless number of factors and dynamics' (Ravitch & Carl, 2019: 130) that colour (or constitute) the objectivity being described. Every interview is therefore extremely unique to the time, place, context and perspective of the interviewee. To this end, it is important to collect and use background information about the interviewee to understand their perspective better. These drawbacks really highlight the advantage of pairing interviews with fieldwork because it means I have at least some first-hand idea of what is being discussed.

It is worth commenting on the 'density' of cross-over between the fieldwork and interviewees, and the overall focus of the data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) collected. During interviews I felt like I was sharing similar experiences, I had worked for or onboarded with agencies that interviewees had mentioned, worked in some of the same places and could commiserate over the same experiences, like trying to find an unknown manager for the first time. Overall, the intensity of all the data is on temporary work agencies in retail, manufacturing, logistics and hospitality events staffed by UK and non-UK citizens from around the world. While this layering was the result of deliberate effort, there were often unforeseen cross-overs. For example three interviewees had worked as Covid-19 testing stewards. Nonetheless, there are a number of other minor offshoots, such as caring, software programming, freelance home repairs, NGO project work, or running a family business in India that contextualise the core of the data in employment agencies.

4.3.5 Fieldwork

The fieldwork lasted eleven months between the 9th of August 2020 and the 14th of July 2021. The fieldwork method was to go and find a job with no guaranteed hours and then hold that job. If I was working part-time, I planned to combine roles. I also planned to work in multiple sectors, at first planning clerical and hospitality work, while attempting to make contact with solo freelancers. In reality these industries were closed due to the disruption from Covid-19, so like every other precarious worker in London at the time, I needed to adapt and follow the prevailing economic conditions.

The fieldwork was based around the research design influences which was to conduct an immersive style ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) involving an extended period of time in the context of the phenomenon. As stated, this involved being inside workplaces and attempting to 'live' as a precarious worker, seeking out jobs and trying to hold onto them. Methodologically this was influenced by three ethnographies (Burawoy, 1982; Mollona, 2009; Orr, 1996) of work that I read where the researcher sought insight primarily through working. In particular is Burawoy's (1982) insight about the labour process that he gained through the tedium of doing it, Orr's (1996) insights into the landscape through informal conversations and Mollona's (2009) extensions from workplace to non-work locations. These each show a different way to participate in the context (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) as a workplace ethnographer. I hoped to apply these workplace insights to the 'being precarious' aspect of the research design through practices like job searching. Guided by the literature, theory and my positionality, the method was to go where I could most become a precarious worker and meet as many precarious workers in context as possible.

Workplace ethnographies can often be quite orientated towards others as researchers focus on the structures and people operating there, however for this study ethical concerns of consent and

theoretical sensitivities to the personal 'feeling' of work led to extensive use of autoethnographic methods (Ellis et al., 2011). Where an ethnographer might be described as entering into a place to make first-hand observations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019), the autoethnographer might be described as conducting a political and poetic act to blend into the social reality under study (Ellis et al., 2011). As stated, this informed the research design in deciding to follow Orwell (2001 [1933]) or Ehrenreich (2010) in their journeys of first-hand precarious working. However more than that, autoethnography can also be framed for its commitment to the problem of representation (Ellis et al., 2011). This means this data is not an objective extraction, but more a 'personal extension' of the field. The field is extended from its location in reality through my personal actions and writing into this thesis. In this manner, my subjectivity and biography is inherent. In the analysis, I combine this with other voices from the interviews and consideration of what environmental elements were similar to everyone. Auto-ethnography makes the research personal and subjective in the best uses of those terms. This research ultimately stands as a theoretically informed hybrid of ethnography and autoethnography.

In the following I describe the actual methods used and what I did in the field. Before the fieldwork in London I conducted a pilot study in Glasgow. During this pilot study I collected no data, I just went to see what precarious work was like in practice. This involved registering with an employment agency and taking shifts as a food kiosk worker in football stadiums. The pilot study gave me impressions of how complex the field actually is, for example about half of my co-workers seemed to be under eighteen years old, something that was rarely mentioned in the literature. This led to me wondering if employment agencies and no guaranteed hours work was even appropriate for the study of adults, and so I became more determined to pursue a research design of multiple workplaces.

The fieldwork did not begin when I got my first job, but before that in my first weeks in London: I was now facing the precariousness of living and looking for work in a city I had never been to before. I began reflecting on this in my fieldnotes immediately, tapping into unemployment, moving to a city by myself and staying in a hostel until I found a flat, as the following fieldnote captures,

> In terms of myself, I have felt quite detached and alone, almost like I am losing touch with myself. Having no space is a bit part of this, as I have no physical environment to be myself, and I feel like this is why the hostel was such a bad experience. Having nothing to do in terms of work, and no space to do non-work things, means that you are really incapable of doing much but watching TV or going on random walks. So here, certainty and monotony really enter into the contingency of the lifestyle, where you are waiting for others to call you. Waiting for the economy to turn. [17-8-20]

Suffice to say, I was overwhelmed. Harrison (2018: 43) equates ethnography to an 'improvisational research practice' and improvisation is something that precarious workers have to do too. There are always unanticipated events in ethnography, which in some cases, can alter the research design itself (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The fieldwork was a process of sharpening my understanding as both a researcher and as a precarious worker, finding out how systems worked conceptually and practically. While I had prepared a list of agencies to call, Facebook Groups to check, and sectors to focus on, I was largely at the mercy of who would hire me. While one of the initial focuses was clerical work, I found the entire sector was in a hiring freeze. Therefore, the work sector being focused on changed. With the hospitality industry either closed or flooded with experienced candidates, I applied to every agency and job in sectors that I thought might hire me, such as manufacturing, logistics, retail, cleaning and remote service work. I searched on job boards, on classified websites Facebook and GumTree and called or applied directly to employment agencies. All the while I struggled with having no national insurance number (NIN) that excluded me from many roles.

My first break came from Handy, a gig-platform app where workers can be hired to do just about any task imaginable, but mostly gardening, cleaning and home repair tasks. Here I worked as gardener and cleaner, setting my own rates. This however was completely alone, I never met any workers and never went into any workplaces. Eventually, two other breaks gave me momentum and defined the fieldwork. The first was my first non-gig work role at Big Delivery. Once I had seen what the job is behind the job ad, I could apply to jobs a lot more effectively. The second was finding EasyHire, an app-based employment agency that allowed me to apply to many different roles on my smartphone. In this way I moved from someone who struggled to get shifts to someone who could read the jobs ads, use agencies like EasyHire and survive in this job market.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) note the ethnographer should be precise in their focus, although of course this changes through the study. It is worth commenting then on where my attention was focused in the field. The data collection regarding workplaces evolved through the project. Initially, informed by the literature and theory (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) of precarious work, in workplaces I was drawn to the insecurities of the work (Standing, 2011; Vosko, 2010). However, these did not link well with the actual experience of working. This was reinforced by conversations and interviews where the aspect of precarious work were rarely mentioned in relation to the actual working. What was more pertinent was the nature of the labour process (Burawoy, 1982) and the overall experience itself (Tweedie, 2013). These became the new focus of my data collection. In other words, what was I doing, what did it feel like and what compelled everyone to act in the manner employers wanted. In reality then, those aspects of precarious work were much more pertinent to being a worker in the general sense than any actual specific job. The analysis reflects this as discussions of attributes like tenure insecurity are all firmly embedded into the labour market as a whole, rather than any single job.

Table Two summarises all the positions I worked, however I had many interactions that did not lead to a job, in addition to what is in the table, I attended two on-site orientations, two remote orientations, had interviews for several other jobs and onboarded with numerous agencies.

Table Two: Fieldwork employment

Role	Workplace Employer	Third Party Employer (Agency)	Employment Type	Duration
Gardener / Cleaner	Property owner (Gig work)	Handy	'Bogus' self-employment	Twelve 'gigs' ranging from two to ten hours
Truck Loader	Big Delivery	Superwork Recruitment	Zero hour contract	Two shifts
Manufacturing Operative	Dream Print	EasyHire	Zero hour contract	Part-time for six weeks
Manufacturing Operative	RedBrick	EasyHire	Zero hour contract	One shift
Shelf Stacker	National Grocers	EasyHire	Zero hour contract	One shift
Food Manufacturing Operative	Allied Meats (Norwich)	Velocity Recruitment	Zero hour contract	One shift
Warehouse Operative	Sidewalk	Velocity Recruitment	Zero hour contract	Full day on-site orientation and one shift
Retail Event Assistant	Sidewalk	Star Recruitment	Term contract	Full-time two months at two sites

In total I worked eight roles through five intermediaries in three sectors. For Sidewalk, I actually worked at the same facility from two different agencies in different roles, seeing the greeting,

orientation, and day-to-day working conditions from what could be called blue and white collar perspectives. In two positions, at Dream Print and Sidewalk, I worked for an extended amount of time where I gained a deeper sense of the workplace and a sense of place there. The agencies themselves were quite different too, some operating out of high street shops and others purely online. Where Superwork and Velocity focus on manufacturing and logistics, Star Recruitment focuses on clerical roles.

Examining this table a number of work insecurities (Standing, 2011) become particularly obvious. First, I was never directly employed, there was always a third party involved. This was by no means deliberate, and was most likely the product of having no NIN, which many direct employers required. Agencies on the other hand tended to be more flexible. Second, is the number of single or double shifts. There are three reasons for these. The first are jobs that were untenable for me to remain in, such as at Big Delivery which was night shifts. I could not sleep during the day and had to quit. Second, are cases where more shifts were never offered. This is associated with EasyHire, where employers tend to hire for one to three shifts at a time. The third reason is effectively being dismissed, although on a ZHC this means not being called back. This occurred at Sidewalk the first time I worked there[2]. Altogether these many different circumstances of job loss show depth and texture to tenure insecurity. In this regard, while the original research design was for two to three in-depth workplace ethnographies, the reality of precarious working altered this to be a much more uncertain endeavour.

The nature of the work that I did was generally menial. These jobs were not easy or unskilled, for example, loading trucks at Big Delivery was exceptionally hard work. Most roles were repetitive though, such as at Dream Print my main task was folding boxes. For my last role at Sidewalk I was hired mainly for my clerical skills in preparation for a retail event being organised, but the role was still quite menial. However, the role changed significantly and I was put in a supervisory position where I trained and supervised up to fifteen employees at a time. This is discussed in depth in Chapter Seven. After the fieldwork, Star Recruitment contacted me again about a data entry role. Working for Handy, being a gig platform, involved me designing my own profile to sell my services, setting my own rates and liaising with clients, although the actual work was labour-intensive.

In terms of data, the fieldwork created two sets, largely reflecting the workplace/precariousness split outlined in Chapters Two and Three. The first are fieldnotes of work, documenting where I worked, what the work was like, and how I felt about the work. The second set was a detailed autoethnographic diary of what I was doing and feeling in my job search and general insecurities. The fieldwork data is in the foreground of Chapters Six and Seven, which examine the jobs themselves. For Chapters Eight and Nine, that focus on the trajectory and narrative of precarious workers, the interview data is foregrounded.

4.4 Analysis and Theorising

Analysis can be described as the process of building up an understanding and abstraction of the data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). While analysis is a continual process that in a sense precedes even data collection, there is a formal phase after data collection which is the most intensive, that I shall focus on in this section. Furthermore, as analysis occurs with and through theorization (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) I shall also comment on the latter here, too. The

[2] In a phone call with the employment agency I was informed that I was not 'enthusiastic' enough and the line manager did not want me to return.

analysis for this project was an iterative process of theoretical development supported by systemic coding and memo-making.

The first point to note about the analysis are that I drew on autoethnographic and ethnographic data (including fieldnotes and interviews). Integrating autoethnographic data means to consider my account of events but also to consider 'ways others may experience similar epiphanies' (Ellis et al., 2011: 276). The analysis process was a constant balancing of first-hand experience with others', which continues into theorisation as I attempt to abstract what was similar about both. This analysis process is therefore closest to a 'layered account' of multiple data (Ellis et al., 2011). In this regard, I drew on my experiences, such as difficulty finding work, as a hunch that I then searched through interviews to see if and how it was similar. An autoethnography also alters the structure of the writing to be much more of a narrative and in some regards this effects the theory too (Ellis et al., 2011). As the data is grounded in personal experience, the writing and theory in turn most naturally become subject-centred. The following analysis chapters therefore move through the stages of being a precarious worker: hiring, working, job hopping and finally exiting. This gives the analysis a 'plot' derived from the autoethnographic and interview data to try contextualise the data in the arc of a life. However, this is largely an artificial arc.

Throughout analysis the two different bodies of data spoke to different aspects of the study. My fieldnotes are most associated with precarious work and the interviews with precariousness and trajectories, however they are both intimately linked. When developing Chapters Six and Seven that are focused on precarious work, I could begin with my insights from the fieldwork. For example, after being effectively hired over the phone I could follow this into the interviews to both confirm this aspect and expand upon it. Chapters Eight and Nine focus on aspects that were not central to the fieldwork, and so the relationship had to be reversed. For example participants described their long-term existences in multiple jobs, and then I had to my fieldnotes to understand how that operated in the day-to-day of precarious work.

While analysis is iterative and general, a systemic analysis process can be used to ensure completeness and to structure such a large job. This system can be summarised into three tasks: coding data, memo making or qualitative description, and conceptual development (Brewer, 2000). Brewer (2000) describes these as very sequential steps, however it is more common to see them as tasks that one moves between (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Nonetheless, there is a direction of change. One is developing theory iteratively, moving closer and closer to the form that is eventually published in a process of 'progressive focusing' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019: 168).

The first task is coding. The data coded were workplace field diaries and interviews. To code, I used Atlas Ti version 7.5.7 for its availability. I had not used Atlas Ti before, so began by going through the included lessons on the functions I was interested in, and some I was not to see if they might be useful. While Atlas Ti has many features to aid analysis, the only feature I used was the basic coding one. This involves highlighting a piece of text and then assigning one or more codes (which are effectively labels) to that highlighted text. Afterwards, one can open the code and see all the text selections. I used this function to gain an overview of the category and see the permutations, consistencies or contradictions that exist within it. This summary however belies one of the most important steps, creating the actual codes that I applied.

Coding fulfils two functions. First is organising the data (Brewer, 2000) and second is the beginning of the iterative analysis process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Coding involves the creation of analytic categories (the codes) and the association of parts of data to those categories (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The categories of codes are distinguished for being the most 'basic' or 'general'. The codes I used fell into three categories. First are those derived from the precarious and work literature, such as identity, being inexperienced, social position or autonomy.

Second were derived from the fieldwork and not mentioned in literature, such as 'immediate start'. Third are those related to being a precarious worker. Here I attempted to code the milestones of being a precarious worker in this context, such as 'advancement', 'find any job' or 'move to London'. These were much more descriptive and less analytical. In some cases the codes were purely conforming cases, and other times the codes were designed more openly to include conforming and antithesis cases. I separated the fieldwork and interview codes from each other in order to maintain a library of autoethnographic data and a library of interview data. Together, these codes reach from the abstract, 'more responsibilities as a temp' to the literal 'getting hired' and they were used differently depending on their content. In conducting this exercise, I was familiarising myself with the data, creating a 'library' of the data and how it is structured and beginning to think abstractly about the data.

Coding also involves the process of 'abduction' where one makes sense of the data in a structured, abstract manner (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). In other words, one begins to understand the data not as individual streams of consciousness or events, but as intensities of abstractions such as precarity, work or gender. In this regard, my main goal, following the conclusions drawn from the literature, was a rather basic one of understanding what precarious is for different people in a way sensitive to the securities and insecurities it produces. Thus, instead of focusing only on how the work was bad to do, I was interested in how the work was tolerable or intolerable, and how the work interlaced with people's self-identities and threads through the political-economy. Fulfilling this in practice meant that while coding I was keeping note of emerging themes recorded as single sentences with categorical terms underlined, such as 'Despite their detachment and insecurity, people become very skilled workers'. This formed the basis of the later stages as these relationships were either expanded or found to be invalid. These themes were sometimes things I had noticed during the fieldwork, or they had arisen only in the coding stage. Furthermore, I felt it was important to come to grips with my interviewees more closely, so I created one-pagers with a textual description of each participant's work history, and a table of what jobs they had, duration of tenure, and reason to leave. These were very important because the interviewees were speaking on very different chronologies. See Appendix One for an example.

These codes, one-pagers, and emerging themes formed the basis for the second task, which was to create qualitative descriptions (Brewer, 2000) or memos (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001) of the codes in an aggregated manner. In other words, I took organised information and brought it together under empirical and theoretical areas of interest, hunches and significance. From here I created folders of memos that combined themes. For example the folder 'Instant, Easy, Convenient. Being Green' contains memos related to applying to jobs, feeling frantic and fragile, being inexperienced or 'green' to precarious work, peoples reasons for taking precarious work and various documents exploring the relationships, extensions and boundaries of such thoughts. Such folders became the foundation for the analysis chapters. These memos could be expanded by going back to Atlas Ti and scanning through the codes to see if any are pertinent. For example if I was examining precarious workers being hired, I could draw on the code 'find any job'. Such themes were moved from folder to folder as each developed.

In addition to coding and memo-making is the most developed task, a process of conceptual development (Brewer, 2000) where analysis gives way to formal theorisation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). To be sure, one is technically theorising through the entire process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019), but there is a task distinct from coding or memo-making that can be discussed. In the theorising task, concepts that had hitherto been quite liquid and fuzzy earlier in the project are given definition, boundaries and relationships. As this is a thesis, theorising also meant shaping the analysis into a linear written work structured as chapters with an overall arch.

Theory comes in many different types Abend (2008), and in this thesis there are two. The first are the framework, similar to a 'central categorical' type (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) but operating closer to ontology. These concepts are presented in Chapter Five as the 'theoretical framework'. These concepts are used through the entire analysis in a fundamental way, helping in, in the words of Hammersley and Atkinson (2019: 177), 'recognising what is going on [… and] understanding the attitudes and actions of participants'. These concepts constitute a theoretical framework adapted from the likes of Bourdieu (1990), Burawoy (1982) and Deleuze and Guattari (2004) and are analogous to their concepts of field, territory or capitalist labour process. They are, in a limited sense, an ontology of precarious working and form the very foundation of the project. These form the worldview and the extent of the discussion, and are developed to overcome limitations in orthodox precarity thinking while speaking to the data and experiences of myself in the fieldwork and described by interviewees.

Secondly are the 'working' or descriptive concepts that are closer to the data and experience. These are the terms and language I use to discuss the data and answer the research questions. Typologies and models (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) are a common strategy here, however I avoided these in favour of what I am tentatively calling structures of diversity, derived from a comment by Castells (2010), and people's engagements with those. For example, the concept 'fast work' describes the mechanism of being hired quickly, which I then brought into discussion with workers' experiences of such. In conducting this style of theorisation, I acted closely to the grounded (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001) tradition that has become the *de facto* method today (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Developing these structures was most similar to 'process-tracing' (Bennett & Checkel, 2015; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Mahoney, 2012) -however at a much larger scale of decades or precarious working. This meant to begin conceptualising from unemployment, then hiring, then working in a workplace, working between jobs and finally exiting precarious work. At each stage, pertinent differences between people's experiences are established in the comparative tradition (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). This generates a sort of 'life cycle' of the precarious worker, however in reality the process is not linear. At each stage of the process I sought to identify those structures of diversity that are operating in the context of the theoretical framework, and the response of individuals to those.

The analysis was an iterative (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019), although nonetheless systemic in places (Brewer, 2000), process. The project is partly autoethnographic, and this impacted the analysis and writing, too. Theory was developed to explicate the 'structures of diversity' that could shine a light on neoliberalism and precarity in the UK.

4.5 Conclusion

This project was designed to address the split and contradictions in the precarious work literature, while remaining open to the broader idea of what flexible economies can mean for workers. This meant a research design orientated to both workplaces and the precariousness that exists between those workplaces. What ensued was a methodology of participant observation with a strong auto-ethnographic (Ellis et al., 2011) aspect, supported by interviews. My choice of work places was overall a product of my own purposeful selection and what jobs the field site made available. While at first these data collection strategies were aimed across the spectrum of precarious work, during the fieldwork both data collection methods came to be centred on the temporary work agencies that were supporting what was open during Covid-19: cleaning, logistics, manufacturing and retail. This produced a rich sample looking at the London precarious work labour market from many different angles with many different movements of entry. My own autoethnographic experiences of finding work, losing work and learning how to do better largely reflect the accounts of my interviewees, only in a much more condensed fashion. In the following

chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework that underpin the analysis. I then begin presenting that analysis in Chapter Six titled *The Risk of Getting Hired*.

5

Conceptual Framework: The Landscape Approach to Precarious Work

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined a methodology that was aimed at either intellectual centre of precarity: jobs and worker. This led to a methodology of fieldwork located roughly in the London precarious labour market, as I and the interviewees encountered it and moved through it. In this chapter I discuss the theoretical tools that arose from the literature, methodology and analysis. The manner of these tools is to describe the environmental qualities of precarity to better grasp how workers live with precarious work.

This chapter is structured into two halves. The first half examines precarity theory through two discussions: the progressive detachment of precarity from work and the tendency to use a 'passive observer' type of subjectivity. There is considerable confusion and inconsistency of these aspects, making it unclear whether precarity is 'real' or 'subjective' and where to draw the line (Doogan, 2015). The second half of the chapter presents three conceptual tools that aim to alleviate these shortcomings, and were developed through the analysis. They are all centred around a phenomenological landscape (Wylie, 2007) approach, that aims to examine how precarious work and precariousness are encountered and perceived by individuals on different terms. This is achieved by seeing workers on a landscape, precarization as creating structural 'empty places' in lieu of jobs and workers traversing trajectories through this landscape.

5.2 Developing Precarity Thinking

As discussed in Part One, while there are developed explanations of precarious work or the precarious condition, there are valid questions as to inconsistencies and contradictions to be worked through (Doogan, 2015; Kiersztyn, 2017). In this section I examine the evolution of precarity theory closer to gain insights into its structure as a paradigm and underlying assumptions. This section focuses on the most recent theoretical developments of labour sociology (Kalleberg, 2018) and the qualitative approaches of *precarization* (Alberti et al., 2018; Della Porta et al., 2015) or ontological precariousness (Butler, 2012; Lorey, 2015) that have, in their own ways, blended the two centres into a work-centred examination of contemporary insecurity.

5.2.1 Precarity Unbound

In this section I discuss the development of precarity theory broadly that has engaged with precarious work, work-induced precarity and precariousness. In Part One I remarked that the precarization of work needs to be stratified in order to examine the inconsistent national statistics

and the presence of concentrated precarious work. With this in mind, I examine what form such precariousness takes in precarity theory, to understand how it might be differentiated. The development of precarity can be understood in three phases, which illustrate a progressive decoupling from concrete material conditions. Initially used to describe fragility of circumstances liken to poverty, precarity was taken up as a labour issue by activists and unions, following this it would later become disconnected from labour in English-language scholarship and located equally in work and all social institutions (Betti, 2018). This is likened to an oeuvre of precarity that is 'unbound' (Ettlinger, 2007) from work.

The first phase of the use of precarity applies to poverty and vulnerability of the urban working class. Economic and social historians have noted that industrialization, while creating wealth never seen before, concomitantly created unemployment and vagabondage (Foucault, 1988; Polanyi, 1944). Precariousness and precarious work have been traced to early industrialization, with French sources as early as 1840 using the words as a descriptive term for workers' conditions (Betti, 2018). The morphological and translated words that would become the contemporary, English 'precarity' appear to have been used in this way consistently for a century. First to the proletariat of the nineteenth century, and then to the urban poor of the twentieth. Betti (2018) mentions the limited use of precarity again in the 1950s. The most recent has been traced to the 1980s when precariousness was used to describe a vulnerability to unpredictable 'incidents' among certain French families (Barbier, 2004). The breadwinners of these families were vulnerable due to their poor work opportunities that led to low wages and poor career prospects. Originally then, precarity was a class issue, and was retroactively used as such. Betti (2018: 280) notes that 'historians from the 2000s onwards increasingly started to use these [precarious work and precariousness] concepts to analyse workers' conditions in nineteenth- and twentieth-century industrial capitalism'. Thus, precarity began firmly in the Marxian class analysis still predominant until the 1980s. The key to this first phase is there does not seem to be a focus on aspects related to post-Fordism, such as instability of working hours, but refers more to a uniform material deprivation of low pay and the realities of being a member of the proletariat. In this period, observers 'hardly distinguished precarious working conditions from the precariousness of the working-class existence as such' (Betti, 2018: 278). In the first phase, precarity is a class aspect of poverty generally.

The second phase is marked by a change in focus from class to work, and interest in the post-Fordist mode of work organization (Beck, 2000; Castells, 2010; Masquelier, 2017). The Fordist era, roughly the 1950s to the 1970s was considered 'secure', and when this ended there was not just the aforementioned focus on urban poor, but on the rise of the new 'non-standard' jobs, as described in Chapter Two. There appeared to be a very clear societal transformation in contractual differentiation undergoing, termed 'flexibilization' or 'Brazilianization' (Beck, 2000) at the behest of numerous economic transformations which even led to terms such as 'new capitalism' (Doogan, 2009; Sennett, 2006). In turn, precariousness and precarious work were reformulated to apply to those without guaranteed stable working conditions. For example, researchers were concerned with the 'quality' of 'non-standard' employment in America in the late 1990s (Kalleberg et al., 2000). At the same time, labour economist Standing (2011) coupled the vulnerable proletariat of the first phase explicitly with non-standard contracts to meld both into the new term, precariat. Even in Algeria in the 1980s, Pierre Bourdieu was observing differences between those with guaranteed and non-guaranteed work and using the term precarious to describe the later (Barbier, 2004). This shows an interesting inversion, where the proletariat who were once considered 'precarious' by the terminology, now represented a security that had been lost. Where the proletariat of the first phase may have had consistent, but low earnings and poor living conditions, the emphasis of precarity moved to those who had no certainties in work.

In the third phase, precariousness becomes 'unbound' (Ettlinger, 2007) from class or work altogether. In the parlance of social philosophy, one could say there was a shift from Marxian to post-modern analysis. The third phase is most analogous to the worker-centred research outlined earlier. While a similar 'condition' of precarity had been identified in relation to class or work precarity (Barbier, 2004; Waite, 2009), the third phase is differentiated by the condition becoming the primary unit in itself, hence I borrow the term used by Ettlinger (2007) to describe it as 'unbound'. Unbound precarity is a societal malaise of contemporary society, it can be identified in the term 'precarization', which describes a universal erosion of worker securities (Alberti et al., 2018; Della Porta et al., 2015). At the same time, are claims that precarity is not located amongst any economic position or type of work, but is universal to either the human condition or capitalism (Lorey, 2015). From this perspective, 'precarity becomes the norm' (Neilson & Rossiter, 2005: no pagation) in the sense that vulnerability is a kind of natural manner of the universe that humans act against. In other cases, this is where capitalism has regressed back to its liberal roots and therefore 'insecurity prevails' (Beck, 2000: 4). In some cases, the third phase is an alternative to the class or work-based approaches, examining 'the more subjective experience of precarity, or what I call 'feeling precarious'' that does not have to originate out of class or work (Worth, 2016: 603). When precarity has been 'unbound' and universal, then the locus for study naturally becomes the subject, as this is the only space of difference.

Each phase is studying vulnerability through the local conditions and the intellectual trends of the time: Marxian class, neoliberal work and then post-structuralist society. Della Porta et al. (2015: 1) summarise the history of precarity research as examining 'insecure, volatile, or vulnerable human situations that are socioeconomically linked to the labour-market dynamics.' Other researchers from outside sociology and geography (the fields contributing most to precarity research) have tentatively pointed out that phases two and three of precarity appear to be only the latest continuation of the perennial study of vulnerability, insecurity and other related terms (Betti, 2018; Han, 2018). Each phase is identifying a new location of vulnerability: urban industrial classes, flexible work, and now, the institutions of late-modernity or neoliberalism (Beck, 2000; Foucault, 2008). This recognition means that 'unbound' precarity is really a lot more historically and geographically located than it first appears.

Another way of understanding unbound precarity is that if the second phase was concerned about work becoming flexible, then the third phase, at least in the sociological approach, is concerned with the flexibilization of all institutions. Looking at precarity literature, for example, in discussing precariousness, Kalleberg (2018) draws attention to presence of precarity-like discourses in late-modern theory that is concerned with the end of 'solid' modernity such as Zygmunt Bauman (2000) and Anthony Giddens (1991a). Meanwhile Beck (2000) remains focused on just work as the thread that, once pulled, will result in nothing but insecurity in economic, social and political spheres. This drives non-work precarization, such as existential 'ontological insecurity' (Giddens, 1991b) or a risk society (Beck, 2000) that are similar, but in the end, not 'precarity'. Meanwhile, the autonomist Marxist, Joseph Choonara (2018), in his theoretical dissertation felt the need to dedicate much of a chapter to late-modern ideologues of Ulrich Beck, Manual Castells, etc., in order to cover the field of discussion. He concludes, 'they have contributed to an ideological climate, especially on the radical left, where it is often assumed such change [in work] has taken place'. Unbound precarity appears to be feeding off the earlier and influential writings of late-modern theory (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 2000; Giddens, 1991a), yet reifying the insecurity described by these authors. Many of these texts however are, extremely complicated and not prone to a simple 'more insecurity' thesis. Bauman famously writes through metaphor that has to be used delicately (Davis, 2016). Beck (2000: 8-9) describes his influential *The Brave New World of Work* as a 'visionary non-fiction' that describe the 'basic features and traces' that can be 'glimpsed today'. Interestingly, Sennett (1998) makes almost identical comments when introducing *Corrosion of Character* that deals with many of the themes of

insecurity. Meanwhile Tweedie (2013) felt the need to say that Sennett had been misunderstood for describing a literal change in work, and instead argues there has been more of an experiential change. Typically, these late-modern authors state their philosophies are written not as predictions, but as explorations of processes underway in which the exact outcome is still unknown (Beck, 2000). Altogether, the simplistic reading of these authors, today being done retroactively through the lens of precarity (Kalleberg, 2018), is intensifying and reifying the perceived insecurity in contemporary work and society -a point made by Doogan (2009). The risk is that theory will detach completely from reality and therefore come to mean less and less to ordinary people, and so have less revolutionary power, and secondly, the theory is at risk of becoming blind to the 'securities' that the most privileged have access to. Today, it is the researchers job is to understand how those transformations described by Beck (2000), Castells (2010), Giddens (1991a) and others are undergoing in real circumstances.

In either case, once 'unbound' precarity starts to float freely, this is a strength and a weakness. The strength is in 'decluttering' prior theory of vulnerability. Decluttering means to erase the systemic functioning of a theory while retaining the consequence. For example, the precarization of work has largely lost its process, one struggles to even find a cause or presence beyond the most general (Kalleberg, 2009), yet the consequence -insecurity- is being touted as significant and real. Such decluttering is indicative of claims of a discontinuity in political economy that is made in late-modern theory. Castells (2010) argues there is a firm discontinuity in the nature of economic activity in the past five decades. Furthermore, Beck (2000: 17) has an interesting statement regarding discontinuity and modernity: ''Second modernity' is a magical password that is meant to open the door to new conceptual landscapes.' This statement sounds sarcastic, but is followed by a paragraph explaining the conceptual landscape of first modernity is no longer relevant and stating researchers need to be awake to the idea that change is affecting everything. Furthermore, Beck (2000: 77) states the origins of the post-Fordist work regime do not lie in first modernity, 'The idea that a single dynamic […] is capable of transforming the world economy in a single direction and towards a single goal belongs [… to] first modernity'. This means one cannot extrapolate a change from a single factor such as flexibilization of employment, but there is also a suggestion in this statement that even looking for causes is misguided because they shall all be operating as a manifold of which the only evidence is the outcome. This decluttering, or discontinuity, gives tremendous freedom for researchers who can now simply just research the insecurities that inspired their action.

In regards to work-induced precarity, in practice, decluttering means that the statistical measurement of non-standard or flexible work as an indicator of economic change can be, more or less, ceased, and instead researchers can simply focus on the consequence: precarity, insecurity and second modernity. For Beck (2000: 114), the transformation of work means that poverty is normalised and so there is no longer any middle class in the sense of security, rather 'fear and economic insecurity also prevail among the majority' in the US. So relating this to precarious work, precarity is no longer discrete, localised or has direct cause, but is everywhere by nature of working in a liberal capitalist economy. In this vein, jumping to empiricism twenty years after Beck wrote, Alberti et al. (2018: 448) point out that they received very few quantitative submissions for their special issue, concluding that contractual measurement is 'too limiting for many sociologists, for whom precarity clearly has to be understood in a more qualitative way'. Therefore, one reaches the conclusion of Chapter Two: minimal statistical change yet an incredibly heightened 'sensitivity' to precarity. Decluttering is a double-edged sword, it enables uninhibited research into an area, which in the case of precarity, speaks to well-being and inequality. At the same time, decluttering can lead to a lack of understanding as to process and cause.

The drawback of an unbound precarity is an emphasis on precisely that lack, there is a sort of tunnel vision regarding societal transformation of risk. At the most generous, this creates a tension in macro theories. For example, while Beck (2000) argues there is a societal transformation of risk that is worth the marque label 'risk regime', he takes great pains to argue that second modernity is first, unpredictable and unknown, and second, heterogeneous. This suggests a much more complex outcome has to be built out of the decluttered theory. To be more critical of decluttering, it can lead to an unreasonable focus on insecurity in that it becomes difficult to decipher prevailing securities. When the emphasis is on *precarity*, conceived through precariousness and vulnerability, then all one can see are the unbalancing substances while missing the very structure that is being made unbalanced. In other words, precarity of what? The study of precarity may be reduced down to threats, such as 'increasing insecurity in both subjective and objective aspects' (Alberti et al., 2018: 449) without any perception of security and the role that has to play. The word precarity implies an 'unbalanced balance', that there are scales of security and insecurity which have become unstable towards insecurity. Yet, unbound *precarity* is only examining the removal of securities and the addition of insecurities, missing the inverse of either. This distorts the inequality of how people gain securities against precarity in order to live above it, while mentioning so briefly the new formations that exist, such as a neoliberal subjectivity that internalises personal responsibility and adaptability, that Ferreri et al. (2017) mention in their conclusion. There is a need to retain the 'decluttered' sense of insecurity while recognising that the driving economic and social forces shall also inevitably contribute to, one, a heterogeneity, and two, the in/secure 'balance' of precarity. This seems to be what Beck (2000: 68) means when he says 'Attention must be redirected and sharply focused on that which is new' -but that means not just new insecurities, but new in/securities that are not just *unbalanced*, but the *balanced unbalanced* existences that have to precede terms like risk, uncertainty or precarity for them to have meaning.

In examining the three phases of precarity, the goal has been to give clarity to this concept and show how the term has been used to describe different phenomena. Precarity has been used to describe industrial urbanisation and class, flexible economies and then institutional flexibility of late-modernity. Whereas precarity was once tightly linked to class or work, it has become 'unbound' (Ettlinger, 2007). This analysis raises the question of how is one to identify vulnerability or economic transformation. The unbound thesis establishes vulnerability too closely as the natural and inevitable state of being a worker. Compared to Butler's notion of precarity, Han (2018: 339) calls for 'humbler' concepts that interrogate vulnerability on the human scale. As stated elsewhere, I follow this call through Castells (2010) comment on structures of diversity. At the same time, I argue these concepts have to be ahistorical. Where proletarian, standard and non-standard work are all historical concepts, there need to be concepts that can speak to the 'forms of precarity at different times and in various places' (Betti, 2018: 300). Therefore, I argue human-scale concepts are needed that can describe the uncertainty of work in any era, so as to avoid being essentialised to the present.

The second aspect of precarity theory to consider is the observer of such changes to work.

5.2.2 The Reactive Subject In Precarity Theory

In Part One, I divided the precarity literature between a job and a worker centre, each with objective and subjective aspects. If the previous section on unbound precarity examined the objective, then this section pays specific attention to the subjective. Many authors speak explicitly of a subjective precarity (Alberti et al., 2018) or a subjective precarious condition (Worth, 2016) that can be about a job, the worker themselves, or some other aspect of an institution, such as citizenship (Alberti et al., 2018). In this section I discuss, in relation to the phenomenological study of being (Bourdieu, 1990; Charlesworth, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 1962) the subject-object divide

and speculate how that might alter the orthodox concept of precarity with an eye to bringing the subjective closer to the objective.

Theorists of perception and action generally argue that the observer and observed are inclined to effect each other and so cannot be thought of as strictly separate (Bourdieu, 1990; Charlesworth, 2000; Ingold, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Meanwhile post-humanist and post-structuralist theorists are inclined to argue a deeper exchange of being between object and subject in arguing that either can literally constitute the other to a partial extent (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009; Haraway, 1987; Thrift, 2008; Weeks, 2011). These authors vary dramatically in their ontologies and visions of being, but all question the notion of a 'passive observer' wholly and eternally separate from the objective. It is from this general perspective that I shall look at subjectivity and objectivity in mainline precarity theory.

Precarity is typically split into 'objective' and 'subjective', which when combined back into precarity theory bleeds into an implicit ontology of a passive observer that is shaped by the aforementioned objective. For example, in elaborating subjective precarity, Alberti et al. (2018: 449) summarise the work of Lorey (2015) and Butler in relation to subjective precarity that there is 'a general *precariousness* as a condition of being vulnerable'. Therefore the 'objective' -being vulnerable- precipitates the subjective condition of general precariousness. This type of subjectivity-as-consequence is repeated by labour sociologist Kalleberg (2018: 17) who describes 'forces that have led to a pervasive sense of vulnerability'. While there are many nuances and subtleties, the overall viewpoint is that there is an objective world that is perceived. This is not problematic in itself, but is worth critical evaluation when conducting analysis at the individual scale. The purpose of this notion of subjectivity is examine how people feel about uncertainty in their lives, however there are additional factors that need to be taken into account when looking into the nature of precarity.

The first point to note is the role of subjectivity in creating precarity itself. This has several aspects. As many philosophers over centuries have pointed out, objectivity can look very different depending on your perspective (Bronowski, 1956; Merleau-Ponty, 1962) -and the same is likely to apply to insecurity. Furthermore, objective insecurities need to be perceived in order to have an effect, or in some regards to even exist. For example, in his definition of (objective) precarious work, Kalleberg (2018: 15) notes that uncertainty includes 'expectations of not being able to find other, comparable jobs'. This describes an objective circumstance in the job market of there being insufficient work, however this is also an expectation, which is perception. This example speaks to the broader issue: objective insecurity has to be recognised as such as by the worker. Such tensions are discussed at length by Kiersztyn (2017).

Going further, attributing an uncertainty to pure objectivity is not straight forward. 'Uncertainty' is a prediction, and is therefore a human invention. Whether events occur or not has no 'chance' in the human sense. If the observer makes no prediction, and waits until the event occurs or not, the event becomes either certain or impossible. For an 'uncertain' event to occur -e.g. a worker is unable to find another, comparable job- then it is now a certainty that has occurred. There is always perception involved in the measurement and creation of uncertainty. Therefore, attempts to map or identify the 'objective' conditions of precarity always bleed into not only the unique circumstances of the worker, but also the perception which those circumstances engender (Doogan, 2009; Kiersztyn, 2017). In this regard, notions of objective conditions being insecure, such as ZHCs, the gig economy, or working in a neoliberal globalized economy, are assertions of objectivity in insecure circumstances. The clean divide between either cannot be assumed.

Second, the precarious subjectivity omits the analysis of whether uncertainty is being 'manufactured' either out of social discourse or individually. This is a point Doogan (2001) raised before precarity had fully entered the English lexicon, applying the term 'manufactured

uncertainty' to post-Fordism. However, phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) poses another angle to this debate. The one-way street of the passive observation of the objective negates that perception can 'create' an objectivity (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). For example, Merleau-Ponty (1962) uses the example of looking at different parts of a house mean you can never perceive the whole thing at once. All one ever sees are partialities. In regards to economic transformation, critical authors effectively argue there has been too much focus on small parts of the economy (Doogan, 2009). Without careful examination of the objective and subjective, there is always the risk that the objective has stayed the same and individuals are not actually more, or less, insecure. This is the argument made by Doogan (2009), and later Choonara (2020). Furthermore, an individual could conceivably feel precarious by the accounts of those around them. Such as how Worth (2016: 609) describes 'borrowing insecurity [… by] picking up on the zeitgeist of feeling precarious.' This draws attention to both the need for clarity over what precarious work or precarity materially are, and the need to embed subjectivity in the environment and assertions of feeling and being precarious.

Third, the very subjectivity that is perceiving is a product of its objective position. Later developments of phenomenology off of Merleau-Ponty (1962) emphasise the situatedness of perception (Bourdieu, 1990; Charlesworth, 2000; Ingold, 2000). Perception always occurs from, and is contingent upon, the unique objective condition of the viewer. Perceptions of work can vary dramatically, and in some cases people can have opposite views of the same objective work conditions (Knox et al., 2015). In other words, perception is dependent on the objective conditions. Thus the objective conditions of the job are not just important, but so are the objective position of the subject that is perceiving. Campbell and Price (2016), who were discussed earlier for arguing the primacy of social context, also argue that the structural is the primary mode of insecurity, and any subjectivity is derived from that. Campbell and Price (2016: 318) say,

> Thus, the case study of room attendants wrongly labels individual experiences, as well as perceptions, as 'subjective' (Knox et al., 2015: 1548), failing to note that the former have an objective dimension that requires careful attention.

What this seems to mean is that any social context or social location (Vosko, 2010) has a local subjectivity associated with it. However, the argument by Campbell and Price (2016) leans too far into a hyper-objective mechanistic view of human behaviour that does not account for affect (Thrift, 2008), such as excitement or freedom, one may feel at being in precarious work that may otherwise be 'bad' for well-being.

Fourth, perception is differentiated by the individuals goals and interests -effectively their perception of what 'security' is. The very composition of the observer can alter, such as by habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) or comportment (Charlesworth, 2000), affecting their interests and so how the objective relates to them. If the workers' idea of security is not the SER, then much of orthodox precarity theory is liable to coming undone. While affected by social context and location, culture and personality may alter the individual's goals. For example in Chapter three I noted the influence of pursuing family well-being that creates entirely new dimensions of job security regarding supporting a family (Knox et al., 2015). Others may feel orientations about their autonomy, viewing permanent work as a threat to that (Wong & Au-Yeung, 2019). Or an individual may be from a culture where home ownership of a certain quality is normal (Hoolachan, McKee, Moore, & Soaita, 2017), and so they feel insecure about their work not enabling them to achieve that. These issues all concern interests of the far future, and regard one's aspirations and sense of where they are going, would like to be and 'deserve' to be. In this manner, subjectivity can be said to 'create' entirely new objective insecurities purely through want and desire. In some cases, these wants are a manner of being short of what was possible

under Fordism or prosperous capitalism (Bessant et al., 2017), such as home ownership, but in other cases they can be in excess of the past, such as wanting work that is not repetitive (Motakef, 2019).

In this discussion I have drawn primarily on phenomenology (Bourdieu, 1990; Charlesworth, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 1962) to outline some of the potential other aspects of perception of precarity that go beyond the 'passive observer' implied by objective and subjective precarity (Alberti et al., 2018; Kalleberg, 2018; Kiersztyn, 2017). While 'subjective' precarity is unproblematically used to examine how people feel about being insecure (Worth, 2016), it is sometimes used in a limiting manner to describe perception. Any objective aspect has to be perceived, and in many respects, such as with living standards, perception could 'create' the objective insecurity. In many cases the technicalities of phenomenological perception appear to be able to be ignored because there are fairly consistent objective conditions and subjective perceptions, however as the literature as developed the calls for a better framework have become louder as not only more edge cases are found (Antonucci, 2018), but also that the need to define the regular, majority state of precarity is even coming into these inconsistencies between objective and subjective at the national statistical level (Kiersztyn, 2017).

Staying open to these additional complications means to recognise there is no clean split between objective conditions of work and subjective perceptions of that work. The answer this points to is a contextualised view of precarious work that accounts for the goal of the worker. Insecurity - whether it is apparently an 'objective' aspect of the job or a 'subjective' aspect of the worker- has to be realised as the combination of both objective and subjective criteria. The reality has to exist, representing a greater likelihood or frequency of change over a period of time, but it also has to be perceived and salient to the subject.

5.2.3 Examining: Precarity Conclusion

In the previous chapters I discussed the precarity literature in terms of two centres, job and worker, to discuss how work might be changing and the presence of insecurity in developed economies. In this section, it could be said that I cut precarity the other way, examining the 'objective' of job and worker together and then the 'subjective'.

In many lines of thinking, precarity is unbound from class and work. The term 'unbound' is borrowed from Ettlinger (2007) who aimed to explicitly theorise precarity in itself. This is valuable for enabling the unhindered exploration of vulnerability in contemporary societies (Beck, 2000). However, the consequence -precarity- has come to replace the cause, most clearly seen in theorizations of precarization (Alberti et al., 2018; Della Porta et al., 2015) or risk (Beck, 2000). Unbound precarity retains links to class and work, but is amongst a smorgasbord of forces and processes (Doogan, 2015). In response, anthropologist and ethnographer Han (2018) has called for 'humbler' concepts that are closer to experience. I add to this a need for concepts that can speak to different times and places, that is concepts that speak to 'vulnerability' in the abstract rather than the historical-present concept of 'precarity'.

The discussion of the objective was followed by that of the subjective. The subject in precarity thinking tends to be detached from their environment, they are often described as if observing their environment becoming less secure, and then being shaped by that in a sometimes one-way manner. Thus, precarious subjects are passive -perception is the pure consequence of the objective. This means that individuals who do not perceive an uncertainty as precarious are difficult to integrate into frameworks. Precarity can be felt independently of the conditions, or can be interpreted differently due to the social context and location. The objective is very much that, the object of the subject, yet, in identifying the 'precarious subject' it is the other way around, the individual becomes the total object of the environment. In what follows I present three tools

developed through the analysis to come to terms with precarity in a located manner, on the scale of the human and subject to the perspective and actions of the worker.

5.3 Working in the Contingent Landscape

Examining precarious work requires an approach that is situated between the objective and subjective aspects, while being open to transferences between the two. At the same time is the need to develop on the 'structures of diversity' derived from Castells (2010) that are the real world medium of flexibilization of work. This approach also needs to provide some type of understanding of what insecurity actually is in material terms, while speaking to work and employment. To achieve these aims, I refocus the conceptual schema on the contingency of work in a landscape.

5.3.1 Contingent Landscape

I approach precarity through landscape, a term with a long history in geography (Wylie, 2007). Landscape is used to describe the object of action, and so is similar to a field (Bourdieu, 1990) or milieu (Foucault, 2009). Landscape has theoretical connotations relating to perspective, production and power that have developed since the 1950s with the various turns in the social sciences (Wylie, 2007). I adapt landscape to identify a quality of space that is both general and specific to the viewer.

The original conceptual value of landscape was in perspective. Wylie (2007) explains landscape originated with the Western perspectival traditions of art, which aimed to paint in a way that is closer to a perspective and so be more 'real'. The original notion is a spectator observing. As far back as 1941, landscape could be considered an experimental science that deviated from positivism (Pries, 2018). Landscapes are seen from somewhere and only exist from that perspective. While the landscape concept is has been reinvented through the decades, perspective endures as the consistent aspect. For cultural geographers, landscape is 'a portion of the earth visible by an observer from a particular position or location' -whether that is a physical or social location (Morin, 2009: 287). That perspective separates reality into a new thing: landscape. For example, if one can only see one face of a cube, there is a square. Landscape can therefore be thought of as a thing, 'an area or the appearance of an area' and its component parts that make it up (Morin, 2009: 287). Landscape thinking allows one to conceptualise both the outer world 'objective' characteristics while noting the perspective and location of such.

I use this perspective of phenomenological landscape to develop a conceptualisation of insecurity in the environment that is both general and unique to the individual, however this requires a shift to the language of *contingency*. The purpose is not to study the entire landscape being perceived, but instead only the contingent aspects relative to action. To understand this I see contingency as a quality, drawing from the original formulation of landscape. This was inspired by the idea of a landscape painting that portrays not the 'literal' -or we could say photographic- reality, but painters style is used to portray a scene with certain qualities. For example Pries (2018: 2) describes landscape as 'the character of a region, a unity of cultural and physical phenomena in their broadest terms'. In saying this, Pries (2018) cites many researchers from the 1940s to 1970s who use the terms, *spirit*, *quality*, and *personality* to describe what landscape is. So the contingent landscape refers to all the aspects that have the quality of being contingent relative to action. The existence of it however is dual: there is contingency as it exists upon a subject (such as a bus to ride to work is contingent but a pavement to walk to work is not), and contingency as it exists phenomenologically (do we run to the bus or just walk to work).

Where for much of its history landscape has been used in relation to a detached and objective viewer, viewing the absolute truth, this became untenable after post-structuralism took hold in mainstream English academic literature. Charlesworth (2000) critiques the detached landscape of his hometown Rotherham for being the outsider's perspective that does not contain the phenomenological restriction on possibility of action and understanding that locals endure. A view of the landscape is always that of the observer, and so if one were to privilege one perspective -that of the researcher- it will present a distorted image. Contingency is expected to be no different, what is contingent for one person may not be for another, or it may differ in terms of qualities of contingency (important, forgettable, controllable, out of control). While Charlesworth (2000) dispenses with landscape and instead hews closer to Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu for his solution to the detached viewer, landscape itself can be remedied through seeing it as the practical material of action (Wylie, 2007). This means to keep in mind everyone's perspective as the object of action. For example, Ingold (2000: 159) takes a landscape-as-dwelling approach, and says: 'meaning is immanent in the relational contexts of people's practical engagement with their lived environments'. From this perspective the objectivity of the contingent landscape presented earlier recedes as 'the world emerges with its properties alongside the emergence of the perceiver as person' (Ingold, 2000: 160). My aim is to combine the objective and object-of-action approaches. Thus, the contingent landscape is both an objective state of affairs that exists and whatever *emergence* occurs for any single individual.

The phenomenological question of landscape leads to what is the contingent landscape in real or concrete terms. The contingent landscape is the machinations of economic and political power that deploy capital and demand labour in a directly contingent manner. This is considered to generate what sociologists call 'precarious work'. While gig work is recognised as involving the 'ordering' of workers when needed and this being premised on the internet (Prassl, 2018) the contingent landscape is a much more basic concept that cross-cuts contract, employer, sector, technology or even insecurity/security. It is a material and ideological configuration of flow that exerts affect in the sense of a *territory* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004; West-Pavlov, 2009). The contingent landscape is not an employment paradigm, a technology or a governmentality, but *is* the substances of labour demand and supply. These substances are contingent with the aid of the internet, a telephone, a poster or face-to-face communication. In plain terms, this refers to a sports stadium that demands labour only on weekends, to the government intervention in Covid-19 to hire testing staff for only the duration of the pandemic or consumer demand for taxi services. As such it refers to both the economic/material and political imperatives of contingent demand, the stadium punters or disease prevalence, and the ideological influence of modes of management (Castells, 2010; Weil, 2014) that deem contingency appropriate to fulfil these. So, the stadium is determined to be staffed contingently rather than permanently, pandemic responses are best left temporary measures. While the demand of taxi services has always fluctuated and the service needs to be delivered in a very short notice, management ideologies have changed (Beck, 2000; Castells, 2010; Marchington et al., 2005; Sennett, 2006; Weil, 2014) how it is staffed in the form of gig economies, to be contingent as well. Contingency is therefore a blend of both material flows (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009; Goodchild, 1996; West-Pavlov, 2009) of consumers, goods, diseases, etc., and the ideological imperative of how to respond to those flows.

While it is not entirely clear, *it would appear* that as the economy has become more flexible and markets more influential upon the distribution of resources that the economy has come to flow in a contingent manner more often and to a greater proportion (Beck, 2000; Castells, 2010). There are different scales and arcs to this introduction of flow: the invention of capitalism and liquid labour power, neoliberal reform, 2011 GFC, migratory tightening of Brexit and Covid-19 and subsequent shifts in the economy due to interest rates, oil prices, etc. are all different events and scales pulling on the free flow of labour demand. While some theorists see neoliberal reform as

pure class action (Harvey, 2007), much more see the origin of post-Fordism in that it has become fashionable, and a necessity of being competitive, to modulate the firm on a just-in-time basis (Beck, 2000; Castells, 2010; Weil, 2014) of flows. This has been supplemented by advances in information technology (Castells, 2010), contracts (Weil, 2014) and global shipping and communication that facilitate this flexibilization. This is achieved through fissuring the firm (Weil, 2014) or restructuring as a network (Castells, 2010; Mollona, 2009; Sennett, 2006) to be more responsive or attain related benefits. Goods and services, but also consumer demand, are made more able to flow through the economy by market logic without distortions of subsidies, national markets, patents, or logistical or communicative burden. This is both a material necessity of global market competition that pressured integrated, Fordist corporations to restructure (Castells, 2010; Sennett, 2006; Weil, 2014), but also is an ideological imperative that see this as the best response (Sennett, 2006). At the same time, Castells (2010) refers to the informational fabric of economies that did not cause this change, but made it much more intense as, for example, computer networks allowed firms to be more flexible than otherwise. Therefore, central bank interest rates, stock prices and hydrocarbon supply (Cooper, 2010) tilt the management logic to either retaining labour power or letting it flow on the scale of mere years. So, as stated, for example, gig economies seek efficiencies by creating contingent needs that are most intimately connected to consumer demand (Friedman, 2014; Kaine & Josserand, 2019; Prassl, 2018). Non-standard employment contracts allow firms, such as those managing stadiums, but also Fordist workplaces like factories, to rapidly alter their staffing levels completely by demand. In the case of the factory this is likely to represent both a change in consumer taste to more seasonal and diverse products and the managerial imperative to run firms in a contingent manner (Weil, 2014).

Altogether, the contingent landscape represents a constantly moving structure of labour power need. In this manner, it draws upon the Deleuze and Guattari (2004) notions of flow and solidity as one in the same (West-Pavlov, 2009) where everything is, ultimately, a flow (Jankowski, 2022). Pockets of contingent labour power need are created and remain until the conditions of their existence flow again and the need closes. Such flows can be thought of as convection currents below the Earth's crust. At the largest scale these may appear static as the flow maintains the same composition and shape, but when one zooms in the individual particles come into view, and the fraying edges show important definition. This metaphor of convection currents raise the question of contingency's scale and intensity. Even the permanent and standard job is contingent on some demand for labour power. Yet, contingency has always been associated with precarious work, some times being referred to specifically *contingent* work (Feldman, 2006; Herod & Lambert, 2016; Purcell & Purcell, 1998; Redpath, Hurst, & Devine, 2009). I expand on this not by saying the job is contingent in some way, but by defining the job as one that exposes the worker to the contingencies of the contingent landscape, to those constantly shifting flows of labour supply and demand that define the economy.

I distinguish a contingent from a non-contingent job with two aspects: first is the contingency palpable in scale and impact to the subject (in this case a worker) and second, in the *mediation* of the continency. For contingency to be pertinent it has to be palpable. This means the changes are big enough to effect a human. Second is the mediating layer of bureaucracy between worker and labour demand. Typically this layer reduced down to just the employment relationship: does one have a permanent, zero hour or self-employed contract? (Herod & Lambert, 2016) However just looking at the employment relationship misses the true extent of the mechanisms that exist to mediate a change in labour demand. A permanent (or insecure) job may have a mediating layer of bureaucracy (product teams, human resources, finance, unions and so on), legislation and capital between them and labour demand. This layer mitigates the scale and impact of contingency. This mediating layer is a disparate collection of substances, for example, the employer can redirect company efforts, slow-down tasks, assign different duties, restructure, run at a loss and take on debt, accept government subsidies, etc. As the mediating substance these would all stand

between the contingency of labour power demand and the worker's job. Any change in labour demand has to move through these mediating substances, reducing their scale, and in extreme cases making the contingency non-palpable and thus the job appear to be certain, as in corporate Fordist. On the other hand, a contingent job has no such mediator and is thus 'purely' contingent on the flows of demand that created it in the first place. The difference from traditional concepts of 'contingent work' grounded in employment contracts is that mediation reflects there is much more standing between stable employment and job loss. It reflects that a ZHC could be more stable than a permanent contract if labour demand supports the former and not the latter. This also reflects that secure employment is a matter of the firms' aspiration to enforce security and continuity in the workforce in order to attain the benefits of a reliable workforce (Sennett, 2006; Weil, 2014; Whyte, 2002 [1956]).

The first consequence of this framework is to limit the field of study, which has the added benefit of hardening the boundary that is there. Depending on the perspective, where precarious work is any job with some uncertainty (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017), any low pay job (Côté, 2014), or any job (Alberti et al., 2018; Beck, 2000), contingency delimits precarious work while grounding it in the local flows of labour demand. From this perspective, precarious work is work that has been stripped of its protections from the flows of labour power demand. This exposure to flow sits in line with predominant theories of risk regime (Beck, 2000) or information enterprise (Castells, 2010) while recognising that the mediating layer may mitigate flows or that if flows are stable enough, there may be no uncertainty. The way one should think about a employment contracts changes. For example, a ZHC job at a supermarket may actually be stable in the long-term, while nonetheless being contingent without any mediator on the continuous flow of consumers. This would nonetheless be considered 'contingent' as the ZHC legal document and the managerial imperative behind it mean labour demand is sensitive to increases and decreases in demand that mean the worker may receive less hours, receive hours at erratic hours or be offered more hours than usual on a palpable scale.

As per the in/security thesis and seeing the 'good' in precarity (Han, 2018), contingency described in the above manner has the advantage of being the stuff of both security and insecurity. As described in relation to 'decluttering' flexible economic conditions have to a large extent been reified as precarious (Kalleberg, 2009) or forming a 'risk regime' (Beck, 2000). In response, there is a need to place flexibilization and post-Fordism into an ontological foundation that can speak to the emerging stabilities. Castells (2010) goes some way here with his informational society as the 'fabric', and in many ways the contingent landscape is analogous. To this end is a need for what can tentatively be termed 'agnostic theory' that does not make a political statement in its ontology, but further downstream in the analysis of the consequences. Precarity is largely a political concept used to represent class-based grievances of a state of material affairs (Betti, 2018; Neilson & Rossiter, 2005), and while it does apply to many circumstances, it has at times been over-extended and naturalised as the inevitable outcome of flexibility. Precarity refers specifically to a state of affairs that are a threat to the continuation or the stability of the subject (Precarious a la Deriva, 2004), and is inherently biased to the 'risk' aspects of whatever structure is under analysis. Contingency, in being the stuff of both security and insecurity (every job is contingent on something else), is agnostic to these political and moral assertions without dismissing them. Rather, political and moral assertions arise out of the application of contingency where such undue insecurities and material deprivation are demonstrated. The contingent landscape challenges reifications of risk or precarity (Ettlinger, 2007) by placing the analysis in the agnostic term of 'contingency' that may be insecure or secure for the individual. From this more grounded position, I believe political and moral assertions as to the inequalities of precarity can be more convincingly and broadly made.

This reformulation around contingency has the added benefit of speaking to non-economic drivers of precarious work such as disease, natural disaster and political policy in a natural manner as levers on labour power demand. Ulrich Beck (1992) has influentially demonstrated the importance of climate change, nuclear threats or other significant 'natural' forces on society, subsequently mentioning those as influential on his 'risk regime' of work (Beck, 2000). Yet, environmental, nuclear and political threats are only uncommonly mentioned (Doogan, 2015; Schilling et al., 2019) in discussions of precarious work that tend to focus on the neoliberal narrative (Standing, 2011). In the contingent landscape crisis events and the flows they cause interface with the flows of labour demand, such as materials and consumer demand, and with the ideological imperative to manage such flows on a contingent basis to exacerbate, mitigate, or create new contingency. This reflects the much broader destabilization of second modernity beyond just work that was theorised by Beck (2000). In practical terms, an example is the flow of Covid-19 disease leading to a surge in temporary hiring for Covid-19 testers and food delivery drivers during the fieldwork period of this thesis.

Much of the substance of living in and interacting with the contingent landscape shall be explored in the subsequent analysis chapters, the goal here has been to provide a conceptual skeleton that the reader can use themselves. The contingent landscape represents the material and ideological imperatives (Castells, 2010; Weil, 2014) to demand labour on palpably contingent terms. These terms are the result of economic, non-economic and political flows that are connected without mediator to labour demand. Material demands such as servicing a stadium, cleaning an office block or manufacturing consumer goods are paired with managerial techniques such as gig economies, ZHCs and weakened standard contracts to more directly connect workers' labour supply to demand. The approach is sensitive to non-human and semi-human factors such as disease transmission and financial markets that alter the flows which demand of labour. However, the next question is, where does this conceptually leave precarious jobs?

5.3.2 Empty Places

Empty places refer to the 'jobs' that contingency creates. In relation to critical readings of work and the job that call for revaluations and new terms (Beck, 2000; Haraway, 1987; Weeks, 2011), I respond with the empty place concept. Where a job is a position in a rationalised bureaucracy (Weber, 1978) that is held by an individual, that operates to integrate the individual into the fold of the firm to establish worker-employer consensus (Burawoy, 1982; Weil, 2014; Whyte, 2002 [1956]), an empty place is a two-dimensional 'worker-sized hole' that the worker fills. Empty places are the product of contingent needs as labour supply (weekends, public holidays, nights and strikes) and labour demand change. Empty places are an ideal-type with certain jobs meeting the concept well, and others being differentiated for being more like a job in the integrative sense of the term.

As with the contingent landscape, the existence and prevalence of empty places are the product of both material and ideological forces. Almost like a task on a gig app or crowd platform (Huws et al., 2017; Prassl, 2018), empty places refer to a need for labour power regardless of contract type, direct or indirect employment relationship or use of smartphones. This is the dual process whereby labour power is needed and it has been deemed to be fulfilled with an empty place rather than a job. This is caused by firms not retaining enough staff to meet demand at all times (Beck, 2000; Weil, 2014). Instead, for example, the firm may instead retain only a minimal headcount that is enough to meet the minimum constant demand, train temporary staff and maintain the infrastructure of empty places. For firms with highly fluctuating demand this may be a necessity of meeting demand, such as a florist that takes on an assistant at certain times of the year. However, there is also the ideological component, whereby, in line with the idea of the network enterprise (Castells, 2010) or fissured workplace (Weil, 2014), firms are structured as a

lattice of potential empty places that are either manually or 'automatically' opened and closed as demand fluctuates. This is due to the perceived benefits of having staff come in only to fill in empty places, such as lower wages, ease of firing undesirable workers or a belief that empty places make the firm more responsive. Empty places are also the product of fluctuations in the supply of labour. Hence, contingent workers may fill empty places during unsociable hours because the permanent staff are not available. In these ways then, empty places are both the contemporary mode of responding to contingency *and* represent a mode of creating contingency in the economy.

There is an industry that works to both fill and exploit the value of *creating* empty places. An industry, spanning from gig firms to traditional employment agencies (Forde & Slater, 2016; Prassl, 2018) all operate to help fill these empty places as they open and have them vacated when they close. Empty places can be present in any economic activity, ranging from rideshare, factory production to university lecturers. Film and television is one excellent example of empty places because each project is established as a sophisticated structure of empty places that then closes shut once the project is completed. In this manner, empty places are another universal concept that can be used to interrogate precarious work without exclusively resorting to the disparate dimensions of precarious work definitions (Vosko, 2010). To be in an empty place is to be working to just fulfil some labour need and not be integrated (Burawoy, 1982) into the firm.

Contingent needs do not generate 'jobs' as we know them. Empty places are an extremely curtailed job that exists only to fulfil a contingent labour need. Thus, where a job is a position in a bureaucracy (Weber, 1978), an empty place is a contingent need. Empty places are entirely contingent on forces outside the firm for their existence. Empty places 'open' when the contingent structures manoeuvre to create that labour need, and they 'automatically' close once that need is no longer present. Like contingent landscape, this is both a material and ideological construction. For example, a rideshare gig platform functions on contingent need of customer orders, but ideology is present in the decision to administer such orders with empty places (Prassl, 2018). Empty places are analogous to 'non-places' (Augé, 1997). While Augé (1997: 77-78) has a clear focus on transnationalism and globalization, one key definition of the concept, that non-places ''cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity' is particularly poignant as to the nature of empty places compared to jobs that are very much *historical*, *relational* and concerned with *identity* as evidenced in ethnographies of Fordism (Burawoy, 1982). Empty places tie tenure insecurity and erratic work hours, the main dimensions of precarious work, directly to the conditions of the industry, the economy and how staffing is being managed in it. The most straight forward example are gig economies (Huws, Spencer, & Syrdal, 2018; Prassl, 2018). Here, a consumer places an order for a taxi fare, which opens the empty place to be filled. A driver elects to be hired into that empty place and fulfil the service. Once the fare is completed, the empty place closes and the driver is effectively unemployed again until the next fare arrives. While gig economies are the most direct example, the same circumstance applies to contingent needs in any workplace: factories, restaurants, warehouses, stadiums, testing centres, etc. on a number of contract types. The difference is that the worker is not being hired as an employee to take on a job in the full, integrative sense of the term (Whyte, 2002 [1956]), but are being hired to fill an empty place.

The contingent nature of empty places mean that workers are not extended the same benefits of employment of those employed regularly. In addition to tenure and hours insecurity, empty places account for the other dimensions of precarious employment, such as low wages, no skill acquisition, lack of union representation, and lack of access to benefits, among other aspects. I explain this in depth in Chapter Seven. This of course varies by the job and regulatory environment, but as the worker is brought in on a contingent basis to fill a need they are less likely to be brought into the fold and provided the full benefits and securities of employment at

the firm (Burawoy, 1982) that may accrue. While this is enabled by the non-standard contracts discussed in Chapter Two, the lack of security offered to staff in empty places is also a factor of how to treat workers that are living largely 'outside' the firm (Prassl, 2018; Weil, 2014) and so investing in their skill-set, well-being and loyalty (Whyte, 2002 [1956]) are less likely to pay a return.

Empty places represent the jobs that precarious workers are facing while responding to calls for new concepts representative of post-Fordism (Beck, 2000). The work that is described by the concept can range from menial labour on a ZHC to freelance knowledge-based work. Conceptually, empty places embed the dimensions of precarious work firmly in the macro-economic and institutional environment, erasing the reifications of precarity or neoliberalism while building a firm reality that can be analysed. However, this is only an ideal-type, so the characteristics described in this section are all tempered by the real circumstances of certain jobs, industries, contracts, etc. Over the next four analysis chapters I fill in this depth to empty places while using it as a foundation to explain the workers' experience of precarious work.

5.3.3 Precarious Work Trajectories

The third supporting concept is precarious work trajectories, which refers to the path one has taken and is taking through the contingent landscape. Trajectories are developed from the 'intentional arc' described by Merleau-Ponty (1962: 136) and developed by Charlesworth (2000) which refers to 'our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation'. In some manner, the intentional arc is the structure internalised by the habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), but I have kept it external emphasise the detachment and alienation one may feel about their precarious work. The purpose of trajectory is to bridge the contingent landscape and empty place while emphasising the history and future of the worker. This is done by drawing a line between empty places and through the contingent landscape by the logic of the particular worker on that trajectory. Trajectory illuminates movements drifting (Ferrell, 2015) through the contingent landscape or purposefully (Schilling et al., 2019) towards an exit.

The contingent landscape is a social and physical space that is much larger than what any single individual can ever see at once. Everyone starts in a certain location in the landscape: the work they know about and have the inclination to pursue. Thus, individuals are located somewhere in the landscape, and are moving around from that somewhere to other locations. As landscape is a perspective, in each location each individual can 'see' different contingent work options. One could start in a certain city, viewing the social space of warehouse temporary agency work and move to another city and encounter another physical and social space of hospitality work. Tired of that space, the individual may move through social space to another location of care work. Through all of this, discourses of gender, ethnicity and class are also permeating the space by revealing and obscuring work discursively (Weeks, 2011) or as a matter of phenomenological habit (Charlesworth, 2000). Individuals move through the social and physical space of the contingent landscape. Sometimes within one location, and other times moving into a completely different part of the contingent landscape. The trajectory is both the inertia of one's unreflexive movements and it is the object of one's actions to alter that inertia.

Like an aeroplane's landing trajectory, precarious work trajectories are laid out in front of individuals and perceivable as objectivity. In perceiving trajectory, workers perceive their future in or outside of the contingent landscape. From one's position in the landscape, the possibilities of action are visible -the objective limitations on where one may move. While workers may make a subjective judgement of the location in the landscape they are in and the empty place they are in as a measure of job quality, people are prone to thinking at a larger scale and about their futures attempting to form coherent narratives that make sense (Giddens, 1991b). Trajectory is therefore the object of subjective judgement as to the larger picture, the agglomeration of empty places

that one is in and the pathway through the landscape that one is moving down. Therefore, trajectory is most associated with the worker-centric literature and the insecurities of social and economic position.

The final aspect of trajectory is destination: whether the predicted movements are going to take the worker towards greater well-being and security or not. Different jobs that trajectory moves towards realise different social and economic positions of varying security. Therefore the trajectory can be 'horizontal' through a series of empty places of similar in/security, or be directed 'upwards' towards greater or continuing security. Thus the worker can perceive their future precarity in the jobs laid out in front of them. Workers have an expectation or a desire of where they should have been in the past, where they should be in the present and where their trajectory is leading to. Ultimately, one does not just want to find a security against one's present vulnerabilities, but wants to achieve an enduring security that will protect oneself indefinitely.

The trajectory one has moved down, and sees in front of them, alters worker expectations in the manner of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). In other words, the conditions of the contingent landscape come to alter the way that one sees that very landscape. Perception is based on past experience, one learns how to see and what details are important, drawing the focus of the viewer as everything else recedes to peripheral vision (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The same occurs for precarious work, the work that one has become accustomed to becomes the most visible while everything else recedes. That in turn shapes practice. This is not a precarious habitus (Galic, 2019) though, but a comportment of action (Charlesworth, 2000) as to contingency and precarious work. Through comportment, trajectory gains inertia, it is liable to staying in the same location as the individual becomes accustomed to a certain sector or work type. Someone who has worked in a certain sector for some time is therefore predisposed to see their trajectory down that same sector regardless of the objective opportunities that may exist. Therefore, workers may perceive their only option is to continue to move horizontally through the contingent landscape and remain insecure indefinitely or see nothing but a pathway to an inevitable exit.

Precarious work trajectories have an explanatory purpose and is a focus of analysis in itself. First, it is a language to describe one's movement and autonomy in the landscape. Trajectory is also the unit that encapsulates multiple empty places, a history of work and a future of work. As that (objective) unit, trajectory is the object of subjective judgement by workers, while also being the environmental conditioning acting upon the individual. Individuals see their position, recall their past trajectory and comment on what trajectory they are on now and will likely follow in the future. All the while, it is also an object of action, whereby workers can make adjustments; change industry, train or move country to dramatically alter that trajectory. Second, trajectory is an intellectual tool for identifying and studying the inequalities of the contingent landscape.

5.4 Conclusion: Landscaping Precarious Work

The chapter began by closer examining precarity theory. It was found that there is a tendency to focus on the political-economic changes of the past five decades as increasing risk, without much reflection as to how that occurs or what exceptions may be occurring. This reification means that precarity is decoupled from work, existing as an immanent force. As such, precarity 'spills out' into any material aspect of life and any perception by research participants. Such breadth may reflect an empirical reality, but without any structured theory there is no way to determine dominant causes or relationships between identified drivers. This inevitably leads to theoretical artefacts becoming findings, such as when comparing precarious workers with and without family/state support, only those without are deemed to be 'precarious' (Antonucci, 2018). Therefore, a landscape-based theoretical model is adopted.

The contingent landscape supports examining living as a contingent worker. While precarity may be the consequence, the 'problem' is not precarization. Instead the problem for workers is that the terms of work have either become, or are perceived, as more contingent. Workers are facing new challenges as more of their environment is governed less on the rules of durability and more on the rules of contingency. Contingency does not create jobs though, but empty places, mechanisms designed by employers to meet that contingent labour need. In turn, workers are not living or responding to this entire environment, but only to that which is visible from their location. In the next chapter, I begin this journey into the contingent landscape by examining finding precarious work largely for the first time and what that experience is like.

Part Three

Surfing the Contingent Landscape

6

The Risk of Getting Hired

6.1 Introduction: Entering this Frantic Landscape

I arrived to London in August of 2020 and I needed to do everything at once: find somewhere to live, find friends, learn how to live in London, and once all that was sorted, find a job. My early job searching was frantic and very difficult. On the one hand it seemed like there was no work at all, yet on the other I was applying for jobs fairly frequently. In my diary in August I recorded numerous job applications that did not succeed,

> I haven't heard back from any jobs, but have had some emails for some small things like £7 to go to Tesco and do something. [10-8-20]
>
> I tried to make an account and a 'gig' on Fiver.com, but every time I submitted my 'gig' it was rejected for the ambiguous reason of 'violation of TOS'. So, here making an account is difficult, and you need to deal with an ambiguous process. [18-8-20]
>
> Two jobs I applied for yesterday were today 'withdrawn', which is a pain because it does take some effort and time to apply. [26-8-20]

I began applying systematically to every employer I could find, even recording which jobs in a spreadsheet so I did not apply to the same job twice. However, what was more important than quantity of applications was being the right candidate for a precarious job. These jobs may advertise that no prior experience is needed and the duties appear basic, but to be hired requires fulfilling certain criteria.

In this chapter I examine hiring into precarious work closely. Before anyone is a precarious worker, exposed to the insecurities of a job, they first have to be job searching and get hired. Getting hired is a fraught process of uncertainty as much as the terms of any job. While the nature of being in a job is important, every precarious worker is affected by their skills and position in the contingent landscape. The opportunities and tribulations of hiring contextualise precarious work to that worker. Certain jobs are closer in the contingent landscape, workers have the inclination to apply to certain sectors and workers have different successes meeting employers' criteria. Precarious work is generally understood to be heterogeneous (Arnold & Bongiovi, 2013; Kalleberg, 2018) that is nonetheless seated in a universal dynamic of precarity or risk (Beck, 2000; Han, 2018; Lorey, 2015). Hiring reveals some of the aforementioned 'structures of diversity' that stand between that heterogeneity and the general flexibilization in work (Castells, 2010). In this chapter I examine the risk of being hired into precarious work through three sections.

The first section examines the contours and features of the contingent landscape. Hiring into precarious work has a fast quality to it, whereby one can be hired at short-notice with apparent minimal procedure. This fast characteristic is facilitated by an infrastructure of classifieds, high street employment agencies and new hybrid 'app based' employment agencies that all connect workers with jobs. The second section examines the motivations of workers and their attractions to precarious work in the context of its fast nature. Workers enter into precarious work under the

conditions of being excluded from better forms of work or requiring a quicker, more convenient short-term option. The third section takes the closest look at what workers go through when being hired. This discusses the accelerated candidate evaluation and onboarding that workers go though. However, while these often hire on an almost 'first come, first served' basis, there are many barriers that the worker can get 'snagged' on ending their chances of getting the job.

Hiring is the perennial process of being a precarious worker. Job insecurity mean that workers may frequently find themselves searching for work and going through the hiring process. Therefore, while the focus of this chapter is on 'first encounters', the processes here are participated in again and again as workers lose their jobs or decide to try another.

6.2 The Contours and Features of the Contingent Landscape

To begin is a mapping exercise, I describe the contours and features of the landscape. These are not the features of the jobs, such as the contract, but are the features as phenomenological landscape -what precarious work looks like in practice for job searchers. Two features stand out. First is the 'fast' nature of precarious work and second is the connective infrastructure between workers and jobs. Together, these represent a tremendous utility of *accessibility* that is critically interrogated in the subsequent two sections of this chapter.

6.2.1 The Fast Nature of Precarious Work

Amongst labour sociologists precarious work tends to be identified by its inherent uncertainty compared to other work (Kalleberg, 2009; Vosko, 2010). In this section, I propose another line of difference from standard employment: the speed of hiring. The uncertainty of precarious work is attributed to deregulatory labour shifts (Standing, 2011), macro-economic shifts (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017) and more flexible tendencies in management (Sennett, 1998; Weil, 2014). However, these trends have a parallel effect on work, accelerating and simplifying hiring. Precarious work can be available at short-notice and with less concern for the specific candidate in order to get *someone* as soon as possible.

A case that exemplifies the fast nature of precarious work is the first job offer I received. When I was looking for work it became clear not all jobs are advertised. In the case of high-street employment agencies one needs to call multiple times to try and get, effectively, lucky by calling when they have a job available. In September of 2020 I called a Green Start Recruitment office for a second time,

> The recruiter asked why I was calling. I wanted to say the broadest possible selection of jobs, without it seeming like I had no preference (because then it would seem not genuine). I said hospitality, clerical work, and maybe cleaning. I said warehouse work would be okay too. From there the recruiter seemed to feel that was okay, and then he asked me where I lived. And here it seems I passed the test, he said there is work in my area, a school down the road (or 40mins away?). He explained that they are very busy with schools looking for additional cleaners.
>
> He then explained the process, and the paperwork involved. He said if I went through the process very quickly then it could be done by the end of the week (today is a Tuesday), and I could be at work next week. [15-9-2020]

I had not only found some work to apply for, but it was starting next week. I just needed to get the paperwork out of the way before starting. Over the next few days I submitted my

documentation, completed the online forms and received something resembling an employment contract (employee agreement). Four days later on Saturday I got a reply,

> Yesterday I was expecting a call from Green Start and never got one. This morning I emailed the recruiter asking what was up, and then shortly after I received a generic email from another email address saying my application had been unsuccessful, without any reason given. [19-9-2020]

Such is the nature of being 'fast', precarious work can go as easily as it comes. Evidently, I had either made a mistake in my paperwork, or maybe someone else just got in first, in either case, I missed out. To speak in the language of contracts, this was a zero hour contract (ZHC) job. As ZHCs have minimal legal obligations, they are perfect for being extended in the almost rhetorical manner that Green Start had done so, job offers can be made with little thought as to who one is offering the job to. In this regard, the flexibilization of work (Beck, 2000) impacts job searching through flippant job offers. At the same time, the deregulatory nature of precarious work, in making the job offers able to be made quickly and with little obligation, makes the work exceptionally accessible. This is the nature of the contingent landscape, work is available at short notice, yet liable to disappearing. Staff can be onboarded in days with little concern as to who is being hired, and offers can also be rescinded with equally as little care.

For myself, the experience with Green Start was not the exception, every job I got had this fast characteristic in their own ways. In my interviews I asked participants to narrate their work and education history from finishing high school to today. I would ask for more detail on what it was like to apply, and the common response was one of a minimal hiring process that contrasted greatly with cases of permanent work that were mentioned. Timothy describes an identical process to that of Green Start when inquiring about a driver job at a car auction house in London,

> **Krzysztof**: Browsing Gumtree [online classifieds] for anything you can do, or?
>
> **Timothy**: It basically said anyone with two arms and legs. It was a very simple advert, she called me up same day, explained, like offered me the job on the phone, there was no interview process.

Describing when living in his native Italy, Tommaso describes the first job he ever had as a bike delivery person,

> **Tommaso**: As long as you knew how to drive a motorbike, or a bicycle, that was it, you don't need high school, or, diploma, or, university degree, you don't even get any kind of, audition, interview.

Casper, who had recently moved to the London from Hong Kong, explains the process of hiring to be a football steward,

> **Krzysztof**: And then with the National Stewards job, what was it like to apply for that job? Was it easy to get the job? Did you have an interview?
>
> **Casper**: It's very easy you get single interviews and then some other interview, and then group interviews, and then that's it. They employ you. Anybody that can speak English can apply for this job, that's what I think.

Meanwhile, Raymond describes finding fast work though personal networks in what appears to be better quality work than the prior examples,

> **Raymond**: I ended up working in a photography studio for a bit. I put something on Facebook and someone I used to know, said 'oh my friend runs this place'. And I sent them an email and they were like 'yeah cool'.

Examining the entire work narratives of the interviewees, the nature of these firms and jobs, and my field work, precarious workers are rarely hired through would resemble a traditional hiring method in the UK. That is, an intake with a deadline, a short-list, an interview, an evaluation of candidates, selection of best candidate, a formal extension of an offer and a negotiation over the final terms of employment. While the traditional hiring process may lead to better outcomes for workers through a fairer system and developing a stronger relationship between employer and employee, it is also laborious and long. In many cases, the deregulated nature of non-standard contracts, and the nature of precarious work broadly, mean that a different hiring process is desired or needed: hire the first suitable person that makes contact. Such hiring is more like the informal economy (Han, 2018) than the formal economy of a developed country like the UK. While precarious work is inherently unstable, the speed and apparent simplicity of the hiring process in many ways represents the 'good' (Han, 2018) of precarity, and as shall be shown, the utility of precarious work. In the next section I discuss the infrastructure that aids in finding such job opportunities.

6.2.2 Infrastructure: Classifieds, Apps and Agencies

In addition to the fast nature of individual jobs, there is an immense infrastructure that facilitates movement into jobs and the ongoing allocation of precarious workers. When job searching one comes to find concentrations of jobs or particularly useful resources. At the outset are classifieds and high-street employment agencies that play a large role. However information technology is also creating a new fabric (Castells, 2010) for precarious workers in the form of app-based agencies that supply workers to workplaces such as festivals, restaurants, factories and stadiums on a rota or on a per shift basis, notified through smartphone apps. The term infrastructure is pertinent here (Larkin, 2013), the following aspects are built across the landscape and aid in connecting workers to jobs.

Firstly, are the classifieds websites. These can be general job boards like Indeed, however other websites, such as GumTree or Facebook also have a lot of specifically precarious jobs. Classifieds are used by workers because there is a lot of relatively easier to get precarious jobs on these websites. For example is Arral, a London-born man with a corporate career in his thirties. Arral was made redundant from his corporate job, and due to a hiring freeze during Covid-19 struggled to find another comparable job. Therefore, he began looking for 'anything' and eventually found some fast work,

> **Arral**: So I found the job on GumTree, I looked everywhere. I keep changing where my search -where I'm gonna search for things and on GumTree I just kept on hitting the next button, going page by page.
>
> So this popped up -it said safety steward, £11 an hour, didn't really say the time too much. So I saw that on GumTree, I spoke to a friend about it, -cause it didn't even say A+ Stewards, -it might've -I asked a friend about it -he said yeah you should just take it because you know, cause you need it.
>
> I click onto -it actually takes you to their website. The first bit was you just fill out a form -they didn't even ask for my CV. Just fill out a form, name, -the usual- address. I can't even remember if it asked me for my previous work experience.

At this point, Arral had been unemployed for nearly eight months. While he made some money trading in exercise weights at the start of Covid-19, he eventually did need to try to balance his expenses. The role he found was a Covid-19 testing steward, and after making contact Arral was rushed through the hiring process to start soon. As per the fast nature however, his start date kept being pushed back. Castells (2010) argues that while societal transformation is not caused by information technology, that transformation is accelerated and intensified by the technology. This

is very clear with precarious work, where the infrastructure is largely digital and does not cause anything 'new' but helps access the work. In classifieds the digital aspect helps as the classified can link directly to an online form and the hiring process can begin rapidly. Similarly to Gumtree, another common source of work in the UK is Facebook,

> **Aarav**: I started applying for Facebook as well. I got that as a Velocity Recruiter, so I applied. I just messaged her and then they replied and gave me time and that led to go and apply for the job.

Again, this was a zero hour, 'fast' job where Aarav was invited to the office to apply quickly and then begin work in a few weeks. These classified websites are pools of immediate start, low barrier to entry, precarious work.

Secondly, are high-street employment agencies. These are agencies with high-street retail offices where agents connect employers and workers in a more-or-less manual fashion. Forde and Slater (2016) has noted the evolution of these agencies in the UK over the past four decades. Today, many offer immediate start work with little experience required. For example, is Attaf who describes how twenty years ago in his native Northern Ireland he needed work after graduating from his master's degree. Agencies would not only hire him, but hire him immediately,

> **Attaf**: It's like an instant scratch card where you have a job, there's a need for that job, and then I just, you know fulfil that need.

Attaf mentions not only the speed, but also describes it as if there is plentiful work 'waiting' for someone to apply. He happens to describe the 'empty places' concept, that there is a pre-existing need that he can easily fulfil. Meanwhile is Derrick, who describes high-street agencies more recently in London. Derrick is in his twenties, and grew up and graduated university in England. Shortly before we met he was set to begin training for a government job, but this was cancelled in light of Covid-19. He then struggled to find any employment at all, but when it comes to employment agencies, he echoes the comments from Attaf,

> **Derrick**: Agencies are, they respond the quickest. You go see Indeed, you see a job there, it's under agency, an agency will call you tell you to sign up, you go there, you sign up, they promise you 'oh yeah we'll be able to get you, there's loads of jobs going on right now, we'll be able to get you back in work'.
>
> Now, someone like ourselves, who've been out of work for a long period of time and who is looking to get back into the work process and get back into it, this is a gold mine, this is 'oh yeah we're able to go back into work'.

While overall Derrick is critical of agencies, from the landscape perspective of looking at these jobs, Derrick frames employment agencies as having fast work. However, he describes not just that the work is available in the short term, but also that the work is *plentiful* and *assured*. The role of an infrastructure in connecting workers to jobs is more than just convenience, it transforms the nature of precarious work. Employment agencies have been noted as continuing to expand and evolve in the UK, particularly since 1990, and now they appear to be common (Forde & Slater, 2016). In Derrick's quote one can see the border of the contingent landscape in the difference between before and after you contact an agency. At first one is out of work for a long time, and then suddenly the agency is saying there is plenty of work for you.

Digital technology has further altered the landscape with the introduction of smartphone app-based employment agencies that operate much gig platforms. These represent the deepest integration of information technology (Castells, 2010) in precarious work. These app-based agencies -such as EasyHire, Crowd, Stint and Red Recruitment- merge traditional shift rotas with the technology of gig platforms to place workers granularly on a weekly or even per-shift basis in

workplaces like supermarkets and factories. Just like one may order an Uber, a factory manager can order factory operatives to manufacture a surge in customer orders. General online research indicates that these app-based agencies began in the hospitality industry, but during the Covid-19 pandemic pivoted to the industrial, retail and logistics sectors.

The app-based agencies function by pre-screening employers and employees and then allowing them to operate freely on an internal, largely automated job board. Employers are free to hire for as little or as many shifts at once as they want, set the wage, notify the location and choose an employee. Workers 'swipe' through jobs on their smartphone and apply directly to the employer. Attaf, who twenty years ago was working for the high-street agency after graduating, describes recently coming to work for Crowd and EasyHire in London, and shows how the fast nature is intensified tremendously,

> **Attaf**: Then, I moved to the apps. Which I find were incredibly amusing, I could choose, and have that choice, and I could also compress the work, into one or two shifts in a 24 hour window,
>
> **Krzysztof**: What do you mean?
>
> **Attaf**: When I was with Crowd, -Crowd have a very good base of hotels and restaurants, so, when I did, the double, most of it was double, it would be, breakfast service and then something else. So the breakfast service would start at 6AM, finish at 11 or 12, I would finish that shift, I would go home sometimes. Wait for something else, change and go to the next shift, so I was quite happy doing this.

The fast characteristic of precarious work reaches its zenith when accessed through the app-based agencies. The work is made so accessible that one can chain a disparate and changing suite of shifts into a full-time-plus job. Attaf would later explain to me how he was banned from Crowd for working a dangerous amount of hours in a week, although this seems very uncommon overall. However, this reflects the limitations precarious workers can face, whereby if they want to earn more money they can only do so by working more hours. In my experience, I found the app-based agency EasyHire to be an almost breakthrough in finding work and getting hired.

Precarious work is not just uncertain work, its substance is 'built up' with infrastructure (Larkin, 2013) that facilitates the efficient placement of workers. Information technology is unlikely to cause a transformation, but shall certainly make emerging changes more intensive and extensive (Castells, 2010). From classifieds, high-street employment agencies to app-based agencies, an infrastructure helps workers find jobs that range in duration from ongoing work to a single shift. This infrastructure is commonplace and most interviewees had used an employment agency or an app to find work. Furthermore, these firms have the capacity to advertise publicly, extending their visibility. At its most developed, the infrastructure combines non-standard employment contracts (Kalleberg, 2009) with telecommunications and bureaucratic technologies (Castells, 2010) to create a more fluidic (Bauman, 2000) working environment of rapidly opening and closing empty places and a highly mobile workforce that moves between them. In this regard, the 'structures of diversity' (Castells, 2010) that make uniform change heterogeneous begin to come to light in fast work and infrastructure.

6.2.3 Summary: The Fast Nature of Precarious Work

Precarious work is not just '*uncertain*, *unstable*, and *insecure*' (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017: 1), it is also *fast*. These employers all need people in a very short amount of time, which makes the no guaranteed hours contracts (NGHCs) that they use attractive. There are many reasons that an employer could need someone at short-notice. A worker might pull out of their shift, the shift last night was slower than expected and there is now a backlog or there is just more work to do due

to consumer demand. In any case, the workplace is now a person down and so someone gets called up. At the same time, there is an infrastructure (Larkin, 2013) being established. This infrastructure pairs NGHCs (Kalleberg, 2009), the fragmentation of work duties (Marchington et al., 2005) and telecommunications technology (Castells, 2010) to disseminate information about empty places as they open. Together, fast work and the infrastructure add up to a contingent landscape of readily available, albeit uncertain, work. While there are tremendous drawbacks to this type of work, the emphasis so far has been on the hitherto unexamined fast nature. In the following section I examine the attraction of fast work, and then the realties that make this work so fast, or potentially obstruct access altogether.

6.3 Risk and Reward of Job Searching

This section examines why people go into precarious work. In respect of the fast nature of precarious work, the decision can be figured against two aspects. First, is being excluded from preferable forms of work. Second, is the utility of precarious work whereby it is taken as the practical or convenient option. Each are not mutually exclusive, but refer to an intensity of the work being either the only choice that the worker has to take or a convenient answer that meet the worker's immediate needs.

6.3.1 Exclusion: The Only Work

Many interviewees described being in a position of struggling to find any work at all. The contingent landscape, with its uncertain and fast work, appears as the only option these people have. Access to work is structured by discourses of worker identity such as gender, class and ethnicity (Weeks, 2011), and this appears to play a factor in precarious work through people's embeddedness in the labour market. Those new to London or the UK altogether are most vulnerable to exclusion as they lack the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) that they could use to tap into permanent or better quality forms of work.

When we spoke, Casper had been in London for six months, having recently moved from Hong Kong with his partner. Motivated to leave Hong Kong following the political instability of 2019 and 2020, Casper came to London without a set career plan. In Hong Kong Casper worked comfortably in various customer service roles, leveraging his French language skills to improve his quality of work. In London, Casper had no such advantage, he describes,

> **Casper**: I don't think that I can get any decent job with my limited language ability, [or] qualification, so I would rather do some manual job and to see if there is any changes in my life.

By qualification, Casper is referring to his bachelor's degree in a liberal subject which does not confer any professional status. Casper moved to London and needed to find a job as soon as possible to keep him going. The work he did get was as a kitchen porter and a football steward. These are not jobs that Casper would necessarily have liked to do, but considering the circumstances, he is happy to take these precarious jobs in the short-term. Meanwhile, Foster, also from Hong Kong, describes the nature of taking care work,

> **Krzysztof**: Where did you learn about caring as a job?
>
> **Foster**: No, I did some research when I was in Hong Kong. I see that there's not many people would love to join in this industry, it's not easy. Even in Hong Kong, there's not so many people who love to do this kind of job, yeah, but for me it's a totally good experience.

> **Krzysztof**: Did you figure people don't want to do it so it'll be easy to get?
>
> **Foster**: Yeah, yeah, and also I can do it and there's so many people need this kind of service.

Foster moved to London to live with his girlfriend and to avoid the political turmoil in Hong Kong. Therefore, similar to Casper, he did not have a clear path to getting employed. Foster does not have a degree, and like Casper, previously worked in customer service. Nonetheless, both foresaw being unable to work in their previous occupation in London, and so took what work they could find. In either case, there is a willingness to accept the orthodoxy of neoliberal labour market competition (Polanyi, 1944).

Those that I interviewed from the Sidewalk warehouse were in this position too. Smart Logistics, who operated the warehouse for Sidewalk, had two types of workers, directly employed permanent workers and indirectly (through Velocity Recruitment) workers on ZHCs. One worker I spoke to was Aarav, who originally worked in India as an engineer repairing mechanical equipment. His spouse came to London to study a master's degree, and Aarav trailed. In London, he could not find engineering work however, and so came to work as a warehouse operative,

> **Krzysztof**: How did you find a job? Was it easy or difficult to find a job, did you look for a long time, or…?
>
> **Aarav**: It's not much easy, not that difficult because when I come here, I just start applying for the job after my quarantine period and I started applying for jobs in many places and recruiters like indeed, LinkedIn. Anyway, but there's not a response and I started applying for Facebook as well.
>
> I got that as a Velocity Recruiter, so I applied. I just messaged her and then they replied and gave me time and that led to go and apply for the job. So, it's not that hard.

In Aarav's account we see the relative position of precarious work to permanent work. Insecurity, if anywhere, existed in his engineering career which he could not continue. Meanwhile the warehouse job, due its 'fast' nature where one can be hired at short-notice, became a contributor to security. In this manner, labour market competition pushed Aarav into worse work. The engineering job was impossible to get, yet the warehouse job was easy. However, the warehouse position, that I briefly did myself and saw others doing from my position as a retail assistant for Sidewalk, is hard work. It pays poorly and has a difficult rota of alternating weeks that begin at 6AM one week then beginning at 3PM the next.

Finally, is Fiona coming to work in home cleaning. Fiona came to London twenty years ago around the age of thirty from Brazil. In Brazil Fiona had graduated from university and worked in various customer service and receptionist roles. She came to London first only to explore the city and make a change in her life, but then she decided to stay permanently. While Fiona had a degree and work experience from Brazil, when it came to finding work, she describes being excluded from other forms of work,

> **Krzysztof**: Why did you work in cleaning when you came and not in an office?
>
> **Fiona**: Because I didn't know nothing about English, just can say, -I can't say- just like, 'thank you', if it's you come to me and we starting speaking English, and I say, 'sorry, I'm not English' or say 'I don't' know English', something like that.
>
> And [it] was really hard, and the people around me is, if I was around some people who put me up, I think, I didn't work.
>
> When you come from Brazil, like I came from, the mentality of a lot of people, you come here, you don't know English, you need to go and you work in a cleaner or work in a

> kitchen, and even if I have degree there, say well you don't know, I say well, I can try, I'm not dumb'. But yeah, things really really have, really hard, this is why I start doing some clean.

For Fiona, cleaning appeared to be the only option. While all of these workers had succumb to neoliberal labour market competition pushing them into worse work, Fiona's case raises the relevance of gender and ethnicity (Walby, 2013; Weeks, 2011) to this market competition. Work that is derived from the feminine domain of caring and the home are often precarious. For example, caring has one of the highest rates of zero hour contracts in the UK (Farina et al., 2020) and has been the subject of clear degradation of work quality and pay in Australia (Baines et al., 2019). The association of such work with women mean that through the complexities of hiring, more women would be expected into these industries. However, as industrial work has shifted from being a white and male dominated industry (Weeks, 2011), the terms of employment there has in parallel degraded. Therefore, I observed many non-white men and women working in precarious warehouse and industrial work. This is a pattern observed globally (Ngai, 2005). While precarious workers are pushed into worse work through the orthodoxy of free market labour market competition, there is a tremendous ethnic and gender sorting to this process occurring. These workers are not just excluded from good quality work, but are selectively included into certain low-quality work by gender and ethnicity.

In my fieldwork I observed various gender and ethnic concentrations in different workplaces, often follow geographical patterns depending on what ethnicity was living nearest. In the Dream Print factory I worked exclusively with five non-British European women, four of which were Hungarian. Meanwhile, the Sidewalk packing department was almost entirely Eastern European women while other departments were dominated by Indian men and women. The more labour-intensive role at Big Delivery was entirely men. These observations are tentative, but display how precarious work is shaped by marginalisation. Now that manufacturing work is not protected, it has become the domain of non-white and non-British individuals that are men and women. Meanwhile the care and housework industries are likely to remain female dominated.

Landscape can be useful to examining gender and ethnic stratification for helping to describe what work is 'nearest' in social and physical space. Ethnic networks can lead workers into certain sectors. What is interesting is that while Fiona drew on her networks and community to find this work, the social capital did not improve the quality of the work she found. Her cleaning role was one of the worst jobs described by any interviewee. Cleaning is common among Latin American visitors to London, in their study McIlwaine and Bunge (2019) found 66% of participants worked in cleaning on arrival to London, with English ability being the main differentiator of whether one went into cleaning or not. Fiona's account shines light on the composition of her precarity. It is both a factor of other forms of work being 'closed off' due to having poor English, but also that cleaning is readily available. Indicative of fast work, cleaning is one of the 'go to' work among Latin American visitors/migrants. Fiona's case shows how the contingent landscape is segmented and for her cleaning was the natural, and even compelled choice. However, when I applied for similar looking cleaning jobs on GumTree, I got no reply.

Some workers are excluded from permanent or 'non-precarious' work, yet precarious work stands out not just for all that is left, but for being more-or-less easy and straight forward to get. These individuals lack the capital, skills or experience to find permanent work in London. In a work society like the UK where a job is the only viable option to live (Weeks, 2011), one's only recourse is to participate in the logic of the free labour market. However, this labour market is stratified by gender and ethnicity meaning people have very different experiences. What 'worst' job one finds and ends up working depends on one's social and physical location the in contingent landscape. Marginalised groups are not only more likely to be excluded from permanent work, but are also

more likely to go into worse quality jobs than their more privileged counterparts. However, this worst quality work still retains the quality of being 'fast' in the sense of rapid hiring. This shows the beginning of the dual nature of precarious work, a product of exclusion of permanent work, generating an insecurity over employment, and yet precarious work is an almost saviour compared to unemployment. However, the nature of that 'saviour' is a product of one's ethnicity, class and gender. Precarious work is part of the dedication to employment that Weeks (2011) describes in contemporary societies, where it seems no matter how bad the work is, how unfair the bargain between employee and employer, all one can do is be at the mercy of the free labour market.

6.3.2 Utility: Practical and Convenient

In addition to being excluded from better work, interviewees also expressed that precarious work was simply the practical and convenient option, and in many cases this was the dominant reason for taking an insecure job. However, this is not just a matter of preferring flexibility (Wong & Au-Yeung, 2019) or wanting a creative career (Donald, Gertler, & Tyler, 2013), this desire is inherent to the fast nature of precarious work. Some interviewees appeared to be excluded to a lesser extent from permanent work than those in the previous section, but were also drawn to the utility of work that is faster to get. The utility of precarious work is indicative of a 'work society' (Weeks, 2011) where the only way to engage collectively or acquire resources is through work. These people may look for permanent work in a half-hearted way that is reflective of their limited options, to come to the practicality of taking a precarious job quickly.

In some cases exclusion and utility work together. After finishing high school in Italy, Tommaso decided to take a one year break to save money for university in London. He worked two jobs with NGHCs as a bike delivery driver, but he describes his job search as being excluded from the better work,

> **Krzysztof**: Were there any jobs that you got offered that you passed up on, or was this the first offer?
>
> **Tommaso**: It was the first, yeah, it was first time, it was also the first time of me looking for a job, first time of me doing a CV, so obviously [laugh]. I might have sent it around some places, but I don't think I ever got any, response honestly, because it was pretty ridiculous, obviously, I didn't have anything but I'm graduated in high school and that's it.

So Tommaso felt restrained by his position, and felt almost embarrassed to be applying for permanent jobs. However, there was no period of anguish where he was being rejected again and again, only to decide that all he could do was bike delivery. Instead there was a half-hearted, and maybe realistic in this respect, search for permanent work before taking a job for its 'fast' quality,

> **Tommaso**: With that agency in Italy, which is why I went in there, because it was the quickest way to find the job, that wasn't too bad, the pay as well wasn't too bad.

Tommaso was filling out a gap year, which he used to save money for university. He only had twelve months or so, and needed to begin work quickly. Tommaso's main 'career' was being a university student, and that would not begin for another year. Therefore, he is not strictly excluded from permanent work due to having an empty CV, he is as much excluding himself from permanent work due to not wanting to retrain. He has this time to fill, and the fastest job he can find might not be ideal, but it was acceptable to him in the short-term. This case shows the complexity of precarity. Critically, Tommaso was needing to save money for the unaffordable university study and living in London. In a neoliberal 'work society' (Weeks, 2011) one's natural inclination, and likely only option, is to earn the money through work. Precarious work, through this whittling down of options, becomes the only 'solution' to Tommaso's predicament. In this

manner is restriction and openings, insecurity and security that operate together to generate the general and the specific case of precarity for Tommaso.

Timothy, an Englishman, was in a similar position of filling time having missed out on a working-holiday visa and needing to wait a year before applying again. Despite graduating with a business degree, he spent the year working in hospitality roles in the South-East of England,

> **Krzysztof**: You didn't think about trying to find a business job or something like that?
>
> **Timothy**: I mean, maybe I looked briefly? But it's always, I guess when I was young as well, you get put off by 'need two years' experience' and when every sort of job application is saying that, you just don't have the confidence to apply when you're young.

Timothy describes being discouraged by the permanent and university-qualified job market, here then, the fast nature of precarious work was attractive to him. In this case, his previous experience compounded the qualities and made the work even more attractive,

> **Krzysztof**: Why do you think you ended up in these [hospitality] positions?
>
> **Timothy**: I kinda wanted to work with people, my ageish. I only had like couple jobs in uni, and they were all in pubs, so it's kind of what I thought -it's the only experience I got, -so I'm gonna have an easier time getting a job in that kind of industry.

Facing the restrictions of the job market, as those excluded did, Timothy also saw the relative utility of entering bar work, which was made more the case due to his previous experience. In contrast to Fiona entering cleaning work earlier, Timothy was in a different location in the contingent landscape whereby bar work was the 'closest' and most visible to him.

In the same vein is Ekeema's attitude to working at Sidewalk. Ekeema grew up in London and graduated from a Russel Group university in the fashion field. However, she never found her feet in the permanent job market and at the time of speaking was a few years out of university taking odd jobs while living with her parents. Ekeema described how one day she thought about how she wants to move to Spain to teach English. So, she turned to the precarious work that she knew to get money,

> **Ekeema**: I'm going to need to make some money so I can pay for this, so I was like I've done sample sales before, like let me just look for some.
>
> I didn't really know what else to do, so I just applied to like loads of things, even before the pop-up, I did like a two day of a sample sale with at this place called Diamond Shop, they always have sample sales, and I'd worked with a company that did a sale there before, I just messaged them like, okay like, 'do you have any sample sales coming up? and they messaged me and let do two trial shifts, and then, have a day off, and then I started working at the warehouse with Sidewalk.

The exact work that one takes is a product of their location in the contingent landscape, making some jobs easier and faster to get than others. Ethnicity, gender, class and other discourses can all impact what a job is or what type of a worker one will become (Weeks, 2011). Ekeema had a degree in fashion marketing and had relevant work experience that made this kind of work the fastest for her to get. In one sense, this is the work that was 'closest' to her in the landscape. Overall though, she was not seeking something permanent, just seeking something that had the fast characteristic. Reflective of this, she was able to find work within a few days. Here, precarious work is a ready option that she could just 'turn on' when she needed it. Overall though, while she did not like working at Sidewalk, it was still a convenient option. As with the other interviewees in this section, Ekeema probably would have preferred a more fulfilling job, but for the time being, insecure retail work was a practical answer.

In addition to being excluded from permanent or better quality work, precarious work, due to its fast nature, has a utility that draws workers to it. While most workers would prefer a permanent or better quality job, the practicalities of fast work make it an acceptable option at least in the short-term. Throughout this section, there is a tension between exclusion from permanent work and the compulsion or requirements to work in a highly capitalist society like contemporary UK (Weeks, 2011). While on the one hand, workers are able to use work instrumentally for their own ends, the critical viewpoint (Weeks, 2011) implores one to ask why work was the only source of short-term income, or the means to fill empty time for these workers. Understanding precarity requires to see the restrictive compulsion of work society (Weeks, 2011) and the productive power (Foucault, 2008) of the utility in fast work.

6.3.3 Summary: Pragmatics of Precarious Work

The discussion shows the positionality inherent to the contingent landscape. Work and worker identities are gendered, ethnic and classed (Weeks, 2011). Due to their class, ethnicity, gender or other attribute, workers are in different 'locations' of the contingent landscape, meaning that certain jobs are closer (in terms of social and physical space) or more visible to them, making some precarious jobs faster and easier to get than others. In this section, the jobs that people found varied dramatically depending on their position. Those new to London tended to lean on the infrastructure and so were filtered into more general warehouse, stewarding and kitchen work. In the case of Fiona, her ethnic networks led to home cleaning. Meanwhile, those with more cultural or social capital had 'precarious occupations' that they could turn to rapidly. This includes Timothy taking bar work or Ekeema clothing retail work. Both of those cases are relatively better quality work that seems to relate to their Britishness. In either case, what job was the 'practical and convenient' option was a matter of the individual's location in work discourses (Weeks, 2011) and the contingent landscape. In this regard, the contingent landscape is heavily textured with different physical (I.E. the city and commuting distance) and social 'locations' that workers are in. Some jobs are far away, others near. These cases represent the beginning of precarious work trajectories that I shall trace through the following analysis chapters.

More importantly, worker positionality changes what the appeal or possibility of precarious work is. Precarious work is attractive for two reasons. Firstly, the speed of precarious work reflects the fewer barriers to entry compared to other, 'slower' permanent work, making it the only choice for some workers. Secondly, fast work can be attractive because the individual needs a job fast and without too much effort. These show a relationship to different aspects of the labour market. While workers may similarly be in precarious work, they are differentiated by the finality of precarious work -that is whether they have a credible trajectory out. This is a point highlighted by Knox et al. (2015) in their 'transient or trapped' characteristic of hotel attendants. Therefore the class aspect of precarious work emerges not in one's relationship to the specific job, or even occupation or sector, as a classical reading may suggest (Giddens, 1971; Grint, 2005), but in one's relationship to precarious work as a whole, or in the language of this thesis, the contingent landscape. Workers can be differentiated for using precarious work as a last resort or as a convenient option. The discussion shows how the fast characteristic of precarious work is a utility used by workers to pursue their goals. Yet, it also shows how the decision is at times driven by exclusion from better or permanent forms of work. As excluded, workers then turn to the logics of a highly neoliberalised labour market (Polanyi, 1944) where all they can do is put their labour power up for sale. A complex relationship emerges between exclusion from permanent work and inclusion into precarious work. In this regard, the logic of in/security is present. As workers escape the insecurity of a permanent job market that will not hire them, the relative utility of a fast job is clear in providing a short-term solution. However, that does not necessarily make one more 'secure' overall. Rather taking the fast job is to enter into a new balance of in/security, the immediate vulnerabilities of unemployment may be remedied, but in doing so, an entirely new

set of vulnerabilities of precarious work are introduced. In this manner the free labour markets of neoliberalism create a utility of fast work through the rescinding of good options.

So far the analysis has presented precarious work as a remarkably accessible form of work, however the chapter began by noting how much difficulty I had in my first few months. The final section of this chapter discusses this duality through the filtering mechanisms of 'fast lanes'.

6.4 Fast Lanes of Precarious Work and the 'Precarious Work Ethic'

So far the discussion has occurred on the surface of the contingent landscape, with workers navigating a job market and perceiving different job offers. To actually reach one of these jobs though, workers have to move down a fast lane consisting of evaluation criteria. Many of these jobs are mere empty places, a fairly generic lack in the labour process. The contours of that empty place, the availability, documentation and competency required to work in it, are telescoped through the fast lane to the job market. If one conforms, then they move down the lane rapidly and the job conforms to the 'fast' characteristic described so far. However, if one does not conform, then the worker is effectively ejected from the fast lane altogether and the job is inaccessible. Altogether, fast lanes can be thought of as assessing the worker's conformity to a 'precarious work ethic', which is similar to the post-Fordist one described by Weeks (2011). In this regard, fast lanes are very much a practical and concrete manifestation of post-Fordism beyond just the flexibilization of work. In this manner, precarious work is simultaneously fast and easy, yet can be extremely evasive. The following discussion covers three measures of evaluation present in fast lanes: availability, documentation and competence.

6.4.1 Being Available

The first concern for precarious employers is whether the worker is available to do the job, often by the terms of fluctuating hours. Therefore, in many cases the primary concern is hiring someone who is maximally available. If the worker claims suitable availability, then they proceed down the fast lane towards the job.

When one calls high-street employment agencies or employers that are hiring into a precarious job, the first piece of information the employer will ask for is one's commute and day-to-day availability. If the worker conforms to the availability criteria then they may proceed, if not, then the discussion is liable to ending. In April of 2021 I applied to Velocity Recruitment for a warehouse operative position, the next day they called me,

> Velocity Recruitment asked me my postcode, and whether I wanted to work full-time or part-time. Then they asked if I can come in the next day at 9:00am for onboarding. [30-4-2021]

The phone call was about a minute long, and having met the availability criteria I was invited to come into the office to be formally onboarded. Availability was not all that was required to be hired, but at this stage availability was the concern as to whether I could proceed down the fast lane or not. Jason, who I met at the Sidewalk warehouse, explained a similar phone call with Velocity Recruitment for the same role,

> **Jason**: I applied on Facebook, I got a call from Velocity Recruitment, they ask are you free to work full -I mean five days a week, I say okay, presently I'm not working. So they say that you need to work in picking department, I said okay, I can work in picking but I don't know how picking works. Then [they say] on the first day we have induction [where] they teach us all the different work.

All Jason said he was asked was his availability, that is, can he work five days a week. There is no expectation that one is experienced or skilled in this role. All the agency needs to know is if you can get to the workplace when needed.

The day after my phone call with Velocity Recruitment, I went into their high-street office for onboarding, and availability is again the only thing brought up,

> The three of us sit down, and the woman asks us our address, if we want full-time or part-time, and asks us if we are students. I say full-time and no to the student question. This is all she asks us. She does not introduce herself or the company, or really give any explanation of the context of the situation. It's just the terms of the position and nothing else. [30-4-2021]

For those of us who were sitting in the Velocity Recruitment office, our acceptance to the role seemed to be predicated on living nearby and having no other commitments that could interfere with our being at the workplace. In this regard, the first inclinations of displaying an appropriate work ethic (Weeks, 2011) are visible. Anything resembling an evaluation of our fitness for the job at this stage consisted of the questions 'Full-time or part-time?' and 'Are you a student?'. This empty place requires full availability, here identified by full-time and not being a student. Such is the nature of fast work, a positive answer meant we were being employed and we proceeded to give our proof of work and bank details so we could begin work next week.

If one does not conform to the availability requirement of the job, it can be completely inaccessible. One is either on the fast lane to the precarious job or one is not going to be hired, there is infrequently a grey area or 'slow lane' into precarious jobs. In this manner, conformity to what could be called the 'precarious' work ethic (Weber, 2013; Weeks, 2011) is not only absolute but conducted quite mechanically rather than ideologically. The greater personal demands of precarious work are well documented (Smith & McBride, 2021), but these are typically rendered as a loss of previously held rights and benefits of standard employment (Kalleberg, 2009) and may be better approached as a work ethic (Weeks, 2011). In light of the fast nature of precarious work, personal demands are a barrier to an instantly available job,

> Sitel, the call centre company, called me and said it is required to be fully flexible, all day, seven days a week. I said I said this in the application form, three times, and then they call me. It did not say this in the ad, and availability was asked in the application form. I spent thirty mins applying, doing all these tests, for a job I can't even do. I guess I should've lied about it to see what happens. You need to be really savvy. The position basically requires you to be on call 24/7. [13-10-2020]

As shown in the field note, managing the demands of fast lanes can be very stressful as one misses out on work for what appears to be minor reasons. In the end, the representative said I could not proceed due to having limited availability, which amounted to three hours a week. In order to get the job, I needed to contort myself to fit this job and adopt a precarious work ethic. If I had done so, I likely would have been hired quite rapidly, however having not done so, I was passed for any possibility of being hired.

Availability raises again the presence of the 'good' (Han, 2018) within the 'bad' that needs to be grasped to understand precarious work and precarity. Through fast lanes precarious work is made abundant or sparse for workers. If one can conform to the availability requirements, then work becomes quite accessible in the manner of the 'good'. However, if you cannot conform -due to your commute being too long, being a student or having other care commitments- then the high-street employment agency form of fast work can be incredibly evasive. In this regard, one would need to find work that conformed to a different time and geography of availability, such as bike delivery work. The key is that precarious work is not inherently or inevitably insecure, but these

characteristics are predicated on one's ability to conform to the fast lane. In what follows I examine two more burdens that workers must pass to move down a fast lane.

6.4.2 Being Documented

The second key requirement to pass in a fast lane is a typically burdensome documentary requirement. This ranges from legal requirements, such as medical questionnaires, company orthodoxy (the belief one needs a National Insurance Number to work), or in other cases it appears to be an illogical bureaucratic overstretch (such as asking five years' address history), and finally, are cases of needing to prove one's good standing. This represents the evolution of Weberian rational bureaucracies in work (Giddens, 1971; Weber, 1978) to facilitate the logic of being a network enterprise (Castells, 2010) that has to by dynamic and employ many unknown individuals. I believe that with so many applications and such a 'light touch' to candidate evaluation, a documentary burden is used to screen out the applicants in favour of what are considered to be the best.

While employers may 'hire' workers over the phone after only few questions about availability, afterwards the worker will need to complete a number of forms that can range greatly in number depending on the employer. When applying to precarious jobs and particular agencies, it is not uncommon to be inundated with forms,

> These consisted of a health form (a checklist of anything you can think of, asking do you have it), a very basic literacy test, previous employment, work preferences and availability, mobile workers' form, and 48 hour+ form. These forms were then taken away, and new forms were presented, these were more formal, and consisted of the actual onboarding information (bank account, etc.) and the contract. [21-10-2020]

The strangest question I was asked was from PMP Recruitment, who hire for Amazon, who asked my mother's maiden name. As stated, the paperwork achieves different ends. Some forms are legal declarations required to work, such as the health forms in order work in food production (Do you have boils?) or the statutory declaration to work more than forty-eight hours a week. While not required to work, many employers will require a National Insurance Number (NIN) that is needed to pay the appropriate amount of tax, and without one, payroll is more complex. However, employers may go beyond any legal requirement and introduce their own documentary burden.

Many employers who hire in bulk (such as high-street employment agencies or large employers) require documentation well beyond the legal requirement. Empty places are governed much like a Weberian bureaucratic office where the worker has to meet certain rational stipulations (Giddens, 1971; Weber, 1978). This documentation does not include professional certifications or qualifications, but appear aimed at the general standing and credibility of the individual. This aspect is the most problematic for workers as these are the hardest to attain documents. Firstly, many employers will request an address proof from a bank or utility firm. In my own experience, having just moved to London and living in a temporary accommodation meant that I did not have these forms. Thus, this puts a burden on those out of stable accommodation or new to the city. Furthermore, to work anywhere deemed 'sensitive', such as a mail distribution centre or as an event steward there are stricter obligations. This requires declaring five years' address and employment history, although of course these are not checked in any way. Meanwhile, one may need to procure a basic DBS certificate, effectively a criminal record check. Generally these forms are not rigorously checked and are a box-ticking exercise. For example, address proof forms can be generated automatically through online banking portals and my DBS certificate actually had the wrong name on it, just 'K', and so the check would not have been effective. Overall, fast lanes are shaped with these different documentary requirements in the manner of filling a bureaucratic

office (Weber, 1978) but are contributing to this 'precarious work ethic' (Weber, 2013) of being a generic and easily-moved source of labour power. Much like with availability, documentation unlocks fast access, and the only alternative is no access. When one has all the documents, the process can be, while laborious, more or less transparent.

Interviewees infrequently mentioned difficulties passing documentary requirements, but I did encounter and observe some barriers that are exemplary of 'fast lanes'. For example, many online application forms require a valid NIN in order to be submitted. In two instances where I managed to slip through and had a job offer, it was rescinded for lacking a NIN, as occurred with retail chain Wilko,

> On Monday, today, I did get a call from the manager of the Wilko. She explained that she wanted to hire me, and she actually even called on Saturday and missed me, and went to call back on Monday, which was very nice. But she said I need NIN and I need proof and she cannot hire me without it, so right now I do not know. She asked me to do some more onboarding online, which I completed. And I guess it depends on what the Wilko legal department say. [21-9-2020]

In this case I applied and got an interview, and then was apparently on the fast lane to getting the job and starting work soon. However, lacking a NIN derailed that process. Testament to the speed of precarious work, I actually received a pay stub for one pound in the mail from Wilko, indicating I had been put on payroll in some manner. In addition to NIN, I also needed to overcome having no proof of address. One interviewee, Derrick, an Englishman who was 'sofa-surfing' for much of 2020 on friend's and family's couches to save money, encountered this limitation too,

> **Derrick**: The one thing is that a lot of these jobs require you to actually have an address, so they'll ask you like, oh, where are you living right now, but you can't really give them a permanent address because you don't have one, so, a lot of the jobs I thought I could get I wasn't able to get because I just did not have the information required.

To try learn more about this, I contacted many employers and employment agents for a key informant interview, but none ever replied. While proof of work and the other documentation are trivial for most people to produce, they can pose significant difficulties for those who lack or cannot manufacture this information.

Finally, simply completing documentary forms can pose a burden on those with poor English, meaning they need to find ways to circumvent the questions. At the simplest, for example, agencies that place any workers into food production will always ask a bank of medical questions regardless of the sector they think the individual might work in. This poses an unexpected hindrance to getting hired due to the literacy required. As I observed at the Superwork Recruitment office,

> The man who was already there was having trouble completing his forms. He said he could not complete the medical form, as he could not read the (presumably medical terms); so here one may be basically fluent in English, but not be able to read 'eczema'. The staff, in quite generous terms, explained that they cannot help with him with this form, and as he cannot complete it, they were 'sorry', but they cannot hire him. The man said okay, I understand, thanks, and left. [21-10-2020]

This documentary element poses another trivial yet easy to trip-up on barrier in hiring. The criteria are enforced strictly. This is not to say that everyone in these jobs understands all of these terms, this man should have just blindly ticked 'no' down the list and nothing would have ever come of it. Ironically, Superwork also had a one-page English test as well that was far simpler than these medical terms.

In addition to availability, fast lanes are also shaped by documentation. This has clear associations with rational bureaucracy that has governed capitalist work since its inception (Weber, 1978), however here the implementation are adapted from hierarchy to network (Castells, 2010). Documentation is not used to measure one's fit for office *per se*, but to ensure the individual is trustworthy to be inserted into the network as a type of unknown stranger. Weber (1978) stated that rationalization is more efficient (Giddens, 1971), and that applies here too. Documentary requirements allow one to move into a job very rapidly, however, if one cannot meet these requirements then the hiring process is likely to stop altogether. Documentation fulfils different specific needs. In some cases it is a legal requirement in things like right to work. In other cases, documentation is used to prove a workers' standing through proofs like address. For 'sensitive' workplaces, this can extend to five years of work and address history. While laborious, but trivial, for most people to complete, these documentary requirements can exclude outsiders, those already facing stress in their lives through things like homelessness or those with poor English language skills.

6.4.3 Being Competent

The final aspect is to display competency in terms of specific skills and the most explicit measurement of work ethic (Weber, 1978; Weeks, 2011). In regard of work-ethic, employers are almost inserting a 'speed bump' in the fast lane in order to make candidates have to display their professionalism and dedication as workers. In the first instance are formal evaluations of English ability, but many roles have specific competency requirements such as customer service that are tested. Importantly, competency is not measured on a scale where the best worker is chosen after everyone is assessed, but instead competency is measured in the same rationalised yes/no manner of availability and documentation. Demonstrating competency may be done by notifying about previous work experience, completing a training workshop or passing an assessment.

While the first place I worked, Big Delivery, had no such testing regime, I just needed to be available and documented, other employers had substantive testing. Following on from my short interview at the Velocity Recruitment office where I was asked about availability and gave my documentation, the next week was a day-long orientation and testing at the Sidewalk warehouse itself. The material that we were tested on consisted of,

> The actual training session is broad. We did not learn anything about job tasks, just induction. We have a three and half hour training session. It covers Smart Logistics [the company operating the warehouse] and Sidewalk itself. Very thorough introduction, company values, safety, lots of rules and surveillance. Weird high energy drum and bass video. Much talk about the high value of the products. We cover this for ages. We see an unboxing video of a Sidewalk product, to show the excitement and happiness that customers feel. Every package has the name written by hand on the card of the packaging staff "packaged by….".
>
> The 'luxury' of the brand is drilled into us, and we are given responsibility, basically. [6-5-2021]

Much of this appeared to be conferring the gravity of the situation and that one should care about the job. It is a method to root to us to the job and communicate that a certain work ethic would be required. While the concept of work ethic was originated by Weber (2013) to describe working for works' sake as a 'calling', Weeks (2011) points out the evolving nature of the work ethic to about exerting and committing oneself through labour. This is explicit in the hiring process by precarious employers. At Sidewalk, a seriousness was conveyed through illustrating the success and efficiency of the company (it was noted Sidewalk has an office in a notable London office tower) and through highlighting the high value of the products being shipped out of

the warehouse. Next, we needed to demonstrate the retention of this information and our work ethic by passing two multi-choice tests. One consisted of warehouse safety questions such as, 'Who do you report accidents to?' and the other company questions such as 'What are the six Sidewalk company values?' We are not told if we passed or not on the orientation day, only that we shall be hearing back later in the form or a rota if we are hired. The orientation day lasted about six hours and, notably amongst a context of exploitation of zero hour workers, was paid.

While these tests measure one's apparent knowledge of safety or customer service, their methods also test English comprehension, and through concentration and information retention, work ethic. The capitalist work ethic has always demanded an element of dedication from workers, the willingness to put oneself completely into the task and the job (Weber, 2013; Weeks, 2011), and in the fast world of precarious work, this has to be measured somehow. The method of testing, a seminar and multi-choice quiz, pose a significant barrier to those with poor English or those who never learned the classroom skills that these tests rely on. This therefore introduces a significant ethnic-national and class barrier to employment. Yet, this is just the logic of the fast lane that one is conforming to, and real English ability is irrelevant. While Sidewalk had significant testing of information given verbally, I worked with staff who could neither speak nor read English beyond the simplest phrases. I could not arrange an interview with one worker because he did not understand my text messages or phone conversations.

Those with native English may also fail these tests due to being unable to retain all the little details being tested. Some questions are a matter of memory, such as knowing what colour high-visibility vest visitors, as opposed to staff, wear (the answer is pink). The information retention aspect of these tests makes it appear employers are measuring work ethic specifically. One needs to demonstrate their work ethic through sitting up straight and listening for a few hours. Therefore, the safety test is less about safety and more about work ethic. While at Sidewalk I did not see how many people passed, for another job, through employment agency Stint, we were given a similar presentation and test about warehouse safety. In this case, the results were read to the whole room with those failing being asked to leave. About one third failed the test.

Not all competency tests are as rhetorical as at Sidewalk or Stint, but do seem to be a genuine evaluation and measurement. Yet, the way interviewees describe these tests as disingenuous suggests a similar measure of sheer work ethic more than anything else. There is again this notion of a speed-bump down the fast lane and simply needing to exert oneself to show one is serious about the role, rather than actually being assessed on a specific skill. For example, if we remember the corporate-career man named Arral who applied through GumTree to be a Covid-19 testing steward. For this role, competency testing took the form of a 'one-way' interview,

> **Arral**: Then I got an email from their HR. It asked me to do a one way video interview. I think there were about four or five basic questions, what do you know about A+? Then quickly Wikipedia'ed beforehand of course. -And I think each question there's a 90 second time limit. So I quickly made some notes and then did it. For the other, one of them was about the importance of customer experience or customer service, they're very basic competency questions. -Nothing too much really about me even.

Arral's skills were tested, but he also suggests the test was somewhat rhetorical. Earlier, it was mentioned that Casper's perspective on a football steward job that had multiple interviews was, nonetheless, that anyone who could answer would be hired. Arral shows the limitation to that 'anyone': workers need to be able to present themselves and answer basic questions. When I applied for a football steward role I was asked questions such as 'How would you respond to a belligerent member of the public?' -this was not a trick question, I simply said I would remain calm and talk them down, after several questions like this I was offered the job (and then lost it

due to lacking a NIN). For these customer facing roles, there is also likely to be a simple aspect of articulation and presentability.

Similarly, Ekeema describes a more practical test to be a seasonal retail assistant for a mid-market fashion chain some time before she worked at Sidewalk,

> **Ekeema**: They called me in for a group interview, so I went into the branch, and it was a big interview.
>
> I can't really remember everything that we had to do, but I remember us sitting in a big circle, it was probably about, twelve or fifteen people, I remember us having to do some tests. They gave us a challenge to put together an outfit for a fictional client, so we had to go round the whole store, in little groups, and get pieces of clothing or something. And some other stuff that I don't really remember, and then a few days later they messaged me that I got the job.
>
> But I personally feel like they just chose who they felt fitted aesthetics of there. I don't know, their store.., it's weird, it's not like I did better than anyone else.

In line with the earlier notions of position in the contingent landscape, the test Ekeema described could be a challenge for some people, choosing an outfit is likely more difficult than Ekeema makes it out to be. However, for her, the test was again almost quaint and she regarded it as meaningless.

Arral and Ekeema describe more in-depth and industry-specific tests measuring one's customer-service abilities than for warehouses, but there is also a more general tint to these of simply being the 'right type of person'. Arral stated not much was asked about him, and it seems it was more testing his ability to respond correctly. Ekeema felt the test was not genuine. I do not know what these tests were really aiming for, and those administering them probably had multiple different ideas. Nonetheless, there is the aspect of exertion to these tests, they seem to be testing, is the individual prepared to exert themselves to get this job? If the answer is yes, they are more likely to exert themselves in the job. In this regard, a clear formation of a work ethic of dedicated, proactive and industriousness (Weeks, 2011) is being tested, and in some ways, created. For the interviewees though, these tests are an oddity, an awkward and minor hurdle that one has little control over. Across the warehouse safety tests, steward one-way interview and the retail assistant task, these assessments are aiming to identify those who can most seamlessly move into an empty place and begin working immediately and responsibly with the least disruption to operations. These qualities are the essence of a 'precarious work ethic', to some extent described as an identity of adaptability by Winkler and Mahmood (2018).

Employers are attempting to improve the quality of the workers that they hire through rudimentary tasks and exercises that measure competence and one's conformity to a work ethic (Weeks, 2011) demanded of employers. At Sidewalk, the lead instructor told me they have a summer and winter intake of around one hundred employees each. Such large numbers need to be screened in some way, but as these are not 'jobs' in the traditional sense but merely empty places, this needs to done in a manner reflective of the ultimately disposable nature of the workers. This is achieved through two ways, first actually testing some basic skills, although stopping cheating appears to be lax. Second is to create a 'speed bump' to hiring, where the worker has to exert themself in some way. Competence is the final aspect of fast lanes, where if one can conform, work can be available at short-notice.

6.4.4 Summary: Hiring in the Deregulated Economy

The forces driving precarious work generate uncertainty and greater risk, while also reshaping the nature of hiring and access. Precarious work operates through not just the rescinding of securities

and addition of insecurities, but in the form of fast lanes, by creating new lines to employment, and so a limited form of security. These fast lanes are governed by rational bucrearacies (Weber, 1978) that operating as a network (Castells, 2010) that needs to be highly flexible. In doing so, the forces underpinning precarious work open a new line of power through compelling workers to conform to the demands of empty places. Access to precarious jobs is predicated on being available, documented and competent in a yes/no manner. Those that conform can expect a preferential 'fast lane' into work, and those who do not are excluded from employment altogether. This results in getting hired being an uneasy mixture of extreme ease and tremendous barriers. Altogether this amounts to a power of capability, through fast lanes, workers are given the tools to live in/securely -able to find work rapidly that will however be insecure in the medium-to-long term.

Flexibility in work is not so much used to accommodate the worker, but instead flexibility means that the job is configured to a set criteria that workers must conform to. One way of understanding fast lanes is as the imposition of a precarious work ethic. Following Weber (2013), Weeks (2011) describes the constant mutation of the Protestant work ethic through different labour processes and worker bodies. Fast lanes show the practical instigation of a precarious form of this ethic: be available, be generic and be enthusiastically competent. Where the post-Fordist ethic is typically understood as grounded in continuous development, adaptability and emotional labour (Sennett, 1998; Weeks, 2011), fast lanes show a more basic stipulation attached to precarious work. The nature of the precarious work ethic is to become raw, fluid labour power: always ready to be deployed, generic and quantifiable and competent at applying their labour power. These attributes are required in order to be deployed successfully into empty places as the convection currents of the contingent landscape move.

This discussion shines a different light on precarity. Instead of removing securities, the functioning of fast lanes is by productive power and enablement. Precarious work is generally associated as the result of changes in employment taking away securities of standard employment and introducing insecurities of non-standard employment (Betti, 2018). This discussion of fast lanes shows how precarity also functions by the extension of certain 'securities' in the form of fast lanes as a remedy to unemployment. The precarious work ethic intermeshes here as the requirement in order to attain the 'security' of fast work. This is productive power creating new ways-of-being for workers as their insecurity compels them to demonstrate the precarious work ethic: that they are available, documented and competent in exerting themselves. Therefore, labour market flexibility represents an expansion of power of employers, but not simply through the rescinding of securities, but in the creation of a new axes of in/security: being a precarious worker.

6.5 Conclusion: Examining Both Sides -Insecurity and Security- of Precarious Work

In this chapter I have investigated the reality of precarious work on job searching as a whole. The forces that make work precarious also make it *fast*. This gives the work a new utility for precarious workers, in being the most accessible or only form of work they can find. Precarious workers are in this environment of decreasing permanent work and increasing access to precarious work that is the fastest and easiest to get. When examined as worker action in the labour market, for those facing unemployment or needing a job in the short-term, the fast nature is a security in the short-term. Where authors have tend to focus on the labour process in shaping the culture of submitting to work (Burawoy, 1982; Weeks, 2011), the stop-start nature of precarious work mean hiring is now pertinent to shaping worker subjectivities and work ethic (Weber, 2013).

The chapter began with the observation of the 'fast' nature of precarious work, that precarious jobs tend to start at short-notice and hiring is a light touch. This is supported by an infrastructure

of classifieds, high-street agencies and app-based agencies that aid finding and getting into work rapidly. The role of information technology in the flexibilization of work (Castells, 2010) becomes clear, and a bit more concrete, in the digital nature of the infrastructure. When workers cannot find anything else, or need a job relatively quickly with less effort, then the fast nature of precarious work becomes attractive. The discussion ended by examining hiring. Work is governed by an ethic (Weber, 2013; Weeks, 2011). If workers conform to a precarious work ethic of availability, documentation and competence then they are put on a fast lane moving without hindrance into the empty place. If the worker does not conform, they will be excluded in favour of someone who can.

Examining the nature of contemporary work is often thought of as a network (Castells, 2010; Sennett, 2006). Networks are considered to be more dynamic than their predecessor, the hierarchy, because they are liable to adaptations, severing connections and restructuring, this can make workers less certain about work and their lives (Sennett, 2006). The 'network' is captured in this chapter's mapping of the contingent landscape, the fast work, the infrastructure and the nature of its presence for workers that spread through the city like a web. Where typically networks are considered to be one enterprise (Castells, 2010; Sennett, 2006), the reality is that firms can blur into each other (Marchington et al., 2005; Mollona, 2009; Weil, 2014), such as when two companies share the same cleaning firm. Fast work and fast lanes service a networked capitalism (Castells, 2010; Mollona, 2009; Sennett, 2006) with information about empty places that can be rapidly disseminated, workers sorted and finally empty places filled. As such, I have described how information management has led to the more intensive functioning of the contingent landscape. However, the attraction of this contingent landscape is predicated on a more competitive labour market (Brown et al., 2010; Côté, 2014) that squeezes workers out of the hierarchical institutions that have better quality work.

This chapter has taken a 'landscape perspective' approach to analyse precarious work from the perspective of the job seeker. In this regard, I have attempted to show what precarious workers 'see' in a precarious job, at least from the outside. While one is likely to be aware of the insecurity of a ZHC or the low wages of a job, there are also the more obvious aspects such as an immediate job offer or an employment agency having work already 'waiting' for the job seeker. In this regard, the 'good' or the 'security' that exists in precarity and precarious work (Han, 2018; Lorey, 2015) is shown. Examinations of precarity and precarious work have tended to focus on what has been lost or the addition of risk, such as losing one's job, but an adequate investigation has to include the inverse, of success, that is gaining a job. Such a perspective means to see employment deregulation not only as eroding standard employment, but also of building-up a new mode of working that 'enable[s] life' while at the same time 'maintain[ing] it as precarious' (Lorey, 2015: 20). This is the complex reality of precarity: a more competitive and restrictive labour market coupled with more accessible precarious work. In other words, the precarization of work is not a pure erosion of standard employment, but is also a constructive process of structures that enable one to live insecurely. In this manner, the reality of in/security begins to come into view. These provisions of fast or accessible work need to be read critically, however. The fast characteristic enables one to adapt and find work quickly, but this is unlikely to ever amount to becoming 'secure'. In this regard, the highly accessible yet insecure nature of precarious work is a manifestation of in/security.

This analysis has shown the systemic and differentiated nature of precarious work in its consistent qualities and availability to certain individuals based on their social and physical location in the contingent landscape. First, precarious work is *systemic*. Precarious work is not any particular job or a contract, but a socio-technical capability that has agglomerated into one environment. If economic activity has become structured more like a network than a hierarchy (Castells, 2010; Sennett, 2006) then that has manifest itself as fast work, infrastructure and fast lanes. These blur

the distinctions between not just employers, but in a way blur the city, and even the globe, together as one circuit of interconnected labour supply and need. In stating precarity is environmental means it is a technical and pragmatic response to managing market and personal change. This gives firm and real manifestations of ontological precariousness that can at times remain high abstract and detached even through extended discussion (Ettlinger, 2007). Precarious work is all of the work that has been stripped back to just an empty place, to be more responsive to market supply and demand, and to be as light as possible. It is the result of these lightening processes and forces throughout the economic sphere, such as labour deregulation (Standing, 2011) or the fissuring and fragmenting of workplaces (Marchington et al., 2005; Weil, 2014). These processes coalesce, interact and are intensified to form the contingent landscape as a whole and the more visible manifestations like fast work discussed here.

Second, precarious work is *differentiated*. Workers are operating in their locale of the contingent landscape, with some jobs much 'closer' to them than others. In being excluded from permanent work or needing something quickly, workers reach for what is nearby. Work is stratified by gender, ethnicity, class and other aspects of identity (Walby, 2013; Weeks, 2011) as norms govern who can do what job and what kinds of workers different jobs produce. Marginalised individuals are not only more likely to need to take precarious work through being excluded from good quality work, but shall tend to find worse quality precarious work that their more privileged counterparts. I suggest that the contingent landscape may be a valuable concept to examining discursive filtering through conceptualising workers by their physical and social 'distance' to different jobs. Workers can only 'see' certain jobs. In turn, those jobs will only hire those individuals who meet their criteria through the logic of fast lanes. As such, the contingent landscape is traversed by workers' location and their ability to engage with specific facilities of precarious work.

In the next chapter I continue these themes by examining what is like to be in a fast job day-to-day. Where at first one may expect a regular working experience, the reality is to be confined to an empty place.

7

Filling In

7.1 Introduction

In the field I had a string of precarious jobs with steady hours, first as a self-employed gardener for Handy and second was a factory operative for Dream Print, which I found through the app-based agency EasyHire. After working there for some weeks, I found I had become accustomed to it, but was somewhat detached from the workplace,

> This morning I was thinking about how stable this work is again, and how it's indoctrinating, waking up for my fifth week or so at Dream Print, this has been a continuous thing now and I'm basically just a part-time worker. I have developed skills and knowledge that relate to the procedures of the workplace, and yet I have never really met a manager or attended any meeting. I also have no idea how long the work will last, and what the schedule is, if any. There hasn't been any of the typical 'employment' stuff either, no pep talks, no description of what the company does, no expectations of the future like permanent employment or advancement, no contract signed, and no discussion over what the expectation of my behaviour is. And I could literally just stop going and nothing would happen. [15-3-2021]

The detachment of precarious work raises a question of the experience of the labour process. Fordism evolved after World War Two along corporatism that worked to integrate and align worker's interests (Whyte, 2002 [1956]), which formed the basis for the most recent form of SER (Weil, 2014). There is a clear distinction with post-Fordist and precarious work in either having no guarantees of tenure or extending very few guarantees to the worker. Precarious workers are not only vulnerable through this, facing greater uncertainty, but they are in a qualitatively different position. They are not being integrated into the firm, but are held at arms' length. Therefore, there are not just questions of greater uncertainty to a precarious job, but questions over the nature of one's presence in the workplace, because it is not as an 'employee' in the SER sense. Answering this question of presence helps to understand the cause and nature of precarious workers' poor job quality that has been documented statistically (Koumenta & Williams, 2019) and qualitatively (Alberti et al., 2018; Smith & McBride, 2021).

This chapter builds on the previous by examining what it is like to work in an empty place after hurtling towards it down a fast lane, in some cases having only applied the week prior. The foundation for understanding working under precarious employment is 'filling in' an empty place. Workers are initially expected to fulfil some basic duty of the empty place, such as a job on a production line. At the same time, is the imperative and inherent attraction of exceeding that empty place by 'stepping up' to conduct additional duties, such as training another new temp. Yet, the worker is still bound to their empty place, and once it closes, the worker is likely to be dismissed. The contrast between empty places and stepping up creates an unreality whereby workers may be coming in regularly, training staff, developing skills and even outlasting their managers, but they are still just temps bound to their empty place, liable not to being fired, but to no longer being needed. When a job ends there is little to show for it: no personal or professional

connections with the employer, few transferable skills or experience acquired and no access to internal labour markets. At that point workers may go on to find another job, which is the topic of the chapter after this one.

7.2 Filling in the Empty Place

When precarious workers come to the workplace, they often find that they have not been hired for a job, but are merely just filling in an empty place. Everyone is familiar with the idea of 'filling in' -such as a substitute teacher in a school. Where the regular teacher has a job, they own that position, when that teacher gets sick, it leaves an arbitrary 'empty place' in the school schedule. As the classes cannot be cancelled another teacher is needed to stand in. The substitute teacher that comes in though does not do the 'job' -they merely fill in. In practical terms they may use someone else's teaching plan or they do not know the layout of the school. When the original teacher recovers from their sickness, the empty place closes and the substitute teacher is not called back. However, filling in can also be a mode of management. What if, in noticing that substitute teachers do not need to be paid for lesson preparation, summer holidays, sick pay or given annual leave, the school principal decides to operate their school more and more with substitute teachers, maybe deciding to have them 'fill in' for entire school terms? This is precisely how I and the interviewees were working, always 'filling in' and never really working as if we had a job.

7.2.1 The Object of an Automatic Factory

The terms of a precarious job, whether directly employed, indirectly through an agency or through gig work, mean that one has been hired for a very specific task. A production line could need eight people to operate it, a retail store could need four people, or in my case being a gardener with Handy, a hedge needs clearing. Precarious workers are hired with a specific duty in mind for them to fulfil -an empty place. While eventually one may learn to exceed that set duty, when one starts and is naïve of the overall labour process, doing what one is told and filling the empty place is all that one can do. This lack of autonomy and expectation to immediately and consistently fulfil the needs of an empty place is reminiscent of the most basic forms of capitalism described my Karl Marx where 'the factory worker is reduced to a part of a self-moving and self-governing partial machine' (Raunig, 2013: 21). Yet, it also has a distinctly post-modern tint as well for speaking to the machine essence of Haraway's (1987) cyborgs, where in an empty place the organic vitality is subsumed by machinic subservience. What this means is that, at least initially when the precarious worker is still green, the labour process entirely controls the worker to the detriment of their human capacities.

When I applied to Velocity Recruitment to work for Sidewalk, my first day would not be until the following week. In the world of fast work, that is apparently a long time, so Velocity informed us they had some extra shifts at Allied Meats that weekend. I took this opportunity, and after a three-hour bus journey to the factory the other workers and I disembarked and were then led around from line to line where managers would literally pick us off. Halfway through this process, the slowly shrinking group was walked into a refrigerated warehouse where raw chicken is seasoned and packaged,

> There are people standing sorting chicken, and there are stainless steel frames with clear plastic hanging down around them. Then the line manager comes up and picks some people off. We have ear plugs in, but no one else seems to, and those picked off go to a line and start working. They just kind of fill the spot exactly; their hands start moving in time with everyone else like they've done it before. With the help a new line is started.

> Other people around us keep coming up and moving around, walking past, and we stand there for five minutes or so waiting. No one talks to us, we're just standing here, and some people go and some don't. Eventually the man leading us around tells us to turn back to the entrance and we go. [1-5-2021]

Very clearly then, there were empty places sitting open that the line manager was aware of, they took as many as they needed and put staff in them. The staff appeared to work without much instruction, as if machines designed to fill this specific purpose. This continued through the factory until there were just four of us left. It seemed the factory was now overstaffed, so we were then taken to the canteen to wait. Soon after we were sent to the dispatching department to load completed products off conveyer belts into crates. Not long after there were no supervisors around us, and I realise the six or so people around me in the dispatching warehouse are all from Velocity Recruitment. Our empty place lay between the conveyer belt and the crate: someone needs to place the items from one to the other. The conveyer belts were now in charge and the task was clear,

> I get distracted on the second line, and I look over and Gary is completely overwhelmed, there is a huge pile of product at the end of his belt and he's trying to stuff them into crates but he isn't even going faster than the belt. He was too scared or something to yell for help, or he thought he had to do it himself. Like I said, it was like we had been told to fill these roles on these lines, but we haven't. We need to go off the line and onto another line and constantly move around and change what role we will do and the line we are on.
>
> A line manager comes and yells at Gary. She says 'I'm about to send you home' and keeps being horrible to him. He can't really understand her. She kicks him off loading the crates, which is illogical because there are too many and Gary needs help. Before this I was loading crates, and she tells me I'm doing it wrong (rotating them basically) and she just stuffs them on as fast as she can, which will slow down whoever is filling them with product because they will now need to rotate the crate.
>
> She yells at Gary to load more empty crates for her to grab, but the hopper is already full. Gary cannot understand as there are no empty crates nearby and he has to go find a dolly of empty crates on the other side of the warehouse. She keeps yelling at him, but what he's doing has nothing to do with the issue at the moment. [1-5-21]

While this case shows the deplorable working conditions many precarious workers are in, temporary and permanent, it also exemplifies the reality of being a tool in the 'automatic factory'. Marx (1990) used this term to describe the relationship between the labour process and the worker, in the automatic factory, the factory is subject and the worker is object. We were left alone with these machines and expected to adjust to their needs and were reprimanded personally for failing. At the same time there was a hesitation about working as *humans* (Haraway, 1987), communicating and cooperating, instead we were working as dumb tools attached to each conveyer belt.

Throughout working in empty places, there is also the discourses of ethnicity and gender contributing to their operation. For example, in one direct interaction between myself and a supervisor, the supervisor did not speak but only indicated with nods and hand signals to put on the factory boots and jacket as if he thought I had poor English. Where Burawoy (1982) argued that worker attributes do not overcome the logic of the capitalist labour process, feminist scholars argue work is completely altered by characteristics such as gender (Weeks, 2011). While once in an empty place the economic logic dominates, the sorting mechanisms into empty places infuse them with worker characteristics of gender, ethnicity and class. At Allied Meats, ethnicity blends with docility and dehumanization. Ethnic minorities are not just over-represented in

precarious work, such as ZHCs (Farina et al., 2020), but ethnicity, (and gender, class and other aspects of identity), also infuse the empty place with the hierarchical position of who tends to most often fill them. Therefore empty places are this blend of economic and labour necessity, where the specific subjectification that occurs is influenced by worker identities.

In the automatic factory workers are mere 'conscious organs, co-ordinated with the unconscious organs of the automaton' (Marx, 1990: 544) where, following cyborg theory (Haraway, 1987), the empty place blends with the worker to partially or completely constitute their being. The automatic factory is the labour process of production lines, but as Harvey (2018: 217) comments on this section, Marx was too 'universalising' and missed other capitalist forms of organization. The automatic factory is not inevitable to capitalism, yet in precarious work it is embraced in order to facilitate taking workers quickly and with only informal training on the line. In the automatic factory 'the working personnel can continually be replaced without any interruption in the labour process' (Marx, 1990: 546). All one has to do is be inserted into an empty place and the inputs and outputs of that shall determine the pace of work, enforce discipline and ensure productivity. This capability to replace workers as needed has obvious advantages when using insecure labour. Allied Meats, being a factory with literal conveyer belts that people stand at extenuates the idea of filling in, but other workplaces, including service work, retain the same qualities.

Interviewees described a limited presence in the workplace. For example is Michael. When we spoke Michael was in his forties mainly working through Handy making small home repairs. Through this he earned enough to support his family. For some variety, he was also moonlighting as a film extra where the limited presence of filling in has a therapeutic nature,

> **Michael**: Film work is, I show up, and then I just follow instructions, I don't have any responsibility really. Then I go back home. Sometimes I get the costume, sometimes I need to bring my own thing, but there's nothing so complex, you just show up on time, follow the instructions, and that's it.

This 'just follow instructions' is part of the limited presence. At the clothing store that Ekeema described earlier where she had to pick out an outfit during the interview process, she felt disconnected,

> **Ekeema**: Yeah I didn't like it, it was just weird. To me it was just a temporary job. I just needed the money, I didn't care about certain things like, we'd get briefs like, 'oh we have to do this amount of sales today and blah blah blah' and I'm just like, 'I don't really care but okay'.

Despite the attention paid in assessing competence to get this job, at the end of the day, the reality of a fast job is merely filling in an empty place that does not engender care. In Michael and Ekeema's cases, it seems to be a source of power in allowing them to abscond responsibility -in stark contrast to Allied Meats. In other cases, filling in means having no choice over duties. For example, I met Priscilla as a retail assistant for Sidewalk. Like Arral mentioned earlier, Priscilla had a corporate background that was put on hold due to the general hiring freeze of Covid-19. Priscilla took up temporary roles through Star Recruitment as a way to get out of the house. Priscilla and I were working as retail assistants for an event, which required setting up. Priscilla was not really prepared for this,

> **Priscilla**: My first day, it did say set up, and I thought set up would be like putting things out, but I didn't realise it would be carrying heavy crates, so that was not what I expected at all.

> And when I spoke to Olivia, one of the managers. She was like yeah, well that's expected, weren't you guys told? And I was like no, not at all. I think because they're like, 'oh we're doing it', and they thought, 'you're temps you should be doing it'. But like, that wasn't what I had agreed to.

The precarious worker's presence is limited to not considering whether things should be done, or the best way to do them, the worker is just there to fill the empty place that has been designed by the supervisor.

Filling in has a much wider impact of limiting the presence in the workplace as a whole. One is only present in their duty to fill the empty place, not as an employee or 'part of the team', just as someone to be inserted into the labour process. This is evident in first shifts, where one may not receive any greeting from another staff member. This occurred at Dream Print where after gaining access I went to wait in the canteen,

> The canteen was a medium sized room, with picnic table style benches, and a bar stool thing along the window wall. Because of Covid, everyone had to sit alone at a table. The blonde woman I met outside took a seat at the other end of the room, which was a pain for me because I knew no one else. It was about 6:20AM, ten minutes before I was set to start, so I just sat. Soon a bald man, obviously a manger, strode in with a piece of paper, spoke to two people, then left. Soon, people started to just stand up and go out. They just stood up at different times over about two minutes, gathered their things, and went out of the room. Eventually it was just me and the blonde woman.
>
> She asked someone, who was sympathetic and listened, she gave us the solution that she would take us to our stations.
>
> We went out to the factory floor, and the blonde woman was told to go down into the printers and speak to the bald man, who gave a kind of 'ahh!' look at us. I was marched through the machines, past a giant machine, past a room that looked like a lab, and told to go through some doors.
>
> I entered the room, and it was a medium-sized room with a lot of very large tables and bunch of boxes and stuff, stacks of flattened boxes waiting to be folded, etc. There were about six people in the room. I turned to the closest people and asked them if there was someone in charge, they said someone, and indicated somewhere.
>
> I went over and spoke to this woman, who was apparently in charge. We spoke briefly, and she told me to sign my name on a sheet then gave me my duties. [22-2-21]

As 'conscious organs' of the automatic factory (Marx, 1990: 544), workers are supposed to respond to clocks and insert themselves into their empty place. I never met any manager or representative from the employer, I only had to report to my line and start working. Over the weeks, I was never introduced to a manager either, I just became one of these people who stood up at 6:20AM and went to my station. Filling in means workers are a mere object to be controlled by the labour process (Burawoy, 1982) and are rarely 'part of the team' of subjects acting upon the labour process. Where the factory is enduring, we are temporary, and so are not there contributing to the long-term vision, only to the short-term immediate needs of every passing moment.

When filling in, the only people and aspects of the workplace one learns are those adjacent to your role. I knew no one at Dream Print apart from those on my line. At Sidewalk, our department was short-staffed and so we were borrowing temps from other departments, this is how I met Jason. One afternoon he was put at my table to help, I had to get his phone number immediately because I knew he would soon be reallocated again, after an hour or so he was. Jason had been

working for two months at Sidewalk, but it seemed that the only person he knew was his line manager who gives him his duties, picking items,

> **Krzysztof**: Who is your supervisor, and what are they like? Do you get along?
>
> **Jason**: We have team leader, a shift manager I think too. And then there is a team leader, yeah, I don't know, is one Indian guy, he is team leader, and a shift manager. I don't remember his name, and a person who used to give us a picking, his name is Alvero.
>
> He's administrator and he used to give us picking -stuff, in the small paper, and we used to scan it and then, he used to assign us the picking.
>
> **Krzysztof**: So they're not your team leader though?
>
> **Jason**: Ah he's not the team leader -team leader is -he's sitting quite far from, like three-to-four seat from Alvero.

Jason is a picker, so his job is to pick items off the shelves in the warehouse, and it seems the only person he really knows is the administrator who gives him the lists of items to pick. Everyone else is present, but metaphorically and literally distant from Jason. He only knows Alvero, who in this manner, 'activates' Jason's actions by giving him items to pick. Everyone else, representing other parts of the automatic factory, have very little to do with him. This mirrors my experience at Dream Print where I only knew the team leader in my department, but I had no idea who was hiring me through EasyHire and had virtually no contact with anyone above or outside my line mangers.

Examining the working conditions of precarious work tends to focus on the poor or uncertain nature (Smith & McBride, 2021) while emphasising the diminishment of standard employment (Standing, 2011). Being an object of the automatic factory gives structure to these aspects by showing how they arise out of the structural ordering (Weil, 2014) of the workplace, and hence how that differs across the contingent landscape depending on how much autonomy can be handed over to the labour process itself.

7.2.2 Feeling Like a Tool

Being an object of the automatic factory, entering the workplace anonymously, reporting to no one but your line manager and working passively by the terms of the labour process, render one as a mere tool filling an empty place. Being an object, precarious workers face not only uncertainty, but also dehumanisation out of this requirement to be an interchangeable piece. The need to be adaptable by temporary agency workers has been noted as problematic for identity (Winkler & Mahmood, 2018), but there can be deeper issues as to what predicates this adaptability.

The nature of filling in is not lost on the people doing the work. For participants, who had options and were able to exert autonomy, and so were more able to face up to the nature of their work, the feeling of dehumanisation came up in interviews without prompt. Filling an empty place is a dehumanising experience of work, where your own desires and satisfactions are ignored. You are just filling holes, in retrospect, interviewees describe being treated as a tool,

> **Tommaso**: The more you're working there [Dream Print] and, I feel like the more you think of yourself like a machine sometimes, it's easier, it's easy to become a machine yourself. Cause you just go there, you do your orders in the time you're supposed to do it, and, even in the canteen as you say there's not lots of social interaction, because it's all temp workers as well, so, it's not like you always see the same faces, and, people might work in different departments you never worked in, so, you kind of lose the human

> factor, in in that place, so, it's just perfect for temp work I guess, but maybe not that nice a place to work, full-time, you know what I'm saying?

Dream Print is a factory, and so is inevitably going to create some feeling of depersonalisation. Where full-time factory workers may develop integrative cultural worlds of hitting targets and sociality (Burawoy, 1982), the interchangeable nature of temping hinders this from occurring. Therefore the humanism of work is stifled and all one is left with is the machinic aspect (Haraway, 1987), where the distinction between, for example the printing machine, and the worker evaporates. Temporary agency workers need to be adaptable (Winkler & Mahmood, 2018), however here is a consequence of adaptability, it seems to rub against people's sense of self-worth. Another angle on adaptability in work was identified by Sennett (1998) as 'no long term', that seemed to be permeating American corporate society. The workers he spoke to all seemed to be in the drivers' seat of that ethos. For temporary agency workers, they are objects of other's 'no long term' efforts, they are being repositioned and moved around without much control. In other words, following Haraway (1987) short-termism can work on the organism or the machine in very different ways. Tommaso and the other people in these positions have exhibited some autonomy and strategy by electing to take these 'fast lanes' into precarious work that Dream Print functions by. Yet, once these workers arrive that autonomy is lost as they become subject to the rules of the empty place. There is definitely certainty to this precarious work, of becoming more and more a machine.

One aspect of dehumanisation is to have your human faculties ignored. Tommaso felt his faculties ignored in being asked to work at unpredictable times and in many different roles, without continuity. Ekeema complained about the working conditions at the Sidewalk retail event in similar terms,

> **Ekeema**: It just made me feel like -I'm not a robot, I'm still a human- I know you don't care. You just want to make as much money as you can. Today, but I'm not just a body [laugh]. I'm a human being -I've been walking around hanging shit all day -I'm sure it's okay for me to sit down for a bit, or talk to my colleague for five minutes or whatever.

Ekeema here is complaining about quite common problems in customer service, not being able to sit down or not being able to talk to colleagues casually. She frames it again as about being a human, and being objectified by Sidewalk. Humans need to sit down, need some mental variety and feel compelled to talk to colleagues. Only a machine could work as Ekeema thinks she is expected to do so.

Being a tool can be self-imposed by workers. There appeared to be, and I felt myself, a certain denial about working conditions in empty places -that the limited nature of one's social and working presence is natural. This is because if one were to admit to themselves what was really going on -that there is an injustice- then the willpower to continue working might dissipate. In other words, admitting and facing dehumanisation saps one's will to work. It is easier to be machinic (Haraway, 1987). In this manner, the existence as object is social, one that co-workers help enforce and so is impossible to verbalise or act upon, because doing so risks not being reciprocated. I was pressured into acting like a tool while at Big Delivery, where I was given what appeared to me to be an impossible task of unloading kitchen appliances from a truck, the weights were written on the side of each appliance, it was about 3 or 4 AM at the time,

> Someone else said I needed to move a 150kg stack on a pallet from the centre to the edge, I explained I couldn't move it, and again he just said, 'you gotta move it'. On the heaviest loads you can feel the tires of the dolly begin to compress as the weight starts to buckle them. The job felt dangerous doing this too. I was the only one moving things this heavy.

> To be sure, moving a stack of dryers at 70kg is very easy. They might as well be empty boxes, but then something heavier really makes a difference. To get the items on the dolly you cannot just tilt it back, but you have to push forward and then use the momentum to get them to tilt backwards. The issue is the dolly wheel then rotates, so you have to plant the dolly with your weight; something that has little effect as I only weigh 65kg, so the dolly just moves and the stack doesn't tilt.
>
> So, this small aspect wasn't really safe, but the necessity from everyone, that you will do this and there is no question, was irritating. People were acting like I had just said I refuse to mop the floor while working at McDonalds or something, rather than, I literally can't move these. This weighs 150kg, I weigh 65kg. But working here, you obviously cannot say 'I can't do this', it's just not allowed or accepted by anyone. [23-10-2020]

There is a certain self-denial here, denying that the task is out of reason, or that we should do it at half the speed, one item at a time or have equipment for lifting and lowering the washing machines. That denial is embedded in the belief that we are just objects here set to do a job and everyone else around us is an object as well. Objects do not say no, they do the job set them by the automatic factory; a truck has pulled in and so we shall unload it. One has to absorb this perspective into their self-image (Haraway, 1987) in order to survive, because to admit your own humanity, or the humanity of those around you, is to become unemployable. When working in an empty place, workers have to alienate themselves from the production process in order to remain detached, and so in a sense protect their humanity. This is evident in my observation that the seventy kilogram items were light or easy to move, something I would never have thought outside of this working environment.

The interviewees consistently described feeling like a tool or a machine, raising questions of reflexivity about one's work position. The interviewees I spoke to are generally in a relatively privileged position in their lives, with university education, family support or the natural skills to thrive otherwise. This position one might expect to engender a critical perspective through not 'needing' the job. Further adding to the critical voice is the temporal aspect of interviewing (Ravitch & Carl, 2019) in looking retrospectively -people might not have had these feelings when in the actual job. What I am struck by is needing to push my feelings and thoughts of being abused to the side in order to motivate myself to work. This leads to the thesis that, for those who are genuinely 'trapped' in dehumanising employment, to admit to oneself that you are dehumanised may destroy your willpower to work. This however leads to the problematic conclusion that those who have similar capital to myself are being painted as the most informed, and those who are different are 'duped' in some manner.

What Jason said to me at the end of our interview is pertinent. While Jason was working as a picker at Sidewalk, he presented himself very differently. He had a master's degree in computer science, experience as a computer programmer and a wife working in a professional position. He saw Sidewalk as a temporary time away from 'real' work. Whether he would ever actually find better work is unclear, he mentioned it being difficult and was seeking a career change. However, his position, Jason reasoned, made him more 'free' to speak about the conditions at Sidewalk,

> **Jason**: I can give you the honest opinion about myself because I don't have any attachment or any job, that I want the job, so that's why I give you my honest opinion. In future, if you ask any person who take the interview, the person who is totally attachment to him or not at all attached to the job, so he will give you right opinion.
>
> Because whenever I ask my colleagues that, do you like the job? Why not? 'Yeah enjoying'. But at end of the day they just tell me all the frustration that this is how it

> happen, today this happen, the part of the corporate life, so you need to accept the situation.

Jason had this as his final word on working at Sidewalk, that the attached need to accept the situation and if I were to interview I might not get the 'honest' answer. This 'heightened' reflexivity, that one can rise above the discourse or outside of it, is highly contested and often outright rejected (Cohen & Taylor, 2003) due to the pervasiveness of ideology that was revealed with post-modernism. For example, Threadgold and Nilan (2009) argue individuals may be too optimistic about their future due to being caught up in the very discourses of individualization indicative of late-modernity (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). There are many other authors critical of such 'late-modern' reflexivity or agency that argue 'late modernity' is as structured as anything that came before it (Atkinson, 2008, 2010; Coffey & Farrugia, 2014), a point subsequently demonstrated by Jankowski (2021) in relation to global mobility. This leads to the assertion that Jason's, and the interviewee's, detachment and identification of dehumanization is all part of the capitalist process. In this regard, one should be critical of Jason's detachment.

Being a tool is reflexively approached by workers in different ways that at once make it bearable, and at the same time, maintain that dehumanization. First is the fantasy, whether realistic or not, that working in such poor conditions is temporary. That the work is not their future, and so one seeks to gain power over it by being critical and labelling it as dehumanizing. This however is not necessarily reflexive of any actual power. Those with some, but not enough, capital may actually be more likely to mis-represent their position as having more autonomy than it really does (Threadgold & Nilan, 2009). At the same time is a much less understood awareness of dehumanization that is managed through either pushing it to one side or by subverting the labour process through actions like humour (Taylor & Bain, 2003), or as I observed at Sidewalk, working slowly, feigning poor English or simply playing. In the end, all workers across the spectrum of capital probably need to use both strategies to survive in empty places, dreams of leaving, whether that is into better or just *different* work, and pushing thoughts of dehumanization to one side while subverting where they can.

The empty place denotes a completely inter-changeable relationship between worker and labour process. So, the wishes of the worker are ignored, and the labour process completely dominates what needs to be done. The labour process overtakes any design and comes to drive behaviour. In this regard, following transhumanism and more specifically cyborg theory (Haraway, 1987), it can be said that the worker's being entirely and literally blends with the empty place. In turn, this literally subsumes one's human faculties and replaces them with that of the empty place. The reality of working inside an empty place mean that employees come to develop a self-image as a tool rather than as a human. These traits of working stem from the nature of precarious work, but do not conform the traditionally-identified issues of uncertainty and insecurity. It is not the matter of one feeling like the future is unpredictable or fear being caught off guard by a sudden change. It is a certainty of social position, that is accepted. Dehumanization can be imbricated with ideologies of individual autonomy, that one shall eventually leave this empty place for a 'real job'. Workers need to maintain their own viewpoint of detachment from the empty place, either through seeing themselves as mobile or simply pushing these thoughts aside, in order to endure.

7.2.3 Summary: Filling In

In this section I have presented the notion of 'filling in', which identifies in many ways the worst possible employment relationship that one can be created out of precarious work. This is to be object of the 'automatic factory' (Marx, 1990), which itself operates as the subject. If, 'we ourselves have become frighteningly inert' as cyborgs, (Haraway, 1987: 5), then empty places display a firm example of where and how this occurs. As precarious workers are being brought in to fill a contingent need, their presence, at least initially, is limited to the empty place. That is, in

real terms a specific task on a production line, a staff member in a testing centre, a member of a project team or filling in for an absent permanent staff member's role. However, these are not 'positions' that the worker 'owns', but are empty places that the worker occupies. In this, workers are not turned into employees who inhabit the institution, but instead are tools fit into the empty place. However, employers do not like bringing in fresh staff every shift, eventually a familiarity and even seniority may take told, the topic of the second-half of this chapter.

7.3 Stepping Up and Being Put Back in Your (Empty) Place

Through going to work again and again, filling in the same empty place, precarious workers come to grow into the role. Where in the first few weeks and months the workplace is very foreign and confusing, eventually a familiarity takes over in the affective connections to the people, building and way of working. It starts to feel comfortable, and compared to the constant changes typical of gig work or new workplaces, even a regular ZHC can feel anchoring. Furthermore, precarious workers may become experts of their empty place. As such, they are called upon to train new staff, conduct administrative duties and overall gain seniority. Despite the seniority they gain, precarious workers remain wedded to their empty place. When the empty place closes, no matter the workers' contribution in excess of their required duties, their presence is no longer justified and so the worker is let go or never called back.

7.3.1 Stepping Up and Seniority

As those filling in gain experience, they come to have a *de facto* seniority based on their familiarity with the workplace and the tasks. Workers tend to act on this seniority themselves, in a sense 'stepping up' to conduct duties beyond the empty place. In this regard, workers adopt the *professional* work ethic (Weeks, 2011) of an autonomy-on-tracks that is required by employers to self-manage, manage others and exert the correct affect in service-settings (Hochschild, 1979). In adopting such an ethic, following post-humanism (Haraway, 1987), workers are able to detach from the empty place and regain some of their organic humanity. As new temporary staff come in to fill empty places, this generates a seniority among the staff who have been filling in for longer. Eventually, workers may be asked to conduct additional tasks in excess of their empty place, such as training new staff. Employees tend to accept these tasks due to not wanting to appear rude, but also the implicit benefits and advantages that breaching the empty place involves. The benefits of such are not formal, such as higher pay or guaranteed hours, but are instead informal, such as greater variety, the opportunity for workers to make themselves more important to the employer and a greater sense of individual worth.

Many interviewees mentioned that over time they conducted duties and tasks that appeared to breach their empty place. These breaches are not formal extensions of duty, but implicit acts of 'stepping-up' when the situation calls for it. For example is Foster, who came to London a few months prior to being interviewed, from Hong Kong. His first job was an ongoing ZHC role as a carer. This paid minimum wage. He spent his first few days of the job shadowing another staff member, and then after a few months, Foster found that he was now the one training staff,

> **Krzysztof**: After three months, you were teaching people how to do the job?
>
> **Foster**: I won't say teaching, I was sharing my experience with the new guy. I couldn't say teaching because I'm not working in this field for, a year, two years. I just shared what I did for the client every day.

In my own experience I was often trained by other temporary staff. It was always a very straightforward circumstance where a supervisor would call someone out and tell them to show

me the ropes or simply say we are working together. As I was new and did not know what to do, when working together this other staff member would become the *de facto* team leader, delegating duties, setting the pace of work, etc. While Foster downplays how much he taught, what he describes appears to be the critical knowledge for care work. In other cases, non-permanent staff are asked to manage operations or even monitor staff. To get to the Allied Meats factory, Velocity Recruitment had chartered a bus, whereon I observed,

> On board the bus, the Velocity agent asks someone to give something to 'Katie' on arrival and asks him to do the roll call tomorrow morning. This person is one of the temps. He says nothing to the agent but, 'yeah sure'. Later on we spoke briefly, and he said has never been to Allied Meats before, but said he has been working with Velocity for a few months. [1-5-2021]

This man was asked to do the roll call the next morning, so to record which staff had arrived and worked, and so would be paid. He is therefore administrating the filling in, saving the agent from needing to come to the bus the next morning. In both cases of Foster and the roll call, getting more duties is extremely informal. It is blended into the typical delegation of tasks, where the manager might be asking you to do a production task, or it could be a training task. The difference however is that some of these tasks are only appropriate for 'senior' or 'trusted' precarious workers.

So far I have discussed little changes to the scope of responsibilities, such as showing a new person the ropes, or ticking names off a roll, however, there can be much larger breaches of the empty place whereby the temp may take on supervisory roles as a matter of course. If you fill in long enough, and the workplace is flexible enough, precarious workers may become supervisors, run departments or solely oversee a production line. Taking on such roles may look like the staff member has 'graduated' from filling in and become a part of the team, but as we shall see, those who have breached their empty place are nonetheless still merely filling in.

Lucas and Macy both describe taking some type of responsibility for a role, whereby they are not just occupying the empty place, but are actually overseeing it. Lucas, who originally worked at a food court through an agency, re-approached the food court to be hired directly on a casual contract. When we spoke he had been working there for some months. He describes his work as follows,

> **Krzysztof**: Do you have to train them and stuff?
>
> **Lucas**: I don't train them, the supervisor trained them, but I just give my advice and say can you help me with this, can you help me with that. Because I'm not a supervisor I don't have the authority to say do this, do that. I have a soft touch, like could you help me or could you do this and I'll do that?
>
> **Krzysztof**: If you have to communicate…it might as well be you to decide what to do, right?
>
> **Lucas**: Yeah. I pretty much help…I unofficially run upstairs… I run the upstairs area and I just do that. I rarely ever do downstairs unless they really need help.

There is again this practical and implicit aspect to breaching the empty place. Lucas was in his mid-twenties and he said a lot of seventeen and eighteen year-olds would work with him. In the above exchange we can imagine what it is like for Lucas to work there, he knows what to do, and so takes charge and delegates tasks with a light touch. In some respects we can see the advantage of 'running the upstairs' where Lucas can work to his own pace and be somewhat autonomous. He just has to keep the area clean, and he can do that how he wants. This may seem like a minor difference, between filling in to clear tables, and breaching that empty place to 'unofficially run

upstairs' but that independence is real boost when you have been working under close surveillance without any control. Typically if you were asked to train or watch staff, this might be a sign that you had advanced in some manner, but Foster and Lucas were still on the same job title and pay as when they began. There is a certain finesse to this system, where Foster and Lucas are never asked to train anyone formally, they are just placed near new hires who they then impart some knowledge on.

In taking on such responsibilities there is a kind of self-apparent pragmatism that takes over and it just *makes sense* for temporary staff to breach their empty place, something I observed of Macy at Sidewalk. Our time at Sidewalk was conducive to breaching. It was a six-week project with minimal permanent staff, so the temps filling in quickly became experts. After two weeks, while I was still in my empty place sitting in one place scanning hundreds of items every day, Macy had breached that empty place to a more autonomous, varied, and arguably important role of managing the stock. While both tasks were rote, Macy's role was out of sight of managers and required more autonomy, however it was not anymore secure because the hours were still limited by completing the project overall. While it was still scanning, it involved a bit more variety,

> **Macy**: It's a very tedious job, and high attention, but I mean I'd prefer -it's more my thing because it's more about seeing the stock, providing the stock, calculating the stock. I actually quite enjoy that.
>
> Getting this role though was not straightforward,
>
> **Krzysztof**: How did you go about getting there?
>
> **Macy**: Well, I spoke with Kirsten about a problem, she knows she can rely on me, she knows I work hard, so I guess this is my gain. That basically it boiled down to who is competent, who knows the stock and the brands and can divide it in a way that makes sense, so that you know what kind of stock you send where, […] because you know the products and you know what's what. But also someone that gets along with Rozalia, that's going to help.

It is unclear, but it sounds like Macy approached the manager, Kirsten, about a problem that she had noticed in the labour process. In doing so, she essentially volunteered for this new role and therefore managed to create the circumstances for her to breach her empty place and spill out into the world of just doing the job, regardless of the task. Macy displayed the work ethic of dedication to her job (Weeks, 2011), showing she was not just interested in exchanging labour for wages, but in behaving like a *professional*: proactive and adaptable beyond any simple task. Over the coming weeks, Macy would progressively grow to be more and more independent. By this I mean she would self-initiate in the morning, procure supplies and take over on the days that Rozalia was away.

Eventually workers can make themselves invaluable to the workplace, at least until they are not needed anymore. As Tommaso recalls about Dream Print,

> **Tommaso**: I was working really well. I was the head of the department where I used to work all the time, even though I worked basically all the departments of Dream Print because I accepted different shifts, but there was one where I was working mainly, and I knew the guy, the head of department, he used to call me and he, asked me to train temp workers. We came to the point where, I knew basically I had my own responsibilities, and, so there was really no reason for stop calling me, I don't know why, it's probably just because they didn't have that many orders.

So there is the informal agreement that Tommaso will work well, independently, train staff, and complete his own duties. At the same time, this is contingent on the number of orders coming in.

Critically, what this means is that Tommaso will be the 'first' person to lose their role when demand drops, rather than the 'permanent' staff for whom orders would need to drop a very substantial number for them to lose their jobs.

The duties and seniority of the employment relationship are open for negotiation. In his analysis of 'new capitalism' Sennett (2006) argues that much of the uncertainty that workers face is within the terms of the job, rather than something more dramatic like working hours or tenure. The traditional work and career experience of gaining seniority are bottled by the empty place. Where in a permanent job gaining experience would mean deepening integration into a workplace, the nature of precarious work mean these workers are only given additional duties without formal recognition. The informality of stepping up and the need to command others suggest being selected to step up and the success of such would be highly dependent on the workers' gender, ethnicity and class as hierarchies of work (Walby, 2013; Weeks, 2011) from outside the workplace are brought inside the workplace. There are informal benefits such as feeling valued or more important to the overall production process, which could possibly extend the employment tenure over other temporary staff.

7.3.2 Psychological Affect of Stepping Up

The psychological affect of stepping up is significant as it means to move from being a passive tool placed into a gap, to feeling like an autonomous human that is operating via their own energy. In this manner, the advantages of autonomy are enmeshed with the work ethic of being a proactive and industrious worker (Weeks, 2011). It means to shed the position of generic labour that the worker was hired under and instead feel more of an individual that the workplace changes shape to fit. For myself, there was a feeling of 'making it' when I would breach the limitations of my empty place as I felt I was starting to actually 'work' at the workplace.

At Sidewalk, while Macy was in her new, 'better' role, I was still filling in the original empty place I began in. I started to feel down about being 'stuck' in the most rote position, and I think the feeling had to do with the working conditions involved. On one particularly bad day, still scanning items in my original empty place, I wrote at the time in the workplace on my smartphone,

> We do so and it's confusing. I'm now working with only Velocity temps. We're the only people standing and my mood crashes. I feel unvalued and relegated. I want to cry [all morning]. I don't feel like I can talk to my colleagues. I see the new people talking together and want to join them but feel left out and separated. I don't know how to break the ice. I'm glad this job will end soon. [29/6/2021]

There was something about being left behind in my empty place, and mentally and physically exhausted, that affected me. Workers need to engage in emotional-management throughout their working lives (Hochschild, 1979), while this is most often examined in relation to the emotion or affect shown to customers (Farrugia et al., 2018; Hochschild, 2019), this example from production work shows the emotional management one has to maintain for supervisors. The staff that were sitting down seemed to be breaching their empty place in their casualness, and I felt like I was very tightly bound. This is the feeling of being a tool. One cannot act on any of your faculties, like I felt unloading the truck of heavy items at Big Delivery, I felt hopeless at needing to do this task. I really wanted to be in a better position to relieve the feeling of being here. However, the only independent actions that one is allowed to conduct are those that the employer will either not know about or will approve of. Therefore, there is a drive to find or accept tasks that involve more autonomy.

The afternoon after my mood crash I was offered to step up by supervising the others,

> After lunch we were working on outer wear. As I walked in Kirsten kind of intercepted me and asked if I could watch them, the workers, who are all from Velocity [I was hired by Star Recruitment], to see that they work properly.
>
> At this I felt much better, and I had a boost of energy all afternoon. It wasn't like I got to boss them around, and I definitely never told anyone to work more, but I felt like I could help organise more. And this is what I did, I spent my time organising and supporting. Kirsten also asked me to help sort out the rails, as we needed to categorise all those clothes by gender and item of clothing (trousers, shirt, jumper, etc.). So I was kind of supporting the people working by getting them more clothes, more hangers, and moving things around for them, and I was also setting up the rails for the sorting.
>
> So I could run things my way, and keep things moving smoothly, and the work was also much better because there was more coordination and teamwork, for example in finding more hangers in the warehouse. There was also some problem solving, some moving around, evaluating the situation, it was a more diverse role, and so much better, it was fun, active, and satisfying to improve the process rather than just do the process. [29-6-2021]

The workers from Velocity Recruitment mentioned above were approaching the work like I had experienced at Allied Meats. They were being 'plucked' from their roles elsewhere in the warehouse to work for Kirsten, however there were very unclear empty places to fill, so they needed to be supervised and nudged to work, or else they would work slowly. As I had been working on the retail event from the beginning, I was one of the most senior temps, and also I was all that Kirsten had. One way of examining this is that the staff numbers had increased, and this created a new position of line manager. Without any permanent staff, and with a line manager only being needed for a few days at most, it was only possible to place temporary staff member into it. Here, Kirsten was also being forced into the action by overall staffing that had been allocated to her for this project.

In this case, the duties of the job are changing, and expanding quite dramatically, although remuneration or formal recognition were not. I was hired and paid to scan items, and any other duties I was told to do, but this duty involved a heightened responsibility. At the same time, out of sheer courteousness and the personal relationship built up, I felt that I had to say yes. I cannot ever imagine being asked and then turning to Kirsten and saying, 'No, I'm paid minimum wage and it is not in my job description, I'll just sort the items'. More importantly, the senior role felt far better to do, there were better working conditions associated with it. Finally was also my own *hankering* to be able to intervene and start organising the process to be more efficient.

The above work process that I inherited was very disorganised because it was never planned out, the process just came to be and people were stepping over each other to do their tasks. Therefore, I decided to re-organise the task into clear lines, which meant setting up my own empty places for others to fill,

> I suggest that we reorganise the working stations after everyone leaves. […] Basically to reorganise, I set up very explicit stations with much clearer tasks for them. It looks bad, it looks much more like a factory than the 'village effort' it was before. […] It's also more separated to stop them talking and not working, and there are much less distractions, […] I'm not sure how to 'pull rank' on my colleagues and get them to do this. Furthermore it was pointed out that I will be there from 8:30am, half an hour earlier than Olivia and Kirsten, so this time it will really be up to me to get it up running.
>
> When I show Kirsten, she yelled 'Yes! You're in charge of this from now on!' [29-6-2021]

These explicit stations were my opportunity to treat the other staff as tools, to be put into these empty places as to maximise efficiency and reduce their autonomy. Each station had one simple task that the worker then passed onto another person, in three stages. There were two lines like this and I set up a third later the next day as more staff came. In doing this, I was able to make myself more useful to my own manager, Kirsten. This gained me status, autonomy and a sense of self-importance. Where 'affective labour' refers to the labour of producing a certain affect (Farrugia et al., 2018), often aimed at customers, in this example the workplace itself exerts a positive affect upon those who 'step up' as a reward in itself. The significance of this is to work upon the 'embodied subjectivity' (Farrugia et al., 2018: 285) of the worker and feed into their desires for recognition, distinction and upward movement.

As the retail event at Sidewalk was only two months long, it condensed and accelerated the process of working in an empty place and then breaching it to become a supervisor. However, interviewees raised other examples, some recounted here and others not. Such as Lucas and his floor, Tommaso at Dream Print who was running a production line himself, Foster training new carers through the buddy system and the Velocity Recruitment temp who took the bus roll at Allied Meats. Non-permanent staff who begin filling in an empty place are often asked, and prefer to, breach that empty place.

Precarious workers are hired as generic labour, limited to their empty place but also have a tremendous pressure to exceed that empty place and become humans (Haraway, 1987) with jobs (Whyte, 2002 [1956]). To be treated as a human in precarious work is predicated on taking on more responsibility without greater remuneration or security of tenure. In many ways the uncomfortable nature of being a tool in an empty place applies pressure to either accept that as inevitable, or to behave proactively and conduct duties that breach one's empty place. In doing so, one can 'prove' to the employer that they are a good worker and are someone that could do better if not in the empty place. In essence, one is attempting to prove that they are not a tool.

7.3.3 Limitations to Stepping Up and Being Put Back in Your (Empty) Place

After preparing all of the items in the warehouse, it was now time to go to the retail event and sell them to customers. This prompted a 'reset' in our empty places, as Macy and I were put back into our (empty) place. I came full circle to again be completely limited by the empty place I was filling, oblivious to the fact I had orchestrated and supervised the preparation of thousands of items we were now selling. When I arrived at the retail event I had lost all my autonomy, and become a tool again to be slotted into the labour process,

> I tried to say it was 12:15 and I would be starting in fifteen mins at 12:30, but Olivia [my supervisor] just took me off to go speak to the higher manager to be checked-in and be given a job, this happened over at the till. It was weird because Olivia was telling me to simultaneously speak to the higher manager, but also seemed to be indicating that she would speak on my behalf. […] So I was there behind the till with Olivia and then I was checked in, and was then given, through both of them, the instruction that I would be working on the racks, tidying them up. Olivia explained it generally, 'just tidy them up and pick up any clothing on the floor'. And I was like, what is this? and I wasn't sure there was enough work to keep me busy. [7-7-21]

The supervisory role that I had held in the warehouse retreated as the circumstances changed and the limitations of the empty place reasserted themself. The expansion of the staff-count in the warehouse meant that new 'supervisory' duties were required to be done, and Kirsten needed someone to do them, and so she asked me and I did. Once we had finished processing the goods in the warehouse, the empty places that were created to do so closed, and then so did the need for supervisory duties. This meant that my breach 'retreated' as fast as it originally occurred.

When we moved from the warehouse to the retail shop, a completely new arrangement was instituted, but with different staff. Now there were plenty of permanent Sidewalk staff who can supervise, so I became another labourer like everyone else, and just told to go fill this empty place and get it done. As at the beginning of the chapter, I was a tool again, I did not have to think and just had to do my assigned task. In this way, there is a certain contingency to breaching, the contingency of responsibility and seniority. You are not just expected to contingently take a task and fulfil it, but also to contingently 'step-up' and take responsibility, and then 'step-down' when you are no longer needed.

In the end, becoming experienced, coming to own the empty place and stepping-up puts workers with one foot filling in and the other foot in a job. Ultimately, this creates a surreal quality, as Tommaso describes about working at Dream Print,

> **Tommaso**: It was a weird situation, where you feel like, you have experience, more, -a lot of experience, you could be a worker there at all times, but then at the same time, you could not work from tomorrow, you could not be called ever again, you know what I'm saying? It's kinda weird, it's not the best situation.
>
> […]
>
> **Krzysztof**: You said it was 'nothing real' and it was a weird situation? What do you mean it was nothing real?
>
> **Tommaso**: Nah I mean that, how can I say? If it was any other job, at that point you would feel comfortable in that job knowing that you have lots of experience, that you know how everything works, you can even try and learn, more things you know, or ask for a higher pay, I don't know, show you deserve, something. Or, go for the next step in the employment, whatever.
>
> But in reality, this wasn't real, because there was no next step, there was no chance of, you know, moving from that position, and even though, I felt like I had responsibilities, I didn't have any responsibility, I was just at the same level of temp workers that I was training, I was a temp worker as well, and that was it basically.

At Dream Print Tommaso had stepped up, but his extra duties he had acquired were only a breach, and in the end he was still just filling in. Where at least when one is filling in, it is clear and simple what is going on, one is just a simple tool who arrives does what their told, then leaves. Stepping up however blurs that simplicity and creates a situation that cannot be reconciled. The worker has breached their empty place, are training staff and apparently are senior. In Tommaso's case, manufacturing an entire product line, yet like a tool he still has no real responsibility, participation in the workplace (such as meetings) and is liable to being 'swapped out' for another tool at any moment.

7.3.4 Summary: Growing into Your Empty Place

One reason that temps are so cost-effective for employers is because they agree to take on greater responsibilities without any firm benefits or additional remuneration. There are lots of reasons for staff to step-up. The first reason is to get better quality work or improve the working conditions. Working in an empty place often means to do a repetitive, simple, and highly supervised task. By stepping-up, workers can get more varied or interesting tasks, gain more autonomy or less surveillance. One way to see this is that temps 'prove' themselves as reliable, and so can be trusted with more responsibility. For example, once I had breached my empty place I had a lot more freedom to take breaks or just to go 'disappear' for some time, something that was impossible when working on the line.

Rather, the critical reason workers agree is the breaching itself. Stepping up is to no longer be a tool filling an empty place, and instead be a human doing a job. The duality-as-one of the cyborg by Haraway (1987) is poignant here, where the organism and machine are ebbing and flowing through the empty place labour process. Tools are attached to their empty place, but humans are able to act upon the labour process and alter it by their own will. Empty places constantly and unpredictably open and close, and there is an administrative element to who gets to fill the empty place or not. In workplaces like Dream Print in particular which have seasonal demand, the number of empty places slowly decreases after the peak. Tommaso, who could be relied upon to run a line by himself -therefore moving between where what were originally multiple empty places -was one of the last temps to keep working after the Christmas rush, working part-time well into April. By making yourself more human, by integrating yourself deeper into the workplace, you can increase your chances of being called back. This constant drive to breach the empty place that one is in ultimately creates the highly adaptable, motivated and problem-solving workforce (Weeks, 2011)w that can overcome the limitations of hiring passive tools to fill empty places. Ultimately this allow employers to convert more and more positions to empty places.

7.4 Conclusion: Going Nowhere in Empty Places

This chapter began where the last one ended, getting hired and going to a job for the first time. People have a limited presence in the workplace, they are just filling in, doing the duties of the empty place without much thought or care for the bigger picture. The simplicity of this situation can be quite peaceful, like Michael describing being a film extra. However, there is also a dehumanising aspect, workers feel treated as an object which is subject to the labour process. The second half of the chapter examined what happens when workers fill the same empty place over a medium to long period of time: they gain seniority and begin breaching the empty place. Such breaches make one feel like a human again, exercising autonomy over the labour process, however those breaches are only ever informal and the worker is always liable to being put back in their (empty) place.

A deficiency of precarious work theory is the gulf between flexibilization of work and personal experience. Empty places mediate those two ends as a ‘structure of diversity’ -derived from Castells (2010)- and helps demonstrate why work is uncertain. As the economy is run on the logic of empty places which workers find themselves in. With filling in in mind, it is easy to see how working conditions can become worse or less stable. Uncertainty is predicated on the dehumanization of using workers like a tool. Even if the work is ongoing, one may be replaced by another worker through the machinations of an app-based agency like EasyHire. In revealing this meso-level, the ability to distinguish inequalities becomes far easier as certain occupations are more or less amiable to being run on empty places. Furthermore, as different discourses of gender and ethnicity infuse (Weeks, 2011) those empty places with certain positions of subordination.

Filling in helps distinguish precarious working from the more stable working condition of having a ‘job’. By job I mean to be employed permanently and integrated to some extent into the workplace as was the norm in Fordist, SER employment (Burawoy, 1982; Whyte, 2002 [1956]). While the ongoing restructuring of corporations and employment relationships to be more flexible and less secure is clear (Beck, 2000; Sennett, 2006; Weil, 2014), explanations of that follow too closely to this have been found wanting (Doogan, 2009). Instead, the logic of filling in a highly siloed role is closer and more generalizable. The similarities of filling in to earlier forms of capitalism is echoed by Mollona (2009) who observed a return to nineteenth century style liberalism in Sheffield’s manufacturing sector. Precarious working is ‘tighter’ -with restricted

autonomy and humanity- where one is held to the pace and standard of the empty place above all else.

If there is no precariat class (Standing, 2011) and precarity is stretched to all encounters with neo-liberalism (Alberti et al., 2018; Butler, 2015; Lorey, 2015), then maybe there is consistent, but limited, experience of 'filling in': arriving to unfamiliar workplaces to do a specific task, coming back and making something out of it, but the opportunity always has some unreal quality: that while filling you do not really exist in that workplace. Tweedie (2013) argued that the earliest incarnations of precarious work and insecurity theory, in this case Richard Sennett's (1998) *Corrosion of Character* were misinterpreted by focusing too much on the objective working conditions. Instead, Tweedie (2013) argues, insecurity is an experience of work. Filling in links changes in economic practice to changes in work experience. Workers are brought in quickly, given restrictive duties set by the labour process, and yet gaining an uncertain seniority.

Filling in examines the contradiction of an insecure job that one has become accustomed to. Precarious workers develop a semblance of routine, continuously working in the same empty place, that is nonetheless completely without durability, relying entirely on the ongoing contingency that opened the empty place in the first instance. This makes the empty place like a job, but not as one has no contract or connection and might not even know a manager. This is relevant to the uncertainties of social and economic position that workers may be unsure about (Motakef, 2019; Worth, 2016). Precarious jobs can be confusing for workers' precarious work trajectories because of this, as it is unclear if one is moving forward or not, at least until one is dismissed when it is made clear. Empty places therefore become a stagnant location, one never really gains any momentum on their trajectory unless the employer begins treating the worker like a human or offers a permanent job. Empty places make it difficult to see oneself as having any momentum down their trajectory. The initial decision to take a fast job that seemed like a movement can actually become a dead end and the contingent landscape feels a lot smaller than when one began.

The contingent landscape appears to be a shallow ocean, a myriad of empty places that one can step into but never really burrow down and find depth. It is a surface with little shelter that one has to continually live on, always exposed to the contingencies of market demand for labour. In other words, empty places stop one from ever truly securing oneself against the forces of change, and so one has to either settle living as a tool or continually move by the logic of contingent demand. In doing so, workers find in/security, an extremely temporary or intolerable form of security that keeps them going just long enough to find another job or to 'switch off' and accept their dehumanization. Filling in may never culminate in promotion into a job, instead it just continues on and on, keeping the individual in their state of in/security. Such movements from empty place to empty place are the topic of the next chapter.

8

Surfing the Landscape

8.1 Introduction

After spending time in a few jobs, two shifts at Big Delivery, sporadic work through Handy, two months at Dream Print and one intolerable shift at Allied Meats, it was becoming clear there was some type of existence across these jobs, not just in myself, but in how I was getting adept and starting to become familiar with the piece of the landscape I was in. During my fieldwork I wrote,

> I'm gaining a much better idea of the 'game' of being an agency worker. The security of employment enters into things greatly. You are trying to find ongoing, stable work, amongst so much uncertainty. You also managing the terms of work, you are trying to find a comfortable job that you can live with. Part of this is the pay rate, which becomes much more important at this end of the scale. You are also balancing a lot of things in whether you want to do a job; Allied Meats being a good example of something that has good and bad, but is probably untenable for most people. Because the work is so bad, it is a more stable and accessible source of income, yet you do not want to do it. So, you are balancing these different jobs, which are largely unknown as the process is so opaque, and often need to make leaps of faith, you need to commit to just see what it is like. [10-5-21]

This chapter examines what it is to live in precarious work for an extended period of time, that is the long-term, multiple job view. To do so requires me to look at the existence I fostered in my fieldwork over the eight jobs I held, and the transitions between them. At the same time is to do the same to the interview data, and look at it more holistically. In doing so, this chapter marks a transition of placing the fieldwork data in the background and the interview data in the foreground.

This chapter has three empirical focuses. The first is the phenomenon of moving from job to job quite rapidly. This is dubbed 'surfing' to describe moving into a job, holding on for as long as it lasts, and then moving on to the next opportunity. This is further complicated by voluntary movements of leaving a job due to intolerable working conditions. While surfing is not necessarily common among workers in the overall period of their time, it represents an adaptation, possibly an 'urban tactic' (Schilling et al., 2019), to tenure insecurity or intolerable working conditions of precarious work.

Next, I discuss two stabilities that occur within surfing: surfing with one employment agency and settling into one job. Just as I had used EasyHire to work at Dream Print, RedBrick and National Grocers, my participants would also 'surf' from job to job within one agency. The app features of EasyHire make this natural to do. The third focus is when people decide to settle into a job. Many precarious jobs are either term contracts or have reliable work on a zero hour ongoing basis. If the working conditions are acceptable, then the worker will stay there. Surfing is therefore permeated by these periods with one employer where the worker may be fairly stable. This is arguably the typical 'state' of the precarious worker. In doing so, precarious workers achieve some sense of security, albeit with no formal guarantees.

Overall, between surfing and settling, this chapter discusses the overall state of being a precarious worker. There are strong analogies and points of departure to the entrepreneurial self (Kelly, 2006) that shall be highlighted. Surfing can sometimes be individualistic and proactive, but at other times workers are integrated into being a temp and behave passively. At other times, workers opt for security and certainty (Wong & Au-Yeung, 2019) and so appear to minimise their autonomy. I attempt to understand these through the balance of insecurity and security that these workers are living in. Surfing draws attention to how this is a balance that has been arrived at after a lot of effort, exploration of the landscape and choice, and so therefore represents security as much as it does insecurity. In this regard, surfing becomes a protean career, whereby workers are on a trajectory. While precarious to differing extents, depending on their location in the landscape, many workers come to achieve an equilibrium. Precarious workers take work that suits them in the meantime, which could be a few weeks or a few years, before turning back to the landscape and finding more fast work that is similarly instant and relatively straight-forward to get hired into. While they are always to an extent insecure, the movement between jobs balances that out, and so a temporary equilibrium is achieved.

8.2 Turbulent Existence: Surfing from Job to Job

Frequently in the field I would meet people who had come from a precarious job somewhere else only a few months ago, or they would be asking me where I found work previously, as if they were planning their next job. Others would mention other part-time jobs that they still had. While there were certainly plenty of seemingly permanent staff at Dream Print, Big Delivery, Allied Meats and Sidewalk that had been working there for years, it was clear that many were doing much the same thing as me, moving from empty place to empty place as best they could. I use the word turbulent to describe this, referring to the instability of moving from job to job. Cooper (2010) describes 'turbulent worlds' in relation to finance and climate change while honing in on the management and creation of turbulence through scenario planning. If Cooper (2010) focuses on the new emphasis on turbulence at the institutional level in predicting risk in order to price financial instruments, this section focuses on how precarious workers manage the turbulence of contingency through surfing.

8.2.1 Insecure Tenure Job-to-Job

Precarious workers are kept surfing by the sheer insecurity of the jobs that they are getting. The first aspect is that when someone has turned to the contingent landscape and taken what fast work comes up, the tenure of that job may be short or erratic. The straight-forward response is to find another job, therefore attaining some type of financial sustainability by 'smoothing out' the insecurity of any single job. While tenure insecurity is the most widely recognised characteristic of precarious work, by associating that with the contingent landscape and fast work, a continuous loop becomes evident. While the idea of being stuck in a chain of low pay jobs is common, I want to highlight the 'security' of such that occurs out of fast work to better understand this form of being.

The original plan for my fieldwork was to conduct two or three in-depth, medium-term workplace studies as if I were studying permanent work, as other workplace ethnographers had done. While I left gig-platform Handy because I was not meeting any other workers, one of the first ongoing jobs I had, at Dream Print went from being every week to every other week, and then ending completely over two months. Therefore I needed to find another job, however now I was not at the start of my job search, but in the middle, and in some ways I never really stopped searching

while working at Dream Print. Before the work ended, but when I missed a week, I considered my options for finding work,

> So, my options to find employment at the moment are: (1) Wait for EasyHire / Dream Print to pick me up again. (2) Pick up gardening work on gig-platform Handy. (3) Approach a traditional employment agency. (4) Find another platform like EasyHire or Handy to work on. [10-3-21]

This junction reflects a clear individual entrepreneurial mindset (Kelly, 2006), yet is also highly structured by, and consists of, the landscape. This was obviously within the bounds of fieldwork and restricting myself to non-standard contracts, but in retrospect, these are all 'fast work', too. There is a certain tilt back into fast work that one feels, especially if the original exclusion has never dissipated. While the optimum strategy would be to find something more stable than Dream Print, it was obvious that I had options and that I could find a fast job to fill in the time until something stable did come up. Ultimately, although on a larger scale, this is the same set of choice that interviewees described.

Often the first job that people find is an insecure one. Assuming they do not want to leave, they will stay on until the job ends by itself. A very clear example comes from Lucas, who describes moving from a job in Covid-19 testing to the aforementioned job in the food court where he gained some seniority,

> **Lucas**: I started that in the January of this year, and it was very good money, it's like £17.00 an hour during the week and £21.00 an hour during the weekend. And initially it was really good… I got good hours a week the first two weeks, and then they employed too many staff, so that meant they cut our shifts in half.
>
> And then as the restrictions were loosening, they cut our shifts even further, so I ended up doing one shift a week. And even though the hourly rate was really good, the hours were just really crap, so it wasn't worth it.
>
> I went to have some food with friends, I recognized one of the managers who I knew from December when I worked there through Flexi Club and I said to her, are you employing and all that? And she said, yeah. And I just literally went up to her and said I want a job. She said, yeah, and we went from there.

The change in work sector, from Covid-19 tester to food court assistant is to be responding directly to, and thus surfing, the contingencies of the labour market. Lucas also used his sense of the market, he could feel the wave of Covid-19 testing dissipate under him, so moved to the resurging wave of hospitality. In this regard, there is an incredible sensitivity in relation to prevailing market demand for labour that Lucas is showing. Precarious workers are being tossed and turned by the demands of labour, and precarious work, being so light mean that the empty places open and close (and charge differing wages) in direct response to shifts in disease spread, government policy and consumer behaviour. Interestingly, Lucas was not using agencies, but was able to do so through direct employment in both cases, truly surfing across his terrain of known and accessible work.

These movements occur within the workers' specific location in the contingent landscape, and so workers can be surfing very different sectors of work. Where the discussion so far has focused on hospitality, testing and factory work, other interviewees were in very different parts of the contingent landscape. For example is German national Brice, who describes surfing through law and clerical positions,

> **Brice**: TAR was in insurance I made a position for one month, and after this I came over a recruiting agency in a law firm, and there I worked eight months in a document review. There was nothing wrong. This was only the end of a project.

Brice describes working for one month in one position, then moving to another for an eight month position. As Brice says, these ended for no other reason than the work ending, at which point the empty place closed and he was no longer needed. Meanwhile, Thomas summarises the period of work he had on a two year break from university that he took in his hometown,

> **Thomas**: I got an apprenticeship at the County Council, and I did that for nine months, and then that ended. Then I just did a few part-time jobs, one at Argos, worked at a bar, and then I worked as an administrator at a mental hospital, for six to eight months?

Here Thomas actually misses out one job he had immediately after Argos, at a local factory, which he was dismissed from. Thomas was moving opportunistically through what work he could find, taking better quality clerical work when it was available, and labouring, service or hospitality work when he had no other choice.

Precarious work is typically analysed as a job, as is made evident in the emphasis on standard or non-standard contracts by many authors (Vosko, 2010). However, the very uncertain nature of precarious work, coupled with the realities of it also being fast, mean that workers come to surf the very uncertainty that afflicts them. Precarious workers are therefore not so much in one job, but in a mass of insecure work. While the behaviours are reminiscent of the entrepreneurial self (Kelly, 2006), the ability to settle into surfing as a sought of 'career' suggests a deviation.

8.2.2 Working Conditions Job-to-Job

Before a job ends by itself, precarious workers may nonetheless decide to leave due to the working conditions. Much of the work I found was very hard to do and had mental and physical conditions that made one want to quit the job. While one always wants to stay in a job, this is balanced against the working conditions and if it is tolerable to stay. This is exacerbated because many of the worst employers have high turnover, and so they are hiring, and hiring 'instantly' precisely because the working conditions are so poor. I left two jobs due to the working conditions. At Big Delivery I could not stand the night shifts, and at Allied Meats I found the lonesome and hard nature of the workplace to be mentally fatiguing. In both cases I was concerned that I was 'soft' in some way for wanting to resign, and not conducting the ethnography faithfully, but instead as an ethnographer who can 'choose'. In reality, I found the interviewees were doing much the same thing as me in avoiding the worst working conditions.

Interviewees described leaving jobs due to the working conditions being intolerable, after which they would typically seek more fast work. For example is Tommaso, who after being let go from working at Dream Print found a job at a tile shop, which he eventually left voluntarily,

> **Krzysztof**: Why did you stop that?
>
> **Tommaso**: I had to stop because the guy that was working with, was this thirty or forty year old guy, that was driving the car and I went down with the fliers and everything and spoke to the people, but at some point he started being, a bit too involved with myself.
>
> He started saying to me things like that being a musician is not a real profession, that I should have gone and done and be an electrician and he was saying to me you should get a car, you should do this, should do that, and I was like, [laugh]
>
> […] I didn't feel like he was being very professional with me and so, I'm, like, yeah I just stopped.

Tommaso says, 'I had to stop', meaning he had to terminate this ongoing work. Where Tommaso left Dream Print because they stopped calling him in, he left the tile shop because he did not like working there anymore. His next job was cleaning an office building, which he found through the EasyHire app too.

Deciding to leave a job can be a function of the fast nature of the work, that the worker may not be invested in the role and the worker thinks they can find other work easily or it would be easier than enduring the conditions. Thomas describes this about his part-time job at Argos, that he held while on a break from university and living with his parents in his hometown outside of London,

> **Krzysztof**: You said you left after a couple of months, you were trying to leave, I guess?
>
> **Thomas**: Yeah no that was just a very difficult manager there, who was very hard to work, so I just, a bit like the council [job], it was just a stop-gap, part-time job, and he kind of took it extremely seriously so I didn't stick around there for very long.

Thomas identifies both his detachment from the job biographically, he was not invested in it and it offered him no future, and also the poor working conditions. On a break from university, Thomas had a clear trajectory through the contingent landscape, he was just moving in order to get by and, effectively, pass the time. This appears inconsistent with the view of the manager, who wanted the job to be taken seriously. In this regard, he is using the empty place that had been generated as an interstitial space of neoliberalism (Howie & Campbell, 2017). Under these circumstances it simply made sense for him to move on. Where someone else might stay in the job, Thomas was living at home with his parents at the time, so had the luxury to quit before finding his next job. He never really felt like he would stay with the difficult manager,

> **Krzysztof**: Did you think about staying at Argos, or not taking that [next] job?
>
> **Thomas**: No, I'd left Argos by that point, couldn't be bothered with it anymore, must be able to find something else.

While living with minimal expenses, Thomas's decision was impacted by the belief in finding something else, in other words, to find something better. Howie and Campbell (2017) emphasise that *hope* is important to some constructions of the entrepreneurial self. The belief in something better helps motivate surfing, whereas the most marginalised may have no hope and so just endure intolerable working conditions. So for Thomas there is a real contradiction of being powerless, in needing to take this repetitive low-pay job, and the power of hope to just leave. He left simply for being uncomfortable at the workplace. In this regard, there is a power in surfing that is predicated on financial security and the right ethnicity, gender and class to expect to find something better. This also displays how those who have financial support, and thus have been labelled not precarious (Antonucci, 2018), are in fact displaying a different quality of in/security than what is typically labelled 'precarity'.

At the most nonchalant, with no severance pay to worry about, job references to collect, or industry reputation to maintain, precarious workers are liable to walking out,

> **Ekeema**: I got a temporary sales assistant job, at a company called Project One. They're kind of like high-end, high street. […] I worked there for two months and I hated it there -oh my God it was so depressing-, I had to wake up so early, -and it was cold, it was the winter- like I had to wake up so early. And it was dark outside, to go and work, and go and pretend to care about like all these rich people. It was so depressing, and I had to be standing all day, and, yeah it just sucked.
>
> I think just really hated it I had like two more shifts left, but like in the middle of one shift I was like okay fuck this and I just left. And never went back.

This shows how as a non-permanent employee it can seem like your only response to bad working conditions is to resign. The empty place can be so binding, one's position so much a tool, that there appears no way to alter it. Even these relatively minor working conditions appeared non-negotiable, such as being able to sit down. As with Thomas, there is the contradiction between having no choice but to do fast jobs, but also the freedom to walk out. As a note, Ekeema had also saved enough money and was living with her family.

Precarious workers are facing insecurity of working conditions, that drives tenure insecurity by making staying in the job intolerable. In the previous section workers were able to 'smooth out' tenure insecurity, and in this section workers are seen to be doing the same for working conditions. One moves around the landscape looking for something that is tolerable and looking for the best conditions. Neoliberalism might engender risk which drives behaviour (Beck, 2000; Kelly, 2006) but it also engenders movement (Castells, 2010) that comes to a balance -hence the use of the metaphor 'surfing'. In a large enough labour market London, amongst workers who can move, there is a continuity of jobs through the labour market by the terms of tenure and working conditions. This is a tremendous source of power, but does not mean that these workers are immune from the precarity of precarious work, but that they have the power to adapt to that precarity. In adapting these workers are configuring a balance of in/security that they can live with and which is the best they can achieve considering their location in the contingent landscape and the resources they have to enable them to surf.

8.2.3 Getting Fed Up: Pursuing a Trajectory

Workers may also elect to surf due to feeling 'fed up' with the work they are in. Howie and Campbell (2017) argue that success in neoliberalism requires resistance, to some extent being fed up can be thought of as a resistance against precarious work. Being fed up is not so much being critical of the day-to-day working conditions, but that the job has no momentum down the desired trajectory that drives people to surf the landscape again.

Raymond describes a period after graduating. Raymond was never able to find a permanent job that he thought matched his degree. He reasoned it was better to live in France and do something new than to continue working in London. After that time in France he returned to England,

> **Raymond**: Got back August 2015, stayed in my hometown doing that [clerical] job until December. Moved to London January 2016, worked in the pub until, I think late 2016 or early 2017, and then in the meantime started working on the market stall and the nightclub, and then after I left the pub, I did some temping.
>
> Then I got this [delivering salads] job, which was three days a week, and then, was doing that whilst doing all the festivals with the band, so summer 2017, spring 2017, I was doing the [delivery] trike and the music.

Surfing took Raymond through clerical work, hospitality, labouring and playing in his band. His longest term was a year in the bar, a position he got fed up with which began the more rapid period of job switching. The significance of the bar is that it is a precarious job with steady hours and acceptable working conditions, which held him there for some time. Ultimately though Raymond left this profession without having accrued any career experience in it.

Raymond was trying to get out of where he was in the contingent landscape and attain some momentum down a trajectory towards better work or an exit,

> **Krzysztof**: You said you had all these different jobs, like the market, the nightclub, the photography studio. So, what was happening with these jobs?

> **Raymond**: I just wasn't earning enough in any of them. And, the logic was, the pub was the job I knew I could walk back into, but didn't really want to be in. And, was.. paying sort of above the minimum wage, but not much. And I was getting like, two or three shifts a week, and, so not really enough. And it was just like taking what I could get my hands on and looking for a way to get out of hospitality.

Raymond is not simply facing a problem that every job has too few hours or ends suddenly, instead he is trying to move out of hospitality, which has been the most stable form of work up until that point. At the same time, he is attempting to avoid the insecurities of bar work, such as unpredictable hours and poor working conditions. While he describes being driven by never getting enough work in any single job, he is also exercising autonomy by avoiding hospitality work, which he has no preference for and finds the working conditions poor. He had found a stable pocket in bar work, but was seeking to try and find somewhere else in the contingent landscape that might be more hospitable. In other words, Raymond is not prioritising tenure security above all else, but is balancing his preferences, financial needs and working conditions together.

When Fiona moved to London from Brazil, as mentioned in Chapter Six, she went into cleaning homes as a matter of the natural choice. The first job she had was difficult with hard conditions but she found it acceptable in the medium-term, eventually though,

> **Fiona**: It's too far, too tired, and it's not, just because of the money, you don't get nothing better, even the people, I can't, I couldn't see myself growing, there, just you're stuck. This is why, I decide to say, no anymore I need to find something else, this is why, I say no. And I start to work, back to clean, but in more, in the schools, for the agencies, it be more flexible, and some agency put me to work in the kitchen when I can, and this is why, but I more clean, clean clean. […]
>
> Because I saw something, I can do something different, I learning, my new skills in the kitchen [laugh]. And I also do some waitress because I never see myself doing the waitress [laugh]. Like in, Crowd, I did, yeah.

Fiona had previously been working informally as a cleaner for around one year. She had no contract and describes the job as if she were buddying up with someone who did have a contract to clean the homes. This resulted in instances of wage theft and other conditions that were an annoyance, but overall Fiona at the time said she was just happy to be living in London. However, as she says, it was not just about the money that made her leave, it was the lack of growth. Like others, her words resonate with a sense of being 'fed up' with 'filling in', and wanted something that would allow her to if not step up, then at least try empty places elsewhere in the contingent landscape such as waitressing or in a kitchen. Interestingly, she went into another sector of precarious work, cleaning and serving food through temporary agencies, where she stated she was much happier and did manage to extend her horizons. Reflecting on Raymond and Fiona, one could say they are behaving entrepreneurially (Kelly, 2006) by thinking against the path of least resistance and seeking to find a way out. However, one has to be critical if such a decision represents a genuine act of resistance (Howie & Campbell, 2017) or merely represents improving their own productivity in line with the neoliberal imperative and the 'calling' of capitalist work (Weeks, 2011).

As has been argued throughout this analysis, precarious work is very personal, so the types of jobs and circumstances that people get fed up with can be really different from worker to worker. Where Fiona was fed with being a domestic cleaner, Thomas on the other hand describes getting fed up with being a desk researcher for a multi-national corporation. Like cleaning, this was a no guaranteed hours job that nonetheless had steady work and that Thomas felt was okay to do,

> **Krzysztof**: What did you think about this position at JMSYS, were you excited to take this job?
>
> **Thomas**: yeah, I was no yeah, obviously JMSYS are a big research company. It was sort of good to get a foot in the door, and, the work I was doing for them was pretty interesting, or, well, at first it was anyway. Building samples of the people to pass on to their call centre, for people to try and arrange an interview, to certain criteria, mainly using company's websites and LinkedIn.
>
> And the clients I was working for them were like Google, YouTube, World Bank, so big clients, big company, and the work was interesting enough, but I did the exact same, sample building task for them from March 2020 until last September, with a few breaks in between project, but by September, I'd been just doing that same thing for too long anyway, but I stayed on doing anyway while I had the application in for the permanent job thinking it would help my chances.

So, the job was interesting and kept Thomas in steady employment for eighteen months. However, as he says, he was doing the same duty that entire time and was never able to breach the empty place in any meaningful or permanent way. He applied for a permanent job at JMSYS, that would mean he would not be bound to the empty place but instead have a 'job', however,

> **Thomas**: So it was never permanent, went for a permanent job in their team in September. Went through quite a long application, and then an assessment, and then, I didn't get the job and they waited eight days to tell me I didn't get the job, when they said they'd tell me after two days, and then, I felt they were never gonna give me a permanent job.
>
> I was quite annoyed with them that they kept me waiting so long when I'd been working for them eighteen months already and the feedback they gave for not giving me the job wasn't very useful, so I was just like: I'm not got a future here, so I'm just gonna quit, and find something else.

After eighteen months of working in the same empty place, Thomas had become fed up. One way he saw out of this was the promotion that would put him in the ranks of the corporation with a job. In this regard, he was pursuing the very capitalist ideal (Weeks, 2011) of joining the salariat (Standing, 2011). He held out for that, and when he missed the opportunity, he was even more fed up with JMSYS. He describes it as a realisation, that he had come to figure they were never going to extend the permanent job to him. Therefore he had to back to the precarious job market, and took a fast job as a Covid-19 tester on a zero hour basis.

Attaf was a cleaner for six years, longer than the tenures of permanent work that most other interviewees mentioned. He said he liked this job because it fit around his other work, and at least it had a lot of variation in it that made the working conditions tolerable. However, eventually he become disinterested and then decided to pursue temping through app-based agencies Crowd and EasyHire instead,

> **Krzysztof**: Can't you start as a bar back, and then become a bartender after six months or something? A permanent bar tender.
>
> **Attaf**: Time is not on my side, I mean I've been there myself many times. And I put it at the NHS, the bookshop, other places where I start at the very bottom, and they make this promise, the cleaning company, six years is a long time, to do cleaning, they made this promise, join our company, blah blah blah, but really, I realise that all they really wanted me to do was to do that basic job because I'm so reliable. They offered me a permanent

> job, they just needed someone to move the furniture around. There was no future for me there, in this company.

Attaf describes a realisation that all he would ever be doing is filling in the empty place, and even the permanent job that was offered, was really limited to the empty place, rather than a job that he really wants. Again, this job was stable, although would have ended during Covid-19 anyway, and he largely enjoyed it compared to his other jobs, yet he eventually became fed up with not only doing the same thing. When Attaf says there was no future, he means there was no future for accruing capital to move through or exit the contingent landscape, so he elected to surf again.

Finally, is the case of Lucas who is currently in his stable food court job, but was foreseeing it ending in a year, in a sense predicting getting fed up,

> **Krzysztof**: How long do you think you'll work there? Are you…?
>
> **Lucas**: I'll probably stay for a year. As I say I keep applying for degree-related jobs like curating, archives and field research et cetera. If I don't get any of those jobs within a year, I'll probably still do a PhD and still do odd jobs like…I might even stay…if I do a PhD I might even stay in the food court even longer just to help pay my way.
>
> […] But, at the minimum I'll probably stay there for a year probably, unless I find something related to a career that I'd be passionate about, then I'd be gone like that.

Lucas sees himself as content at the food court for up to a year, and maybe longer if he as another path like a PhD in order to have a future in. Yet after that year, he is adamant he will be fed up clearing tables, and so be 'gone like that'.

People find 'stable' precarious work, it might be on a ZHC or gig work, but with a continuous and steady rate of shifts. At the same time, the work is fine day-to-day and while the job might not be ideal and the worker would like something better, it is also okay to do overall or is the best option the individual has. While these jobs might have aspects of uncertainty, the hours, the time of day to work, the conditions might be unstable, there is a certain uniformity to the work. Yet, the individual might change, their view of the conditions or hours, but more significantly, they get fed up with the restrictions of the empty place. Often interviewees frame this as having little future and so they turn to precarious work again to find something else. These workers elect to surf the contingent landscape in search not of more secure work or better conditions, but for a different location in the landscape, in real terms a new sector of work, different employers or even a different city.

There is a certain rejection of stable work here as individuals pursue more aesthetic work choices (Cannizzo & James, 2020) that match their self-image. In a sense, electing to become liquid (Bauman, 2000). There is therefore an element of resistance to precarity, where feeling precarious can be a rejecting what one has been given and deciding to be restless. Being 'fed up' is indicative of the guerilla self (Howie & Campbell, 2017: 917) where individuals have 'desire for action, change and a strong sense of hope'. However, this desire can often lead people straight back into surfing rather than some truly transformative transition.

8.2.4 Discussion: Living by In/security

Precarious work is typically analysed as a job, a non-standard contract and sub-standard wages. Precariousness is also derived from that job itself, the precariousness of sudden job loss (Bourdieu, 1998; Virno, 2003) or consequences of explicit and implicit contractual differentiation (Alberti et al., 2018). Precarious workers come to surf from job to job, and in doing so, alleviate the insecurity of any single job. Their power to surf is because of their inability to secure themselves in a single job. Their only way to be secure, or to increase their security, is to live in an

insecure manner by fast work. Therefore, in coming to live and exist between and through their jobs, people find a new form of in/security.

When researchers grasp precariousness in real terms, they tend to lean into scenarios of catastrophic job loss and a hard transition from employed to unemployed. For example, in her theoretical examination, Lorey (2015) quotes Virno (2003: 33): 'If I lose my job, of course I am forced to confront a well-defined danger, one which gives rise to a specific kind of dread; but this real danger is immediately colored by an unidentifiable anxiety'. For context, Virno (2003) is discussing the overlapping of the 'fear' of job loss with the 'anxiety' of precariousness. Bourdieu (1998) conducts a similar analysis when discussing the new wave of insecure work in France at the time and the sense that anyone is now expendable. While the concept of precariousness is more complex than this scenario, it forms the basis for understanding precariousness in practice and in imagination. There is nuance, while Savage et al. (2013) limit such provocations in to just a very small 'precariat' who have virtually no economic or social capital, most researchers, including Lorey (2015), state that precariousness is actually heterogeneous (Campbell & Price, 2016). The issue though, is that even if one sees this as heterogenous it is still characterised by those key words of insecurity: dread, danger, unidentifiable anxiety and fear. In the vein of in/security, any of these terms of insecurity need to occur with, and occur out of, a parallel construction of supportive affect: confidence, opportunity, continuation, assuredness, etc. The metaphor of surfing, balancing on the energy of a wave, attempts to emphasise the dread and confidence of precarious labour markets.

Following this, the above images of catastrophic job loss, totalising notions of danger or dread are paired with similarly totalising notions of 'immunisation' -that facilities of the worker 'immunise' the worker from precarity, making them unaffected (Campbell & Price, 2016). However, those with protections are still affected by the insecurities of precarious work, in reality, these protections drive adaptations. In this manner, workers who have the advantages are not necessarily protected, but are able to create a more comfortable in/security. For example, the capital to work in hospitality grants access to what some consider better working conditions, making it more tolerable. Or a degree allows one to periodically take more desirable clerical work temporarily. These advantages do not 'immunise' one from precarity, they may protect one from financial ruin, but one is still precarious.

In becoming adept at surfing, the in/security of each worker comes to light. This raises questions of whether workers are precarious, immunised or some other kind of existence. When surfing, workers alleviate their insecurity by moving from job to job. Their ability to balance on the metaphorical surfboard becomes their security against tenure insecurity, intolerable working conditions and a lack of trajectory. In some ways, they adopt the entrepreneurial self (Kelly, 2006) yet surfing is to stop and ride the wave. These workers can also be very passive, responding to the conditions in work just seeking to find something tolerable. In doing so, they match securities and insecurities as best they can, and so display a form of in/security that appears different from precariousness.

In adapting to the contingent landscape, precarious workers come to resemble free entrepreneurial subjects of neo-liberal governmentality (Kelly, 2006; Lorey, 2015). This can be seen as a management of turbulence. Cooper (2010) used 'turbulence' to discuss pricing of financial instruments by institutions in light of unpredictable events, in this section I discuss the 'turbulence' of workers responding to their poor working conditions by moving from job to job. If institutions have had to steel themselves against turbulence through derivatives, then workers can be seen doing the same through surfing. In either case, derivatives or surfing, is a need to be adaptable to the unpredictable. In moving from job to job without an integration or attachment, surfing resembles being a freelancer, but with no clear occupation or profession. Surfing becomes

a ‘career’ that is bounded by what area of the contingent landscape one is in, and workers may try to alter that career by moving to other areas. In surfing, some are ‘freelancing’ as menial labourers form factory to factory, or bar to bar, or between a variety of workplaces -it is a matter of where in the landscape one is. However, where typically this kind of existence is considered to be a matter of discourse and neoliberal governmentality, landscape presents it as a matter of environment. Foucauldian governmentality argues that individuals integrate an entrepreneurial mindset, Lorey (2015) identifies this as the foundation of precariousness as the entrepreneur is always feeling at risk, a point echoed by Masquelier (2019) from a critical perspective. In surfing however, individuals do not necessarily absorb the entrepreneurial mindset, but it is enforced by the material conditions. One simply has to keep on moving, whether they believe the discourse or not.

This notion of acting entrepreneurially, but not believing in it is indicative of the guerilla self (Howie & Campbell, 2017). Surfing is similar to the guerilla self (Howie & Campbell, 2017) as a ‘making do’ out of the circumstances of exclusion from good work and education and the limited or difficult options which remain. The guerilla self is highly independent, it describes people who are ‘going their own way’ in a manner that ‘embodies survival and resistance in hostile environments’ (Howie & Campbell, 2017: 918). Surfing can and cannot involve ‘going your own way’ or through hostile environments, depending on where one decides to go. One might surf the nearest wave and go the way the contingent landscape pulls them. Alternatively they could become ‘fed up’ and decide to try navigate the hostile environment in search of something better. They quit the meagre security that neoliberalism had provided them and seek something better. There is a similar search for security in either case, and the only course of action is to behave entrepreneurially, yet the decision-making is more immediate than the full sense of an entrepreneurial selfhood (Kelly, 2006).

Precarious workers often have to keep moving, whether they believe the discourse (Kelly, 2006) or not. People may even be frustrated and dislike living in such a manner, and seek to leave it (Howie & Campbell, 2017). Critically, the true entrepreneur would not feel insecure being alone and for themself, they would be in concert with the in/security, seeing only opportunity, excitement, etc. At the same time there are workers who are unable to surf and so never achieve a bearable equilibrium. These people are forced to remain in intolerable conditions of unliveable wages, intolerable working conditions or feeling fed up with work and desiring to leave. In this regard, the analysis raises the prospect of who is ‘allowed’ to surf.

In the final sections of the chapter I examine the periods of relative stability where workers are in one job for an extended period of time.

8.3 Within a Labour Pool

Precarious workers may gain more assuredness of work by surfing within the same labour pool - that is through one or more employment agencies. Crowd platforms such as Handy operate similarly, but the workers are self-employed and so may have more control over the allocation of work (through setting rates, advertising their abilities, etc.) than in an agency. High-street employment agencies, such as Star Recruitment or Velocity Recruitment, may make contact with workers once their contracts end with an offer for another temporary position. These ‘temporary agency workers’ (TAW) have therefore been observed as needing to be versatile and adaptable to many different types of jobs (Forde, MacKenzie, & Robinson, 2008; Forde & Slater, 2016). App-based agencies build on this further with shorter placements and a more sophisticated internal job board where employers and employees can engage directly without the help of an agent. Through putting people into unreliable work and then offering new work that can be taken up

'instantly' agencies create can create loop of the worker continuously finding a job, that job ending and then finding another through the same agency.

On EasyHire I found there were many different employers offering work, and so when my shifts at Dream Print were not renewed for a week, it was only natural to go back to the EasyHire internal job board and see if I could find more work,

> I signed up for a shift at National Grocers for tomorrow, midday to 8pm. And so, this is good, it fits my schedule, and I'm glad I didn't fuck things up by taking those other bad shifts. For some reason, the National Grocers one is much better paid, £11.32/hour.
>
> So for a second week in a row I've been able to replace my lost Dream Print shifts with those at other workplaces through EasyHire.
>
> At the time on Monday I got two shifts for next week, Tuesday and Wednesday, after the Easter break. I remember I was walking in the park and felt the notification come in, and I always dropped my phone I was going so fast to confirm the offered shift. It was at Dream Print. [31-3-21]

The EasyHire job board is much like any other, with wages, location, duties and shift times. Once Dream Print began to reduce my hours, I was able to get a few shifts at RedBrick and National Grocers. I was taking shifts at these three different employers, in a sense combining them into one job. This appeared to be the normal thing to do when working for EasyHire. At Dream Print I noticed sometimes I would see someone browsing the EasyHire app on their phone, swiping through jobs. Here then, being an EasyHire temp can becomes a job in itself and there is even a casual, vernacular term for people who do so. In the end there was not enough for me to keep going on EasyHire alone, but interviewees described using the agency to support themselves financially for years.

The app-based employment agencies can be so effective that workers can surf from temporary to temporary job possibly indefinitely. This is maintained by controlling the number of temporary workers who can operate on the job board; I found that the app-based agencies open and close hiring. This is presumably to maintain a good ratio of available shifts to workers. Employment agencies can be very important to those surfing for attaining financial security because the worker does not need to be onboarded for each job, they onboard once with the agency and then gain 'instant' access to many jobs. This means that if you are without work on Tuesday, you can work Wednesday, and get paid the following Monday. While the job boards appeared to be saturated with temps when I was on EasyHire, Tommaso and Attaf had both been working for EasyHire across multiple employers for a year or more. In doing so, they had in some way become committed employees of the agency.

Initially Tommaso found work at Dream Print through EasyHire, where he first worked full-time, progressively this was reduced until Tommaso was no longer called back,

> **Krzysztof**: After the Christmas rush, what did you do, did you keep working at Dream Print?
>
> **Tommaso**: Yes, I kept working for a while at Dream Print, even though they slowly reduced the amount of shifts until, we got to the point where I was only working with them Mondays and Tuesdays, and then at some point they didn't send me offers anymore.

True to the nature of filling in, Tommaso does not say there was any notification or process of his job ending, he just stopped being sent 'offers', which are more or less the rota. After his job ended at Dream Print, Tommaso continued working through EasyHire,

> **Tommaso**: I did different things, National Grocers, I've started, doing cleaning, in an office, next to Aldgate Station. I've worked for a couple of months in a tiles shop, I was doing marketing in this tile shop.

Tommaso simply moved on to the next job that was available. However, he did so within the EasyHire's internal job board. National grocers only has sporadic shifts because it is filling shelves. The tile shop job is the one mentioned earlier that Tommaso voluntarily left due to his co-worker. At the time we were speaking he was cleaning the office building, and actually experiencing an increase in hours as the building progressively got busier and busier as Covid-19 receded. The agencies help with job insecurity, as Tommaso exclaims,

> **Tommaso**: …[they] found other, jobs, which is basically what I did for some months because I had nothing to do, and that's where agency work was absolutely, saviour for me, because EasyHire started partnership[s] with National Grocers, Dream Print, and other places outside of hospitality. If it wasn't for that I wouldn't have known what to do, honestly, where to work, and, so yeah, that was great honestly, find that chance to keep working, and, making sure that I had money through the pandemic.

Tommaso explicitly cites the infrastructure supporting fast work as a saviour to his financial security. He was able to surf the contingent landscape through a pandemic that closed the sector which he had experience in, hospitality. Attaf is another interviewee who had embraced the app-based agencies, and our interview was even between shifts found through EasyHire. Overall, Attaf feels secure in the ability to continuously find more work,

> **Attaf**: The job market at the moment is very fragile, plus I feel like I'm quite safe, it may seem that what I do is incredibly risky, but from the foundation that I have established I can flick from one -there are four industries that I can work in, so, so for example, if there was another lockdown, I know that I would be able to get work at National Grocers or Dream Print, Fountain, or other industries that are still running, so I can switch and I can you know, kind of surf through.

Attaf explicitly finds security in the ability to 'surf' through the labour market and using EasyHire. Attaf's financial security is also significantly improved by him being a preferred worker for many employers. These preferred workers get priority in responding to upcoming vacancies in the manner of visibility in the job board. Thus, on my EasyHire account I saw only a dozen or so jobs available, whereas Attaf saw two or three times this amount. Temping allows Attaf to earn a modest income consistently, and through his affiliation with multiple industries, he is confident he can weather a downturn in any single economic sector.

When working through an app-based agency like EasyHire or Crowd, one has easier access to many different employers across the entire country. One might get ongoing shifts at Dream Print over Christmas, then switch to festivals and kitchens over summer, all the while picking up odd shifts stacking shelves at National Grocers. This requires the management of all these different employment relationships, which Attaf takes very seriously,

> **Attaf**: I form a judgement as to what type of relationship I have with a certain company. If a certain company is on my side, I can kind of rely upon on them in times -when times are difficult.
>
> I'll show which. So from my networks, it's like the principle, 20% are useful, 80% are not. The useful ones are this one, one two, three, and this one, this one as well. Some of them are there, and they don't really have much work.

So, immediately, there is a kind of disposability of the worker in these relationships. Despite the ongoing nature of this work for Attaf, he says he is always at risk of effectively being 'bumped'

from his job for reasons that are a matter of convenience for the employer. Attaf says he is at risk of being replaced by someone else, demand changing, or even the employer changes their employment agency from EasyHire, and so Attaf loses the opportunity to 'fill in'. Working for EasyHire therefore enshrines insecurity as a way of life whereby the logic of fast, insecure work is institutionalised within the EasyHire app. Attaf responds by spreading himself thinner, maximising the number of employers he works for over a certain period so that he can move from one to another easily. One may always be able to find work, but never truly becomes secure.

Overall, Tommaso sees a balance of positives and negatives to working for EasyHire overall,

> **Tommaso**: It's just, it has pros and cons, it's just like what you were saying, it's good because it gives you opportunities, but at the same time, it's really -your transformed into…. A dehumanised version of yourself where you feel like you need to give your availability at all times, you need to be versatile and change your mission and be a cleaner one day and something -reception the day after. Every time you're changing and you could be working all times, in the night, in the morning for two hours, for three hours, for four hours.

The additional capabilities of employment agencies to place workers into temporary work contribute to being enabled to live insecurely. Dedicating oneself to an agency like EasyHire mean that one is more likely to find new work, and this creates a certain amount of financial security because as one job is lost or the working conditions are intolerable, one can move to another job that has hours or seems like it might be a better place to work. At the same time though, the employment agencies introduce the very insecurity that they solve, because the jobs tend to be short-term, seasonal or with poor working conditions. In this regard, the app-based labour pools are an intensification of the logic of surfing, in that workers are given enhanced tools to live in/securely. This can reach the point where one can come to feel confident about being able to find work again, and so while job loss is inconvenient, it becomes much less something to fear. In this regard, a state of in/security is formed as workers live with and integrate the insecurity of their work into the overall sustainability of a working life that is precarious.

Getting into a labour pool can be a difficult task. Employment agencies hire by the logic of fast lanes, seeking those who meet a criteria of availability, documentation and competence. All the while they are trying to maintain a healthy ratio of shifts to workers. This poses barriers for those with poor English or who lack the technical or literacy skills to navigate onboarding. However, they can also be incredibly valuable. Labour pools can be thought of as almost a shelter on the contingent landscape, which workers want to try and get inside of. If people cannot, then they have to find work on the bare surface of the landscape consisting of job boards, social networks and per-job hiring through agencies.

8.4 In and Out of Stable Precarious Work

The final point to surfing is the 'stable' precarious job. This is where the worker has come to 'stop' in some manner. The job has ongoing work, the conditions are tolerable and the worker is not fed up with it, and there is no other reason to leave. Stable precarious jobs come in many different varieties, but three main groups can be identified. These cases have significant relevance to images of risk society (Beck, 2000) for what they offer workers in comparison to the constant balancing of surfing. First is the permanent contract that conforms to other characteristics of precarious work, namely low pay. Second is the term contract which has stable work but will end at one point. Third are no guaranteed hours arrangements -namely zero hour and gig work- that nonetheless have ongoing work. Being in such a job is probably the most common state of being

amongst precarious workers, that is being in something relatively stable and tolerable until it is not anymore. Such terms can last years and resemble permanent or standard employment, blurring the differences between either.

The first cases are the most paradoxical, it is a zero hour contract with enough ongoing work that the worker considers it to be permanent, as identified statistically in the Labour Force Survey by Farina et al. (2020). This is a contract that offers no guarantee of work, but the circumstances of the employer mean the availability of work is actually stable. For example is a case from Alice. Alice is from London, and has worked in and out of precarious jobs her working life. At one point she was on a permanent contract at a supermarket, which she decided to leave seeking a change. Following this, Alice applied for a zero hour job at an amusement centre in London,

> **Alice**: I said to them in my interview- I was really nervous that I wasn't going to get any hours, and I said like I'm applying for zero hours, I know, -the kind of job. A lot of people say that you may not get the hours that you need, but there and then I was promised I that could have whatever I want. So I went into with it with confidence, and they definitely delivered in what they said, and that kind of reinstated my confidence in them, as well.

Alice worked at the amusement centre for two years on a ZHC, only leaving when the business closed down. Despite being on a ZHC, this was a completely different experience from the typical portrayal of a non-standard contract lacking certainty or other dimensions of work security. Alice had stable hours, liked the working conditions and did not complain about the wages. Furthermore, she also had the flexibility of a zero hour rota where one could easily take less or more hours week-to-week. This role was a two year period of relative stability for Alice amongst more turbulent periods. In the metaphor of surfing, this job was a particularly strong and stable wave that one could ride for a long time. When the amusement centre closed down, Alice's movements resembled more turbulent surfing. First she took a permanent role, but left very quickly due to the working conditions. Then she went to agency work and studied briefly before temping again full-time on a maternity-leave term contract, another period of 'stable' precarious work. Such is the nature of surfing, there is tremendous variation in the amount of job switching that people undergo.

A second example of a stable zero hour job Is from Thomas. At the time, Thomas had moved to London to work after graduating university. His first position was for three months, during which he also happened to be recruited as a freelance researcher for a lobbying/consulting firm. However this is only a few days work a month. Thomas then applied for a job advertised through Star Recruitment, the same agency that placed me as a retail assistant, at multi-national JMSYS as a researcher. He worked there for eighteen months with no guaranteed hours, but stable work,

> **Krzysztof**: You didn't really mention insecurity -does that come up?
>
> **Thomas**: Not while I was at JMSYS because I knew that was for as long as -because they'd said they were really happy with what I was doing and [my duty] sampling, is something that they do year round. So, I knew that one was secure.

As a sampler, Thomas's duty was to identify key informant survey participants as part of one of JMSYS's research services. In other words, it appears to be an entry-level role, but in a prestigious corporate environment. In the end Thomas identified the two key points that kept in the role, the ongoing demand that kept the empty place open, and the good employment relationship he had with his supervisor. Earlier in his life, Thomas took a break from studying and had worked a number of insecure roles, such as that at Argos mentioned earlier. At JMSYS Thomas did not feel insecure and was working as if a permanent employee, yet was on a zero hour contract and in many regards still 'surfing'. Eventually, Thomas got 'fed up' and left this role however, after which

he took a Covid-19 testing position on a zero hour basis while seeking permanent work that would represent an exit from the contingent landscape.

Stable work does not need to be at a company however, people may find self-employed stable work through a gig platform (Prassl, 2018), doing the same work consistently (Josserand & Kaine, 2019). For example Michael left his permanent job due to needing flexibility to manage his family care requirements. This led him to taking sporadic work as a film extra, and settling into being a HandyPerson full-time. On Handy, Michael charges up to £40 an hour, and aims to earn £2000 a month,

> **Michael**: It is a very flexible system, it just takes practice to manage your calendar, manage your lifestyle, because obviously you're freelance and you need to, be -like you recently started you never know if you're gonna have work if you're gonna earn money and how much money you're gonna have every month, so it's a dynamic.
>
> Once you're used to it and you're prepared for it, and you put money aside, it works, it's quite good, you get paid within five days, if a client cancels on short notice, you get cover, you know so there's some benefit.

Again, while Michael has no guaranteed hours, and Handy offer no additional support if Michael cannot find gigs, he recognises some stability in his work. Furthermore, Michael finds the work fulfilling and enjoys being able to make repairs to people's homes and improve their quality of life.

At other times the stable job is a term contract, which gives one a 'guarantee' of work for a limited period. Casper has a part-time zero hour job, as a football steward and a twelve-month term contract as a kitchen porter. Having arrived to London only six months prior to us meeting, Casper is happy with his position and plans to stay out the contract at the kitchen,

> **Krzysztof**: How long do you think you will work there?
>
> **Casper**: Well when I finish my contract let me see if there is any internal training, maybe I can be like a chef, not really sous chef or head chef, not [a] kind of promotion, a different role in the kitchen, then I will stay longer, ah but at least I will finish my contract this year. Because, it's a secured job.

Casper's language is a bit unclear, he is saying he would stay if offered a different position in the kitchen, presumably a kitchen hand. It seems that Casper had low expectations for work, and has accepted these low wage, menial roles. The kitchen position however is for a charity, and overall Casper feels working there is rewarding and tolerable, so is not motivated to leave due to the working conditions. However, he is still 'surfing' the availability of football work, and may leave the kitchen role when the contract is over. At that point, he may need to return to surfing the contingent landscape.

While work might be becoming more flexible (Beck, 2000), the antithesis has as much to say about neoliberal and post-Fordist working. This is especially the case as these 'stable' precarious jobs are taken in between periods of extreme flexibility. These periods of stable precarious work are a time in people's lives where they have ongoing work, albeit contractually insecure, that they are comfortable doing. These periods of stability are significant for what they mean when integrated into the precarious worker constructions. These jobs that can meet people's immediate insecurities, providing steady work, financial security and tolerable working conditions. These jobs are particularly strong and stable waves that workers find and then decide to keep going with, and in some ways their stability interrupts surfing with a job that in some ways resemble permanent employment on a standard contract.

While surfing is most centred on changing jobs due to not enough hours, intolerable working conditions or getting fed up, it does also include these periods of stability. These periods of stability really confuse both the concept of surfing and precarious work because they are so stable that they resemble 'non-precarious' work more than precarious work. Permanent and non-permanent work blur and cross over. These jobs, while in practical terms are 'secure', still have a presence predicated on an empty place and so are susceptible to the deficiencies of 'filling in'. Therefore they speak to the pervasiveness of precarity, and the assertions that all work is being transformed, as in the idea of the risk regime (Beck, 2000). Yet, compared to the constant vigilance and proactive behaviour that is often described of such flexibility (Kelly, 2006), being in these jobs is much more prosaic. There is a mundane side to insecurity of neoliberal flexibility. Nonetheless, while workers may be in them securely, the individual can never truly feel like they have left the contingent market or job searching, because they are never fully integrated into the workplace. To this wit, Attaf complained of being marginalised and never getting the payoff from the events centre after working there for six years, line managers would come and go, and he would have to teach each new one the ropes. Even though he was the expert, he was always outside the firm, an auxiliary staff member never taken seriously. In this regard, when the stable precarious job ends, nothing is likely to have change overall and one is likely to go back to the contingent landscape to surf.

8.5 Conclusion: Achieved Equilibrium

This chapter has examined the job-to-job existence of precarious workers. In my fieldwork, this seemed inevitable, albeit to an extent designed, while other similar ethnographies focus on one or a small number of 'stable' precarious jobs (Bundy, 2019; Galic, 2019), my more fluid experience may be due to Covid-19. However, the interviewees described periods of rapid job switching similar to my fieldwork experience, interspersed with periods of 'reliable' ongoing precarious work on a no guaranteed hours basis. Movements and decisions to stop in a job are shaped by the availability of work, working conditions and getting 'fed up' in a job. In doing so, workers not only are able to manage the financial insecurity of insecure work, but also the exposure to poor working conditions, and a lack of momentum down a meaningful trajectory.

The chapter examined three main empirical focuses. First was the movements from job to job. Precarious workers often need to change jobs due to the sheer insecurity of the work that they do manage to find. However, there are other reasons to change jobs including working conditions and the desire to find a job with more momentum. These three are the main movements of surfing. The second and third empirical focuses are periods of stability. There is working within a labour pool, most notably an app-based agency, where one can continually and more efficiently use the infrastructure of precarious work to surf. Finally are 'stable' precarious jobs where individuals find a particularly stable 'wave' to surf with steady work, good working conditions and the worker is not feeling 'fed up' with the job. Nonetheless, these jobs may not amount to much and so when they end, the worker is liable to returning to fast work and surfing. Altogether, these movements and stabilities refer to the overall state of being of precarious workers in the contingent landscape.

Through surfing the contingent landscape, certain precarious workers achieve an equilibrium of hours, conditions and trajectory. Through staying in one precarious job or moving on to another precarious job, workers are floating in their equilibrium. Most notably, the insecure income of precarious work can be 'smoothed out' between jobs in order to achieve, through considerable effort, a consistent income. This however is always prone to uncertainty, but the fast nature of precarious work allows the worker to adapt rapidly. The same occurs for working conditions and

the more personal feeling of being 'fed up'. Through engaging with insecure work, workers eke out a distinct existence built on what little resources are available to them to contribute some security. In this regard, in/security comes to the fore as precarious work comes to be the 'security' that maintains one as precarious as much as it is the insecurity making one precarious. Precarity cannot just be the downside risks and vulnerabilities, it has to contain the security of an equilibrium, and that equilibrium has to be achieved by the worker themself.

This discussion raises questions of what is precarity. Precarity in the Butler tradition is the 'social and political arrangements that differentially distribute precariousness', that is, 'the vulnerability of human existence' (Han, 2018: 338). Such distribution is clearly at play in this chapter, with the individuals who surf only being distributed uncertain and intolerable jobs. Workers nonetheless achieve balance, they manage to counter-balance the insecurity of precarious work with the securities that are available to them -more work. This appears to 'downgrade' the quality of the overall balance or state of being to be less fulfilling and more risky. Furthermore, precarity in the form of the stable precarious job, sees uncertainty recede and a more mundane and repetitive existence form. Heterogeneity of precariousness is not new, many theorists note that precariousness is personal and unique to the individual (Della Porta et al., 2015; Lorey, 2015). However, the point of in/security is to note that the capitalist job market, in the form of fast work and the supporting infrastructure, *support* being precarious. The implication is that precarity is not purely the product of the rescinding of securities, but is an alternative state of security predicated on detachment from employers, adaptability to different types of work and giving up control to the market. This brings precarity much closer to the entrepreneurial or guerilla selves (Howie & Campbell, 2017; Kelly, 2006), but predicated more on the rationality of a limited labour market and the compulsion to work (Weeks, 2011). While one could say that this is a method to induce fear in the working population and shape their conduct as governmentality (Lorey, 2015), it works as much upon offering rewards as it does giving risk.

Achieving an equilibrium returns the discussion to the question of a consistent experience of precarious work. What is distinctive about precarious workers, as explained above, is not their economic, or even their tenure insecurity, but their external, mobile and disposable position in relation to the firms they work. There is a consistency here of what in/security these individuals are living by, what is maintaining and threatening their precariousness. As per the Brazilianization of the West Beck (2000), precarious workers are experiencing insecurity consistently in terms of the need to live off what meagre security they can find on the contingent landscape. Nonetheless, workers are living in different locations in the contingent landscape that result in very different risk profiles. There are differences of work sector, such as hospitality or logistics and distinctions of finding shelter in labour pools or stable precarious jobs. Surfing is a consistent experience that workers of many different means and backgrounds.

The multi-modal reality of surfing raises questions regarding differential vulnerability to being precarious. In surfing, workers are not being protected or exposed to the same single ontological precariousness of human fragility, but different insecurities that arise for them. Workers are reacting to different insecurities, and in some cases, the advantages that a worker has is contributing to what needs to be protected against. The enablement of insecurity that surfing represents does not conform to the notion of an 'unequal distribution of protection' (Alberti et al., 2018: 449) that is also described by other authors examining the relationship between precarity and precarious work (Antonucci, 2018; Campbell & Price, 2016). Workers capabilities enable surfing, and in doing so, create the new insecurities of an achieve equilibrium. Those who can surf face the prospect of needing to keep on moving in order to improve their working life. Thus resources that help shield one from precarity do not immunise the worker, but transform that precarity into a different form. When who can surf is considered, those without resources are

the most likely to be 'stuck' in a single job and therefore in a way-of-being that is arguably *more certain* than surfing.

In the next chapter I end the analysis by examining workers' perspective of surfing itself and their trajectories through the contingent landscape.

9

Continuation, Exit and Recursion

9.1 Introduction: Gaining and Losing Momentum

This chapter turns to surfing as a whole as the unit of analysis. In the previous chapters I examined hiring, then jobs themselves and thirdly the job-to-job career that can form. If the previous chapter examined surfing from the inside, then this chapter examines surfing from an outside perspective. Looking from the outside, are the precarious work trajectories that surfing moves workers along. Such a trajectory can meander through the contingent landscape, with fits and starts of greater or lesser security, where workers fail to see any way to find an 'exit' into permanent work and relative security. The second half of the chapter, and the final analysis section of the thesis, discusses how workers define and achieve an exit to the contingent landscape.

This chapter works closest to the worker-centred literature by examining the subjectivity or feeling of precarity in the context of surfing. As examined in the worker-centred literature, precarious workers may be or feel insecure themselves dependent and independent of their job. Precarious workers are described to 'feel' precarious about past or present precarity (Worth, 2016) not having the work that the individual wants (MacDonald & Giazitzoglu, 2019) and being stopped from using their full abilities (Motakef, 2019). This was summarised as an insecurity of social or financial position, a deliberately desaturated concept of class. At the same time though, are qualitative studies of precarious workers who are using the work to either be more autonomous in their lives (Wong & Au-Yeung, 2019) or as a step towards better employment (Schilling et al., 2019). In other words, precarious work can be a risk to or affirm one's social position while drawing mixed perceptions of it being good or bad overall. In light of social context and location (Vosko, 2010), precarious work has no definite connection to being precarious (Campbell & Price, 2016). However, work is still likely to be important to confidence or anxiety about position. As such, what comes into view is a blend of both the material concerns of avoiding deprivation and the cultural concerns of acquiring a social position that a certain job can represent (Weber, 2010). Trajectory aids the analysis of this anxiety because it moves the focus from a single job to the career of the individual and their perception of their working future. This chapter employs surfing, the insights from filling in, and the notion of taking fast work to develop worker-centred analysis.

This chapter has two sections. First, through the plans and expectations of people's future in work, I examine the trajectory interviewees see. While precarious work is largely unsatisfying, the realities of the wider job market mean that it is the better than what permanent work is available, and workers see little ability to alter that. This means continuing in precarious work is the pragmatic decision, but leaves the worker with no momentum towards an exit or greater security. The second section examines exits from precarious work. The proposal of this section immediately faces a limitation of precarious work theory: what would the line between in and out of such work be? In this regard, I draw on interviewees' definitions of what would be a significant change in their lives for more security. They frame this as having momentum down the 'right path', such a job has a future for ongoing or greater security. For some workers this means

permanent work, but for others it can mean 'upgrading' their precarious work to something more fulfilling and better paid. These exits however can be temporary, and workers are liable to returning to surfing even after having found their right direction. In this regard, the analysis ends openly by noting one could always return to the contingent landscape.

9.2 Indefinite Precarious Working

For some workers, their precarious work trajectory has no end, all the individual can see is more precarious work. The precarious work they can find is overall better than any permanent jobs they have been offered. At the same time, they may see no trajectory out. There is no significant job that would be their break and secure them. Therefore, their precarious work trajectory is to meander through the contingent landscape with no exit in sight.

9.2.1 Preferring Non-Permanent Contracts

Where one may take fast work at first because it is the quicker and easier way to get into work, as precarious workers progress over some years, it may come about that precarious work has better pay and conditions. This is not a function of being in well-paid precarious roles, such as knowledge or creative work (Armano & Murgia, 2013), but can occur in menial roles too. A menial non-standard contract role may pay better and have better conditions than the permanent contract roles that are available to that individual.

I would often ask interviewees if they wanted a permanent contract generally, or what they would do if their current precarious employer offered a permanent contract. For those who had worked in precarious work the longest, the permanent work available to them was not attractive. I quote Raymond, who graduated some six or so years prior to the interview, at length due to the number of points,

> **Krzysztof**: Do you want a permanent contract?
>
> **Raymond**: I don't think that I do, it's one of those things where -I've never really had one, and I don't really associate one with any particular benefit, even though I know they do come with, benefits. And I'm thinking maybe, it's a result of the nature of my employment has always quite chaotic, that it's always been -almost a necessity to, you know, to be able to pick things up and put them down.
>
> **Krzysztof**: So, you like the necessity of being able to pick things up and put them down?
>
> **Raymond**: I don't like that but, so [laugh], if I found a job that I really liked, and they offered me a contract, and, enough money to live on, and it made me feel good, then I would definitely take that, it just so happens that the only jobs that I have had that offered me payroll, and I have had payroll for pubs, and then that doesn't translate into a good work-life balance.
>
> In fact the only thing I feel like that does is create a sense of obligation which you wouldn't otherwise have had to go above and beyond your contract, and, but that's a sort of slightly esoteric setting, where that happens as a matter of course, and that's not the case in other jobs, and I don't think, contracted work is bad, but, for the last few years, I've had my finger, my fingers in lots of different pies, and, it, none of them have been in a position to offer me a contract, and that's been fine.

Contractual differentiation is at the core of work-induced precarity and some approaches to ontological precariousness (Alberti et al., 2018), however, when all work is precarious, then the

equation becomes much more complex regarding a balance of all the characteristics of the job, as perceived by the worker. Raymond appears to be in the 'risk regime' of work (Beck, 2000) where insecurity is everywhere. Raymond does recognise the greater security of a permanent contract, but is not sure what that would actually change in practice. Most importantly though, he sees a permanent contract as requiring greater work intensity in the form of more obligations. The non-permanent contract, bound to filling in an empty place, offers much less labour for only slightly less security. At the same time, his sense of a good permanent job includes good pay and one he feels good about doing. They key point though, is that this circumstance of work means that non-permanent contracts, and so the logic of surfing, has so far over six years been the best option for Raymond. Considering the relative security of such, Raymond appears prepared to surf until a permanent job of adequate quality comes up.

Attaf has been surfing with periods in 'stable' precarious jobs for nearly twenty years. Permanent work would mean earning significantly less, however this is framed in not being able to work as many hours as he does now,

> **Krzysztof**: So places have offered you permanent jobs, as an EasyHire Person, I guess, has this happened or?
>
> **Attaf**: Yeah that is true, I consider them seriously, and I put myself in that position and I've estimated the chances of me get -becoming someone of worth, doing a job which is gonna be financially viable for me as well.
>
> Because to me a cleaner at £9 an hour, it is gonna be really difficult, if I did take a permanent position, job like that, I would end up doing something else anyway, with the added complication of not being free to do like certain jobs that might pay more. So, it really is an all or nothing.

For context, at the time EasyHire paid a minimum of £10 an hour, and up to £12 was regularly available for public holidays, night shifts or less attractive roles like kitchen porter. Ultimately Attaf could earn more as a precarious worker than as a permanent one, in terms of not just pay, but also the ability to work additional hours, which Attaf sees as valuable. The available permanent work is simply not as good as the available agency work. The significance of this is not just the comparison of permanent job to precarious job, but a permanent job to surfing. Through surfing Attaf is able to minimise the drawbacks of temporary agency work, namely the lack of certainty over hours, and reap the benefits, higher hourly wages and flexible hours. Overall though, it has to be stated, Attaf's position working for EasyHire is a difficult one to live in. At the same time, Attaf frames the entire equation by the opportunity cost, would a period of lower wages be worth it in order to get his 'foot in the door' and then be promoted into a role with better wages? On the whole, he judges no. He sees more opportunity for promotion surfing than in what permanent contract jobs he could get. For Attaf, and where he is located in the contingent landscape, the permanent contract job is now the 'precarious job' in terms of wages and promotion prospects.

The aspect which Attaf mentioned of the prospects of permanent work being poor is echoed by Alice. Alice, who has tertiary qualifications but not a degree, was one of the most adept interviewees at surfing. She has moved in and out of various NGHC and permanent contracts of varying job quality her entire working career from when she was sixteen. While at the time of our interview it seemed like she had found her preferred permanent job, working for housing associations, she overall felt positive about surfing compared to permanent work,

> **Alice**: For me, I'm always open, I never looking for something, specific, so if temping's is available, I'll go for a temp job. Because I know it will give me the experience and also the flexibility to move on, like progress, so I'll gain experience within the job and then when

> the end of my contracts comes, I can move onto something better because I would've gained that experience, and also, I'll have - I don't have rubbish reasons for leaving the job.

Alice was overall positive about temporary work, and did not seem to make much of a distinction based on whether a job was permanent or not. For Alice, there is the sense that more rapidly surfing through taking temporary contracts would allow her to better gain experience and keep moving. On the whole, she would always take a temporary role for that ability to keep on moving. In a sense then, if one has to take poor quality work, it is at least better to have some variety and to keep one's options open in the sense of 'gathering' (Schilling et al., 2019) opportunities or living in the interstices of neoliberalism (Howie & Campbell, 2017). Whether that is a trajectory of horizontal movements where one never gains any more security, or moving towards greater security, is another question, however. Allice's view is much the same point Attaf seemed to be making about the permanent jobs he was offered, that he would end up 'stuck' on minimum wage in the same repetitive job.

These points about the 'freedom' of surfing raise questions of a voluntary lifestyle that individuals are entering into. Surfing can become a kind of 'lifestyle precarity' where individuals piece together disparate careers while rejecting the rigmarole of a permanent job. This is a point made by Wong and Au-Yeung (2019) who see young adults using precarious work to pursue autonomy, and then when they get older, deciding to prioritise security. In the case of this section however, the autonomy is purely within work, whereas Wong and Au-Yeung (2019) saw autonomy of things like going travelling. In some ways, the permanent roles discussed in this section would introduce the worker-centred insecurity of lacking progress towards greater social and financial positions of security. Attaf, Raymond and Alice in taking the permanent role would introduce a certainty of staying still, raising doubts if they will ever achieve the desired social and economic position. The attraction of surfing is not in what it offers, but in its inherent ambiguity. Surfing may not necessarily offer progress, but at least it does not foreclose one's future. It keeps one moving down a trajectory, which is deemed better than staying still. In this regard, surfing is conducive to formations of the entrepreneurial self (Kelly, 2006) in that it supports feeling in control or having options. The worker is at once restricted by their lack of attractive permanent work opportunities and entering voluntarily into a lifestyle precarity that, at the least, enters some unpredictability as to whether the future will be better or remain the same.

The decision to stay in precarious work over permanent work is a complex one where workers look at and balance all aspects of the jobs such as wages, working conditions and promotion prospects. A permanent or a non-permanent contract remains a distant thought for these workers. For many, insecure work has the perverse characteristic of being better than the permanent work available to them. This shines a critical light on descriptions of a risk regime of work (Beck, 2000) in that these cases of 'all work' being insecure is local to their being. Where the initial logic of fast work occurred under limited time or needing to find any work, in the context of job searching in the long-term the attraction of precarious work can come down to the simple arithmetic of wages and effort. The permanent jobs these people have access to are identified as worse than the non-permanent jobs they have access to. This is likely however a function of the increased capacity to find precarious work and so continue surfing. Where one precarious job might be worse than one permanent job, when comparing the aggregate of surfing to one permanent job, surfing can be superior. When workers combine their viewpoints about the promotion prospects of the permanent jobs they are being offered, there is little or no perceived advantage. In many regards, this analysis reflects the detriment to the quality of standard work that has been argued (Beck, 2000; Kalleberg, 2018). The standard contract, with its obligations to an employer, more stable yet lower pay and representing a trajectory 'dead-end' are unattractive to those workers who have learned to surf. Therefore, remedying precarity is a lot more complex than banning non-standard contracts in favour of standard ones. The realities of fast work and the

equilibrium that is achieved mean that it can be superior, even in the menial work sectors that these workers are describing.

9.2.2 Stability, but no Exit

At the same time, those surfing are at a loss as to how to stop or how to find a permanent job that is better than what precarious work they are currently in. The permanent job market remains difficult for them to get a hold in, and the precarious work they are taking is not contributing to their overall job search. This reinforces having a trajectory that is meandering around the contingent landscape. Workers may be confident that they will always be able to make ends' meet and survive financially, but there appears to be no job or opportunity to substantially alter the equation of their job searching towards something more secure in terms of a job or themselves.

The interviewees, having achieved an equilibrium in their surfing, may also express being unsettled with not being able to move towards where they want. Every job is a more-or-less horizontal movement across work availability, working conditions and getting fed up, and there is no movement 'up' into better work or work they prefer. They see no way to substantially alter or end their precarious work trajectory. To investigate this, we can return to Lucas, who at the time was twenty-four years old. He was finishing his minor corrections on his history MPhil while working at the food court where he had attained some seniority by 'stepping up'. Now that he has effectively graduated and is working full-time, he is confident in his achieved equilibrium, but is unsure about ever getting out of the contingent landscape, I quote at length,

> **Lucas**: I've always been okay. I'll always…I'm a hard worker, I've got good references on my CV, I've got plenty of work experience in quite a diverse range of fields. I've been a Covid testing operative, I've been a retail assistant, worked in hospitality. I've been a handyman, I've been a cleaner. I've done more or less most things that were lower service based jobs.
>
> So, I'll never be out of work, and I'll always have money coming in, It's just about whether I find something that I really want to do and it's just proving a bit frustrating, and you feel like you're racing against the clock sort of…which is frustrating. But I'll never go without. I will always be okay, it's whether I really fulfil my potential to get the career and job that I want.
>
> **Krzysztof**: And what's that clock that you feel is ticking?
>
> **Lucas**: The sort of jobs that I'm doing it's all right if you're in your early twenties but once you get past 25/26 you just need to…I feel like most people have found the career prospect, that they've already found their career, they've already set themselves up for something. They're already progressing with going to be a supervisor, manager, they're going up the ladder and it feels like endless frustration, like you're not quite there yet. Don't get me wrong there's loads of people in far worst positions doing the same sort of…went to uni etcetera, and they're struggling.
>
> I feel like I'm in the middle with, I'm not going to a food bank, I'm not struggling to get any sort of work whatsoever, I've got enough work experience all added to make sure I'm all right. But at the same time, I'm not in doing as well as my other peers, who are already doing…in a high-end jobs like the City in Canary Wharf or doing what…doing stuff that they set out to do, which is again frustrating.
>
> **Krzysztof**: So, are these people that you know or is this…?

> **Lucas**: Well, who I know and generally too. I think the people I know are at both ends of the spectrum and I'm in the middle which is just frustrating in a way. As I say I don't go without, I'll always be okay-ish, but whether I fulfil my potential is the real frustration.

Lucas adds the relationship to age and relative 'progress' to trajectory. To meander through the contingent landscape is tolerable, however over time, Lucas feels that he would be falling behind compared to others. There is a clear status and class (Weber, 2010) aspect to the framing by Lucas, that materially he will always have his basic needs met, but he feels like he is 'falling behind' his peers in terms of a career -a cultural marker of class (Bourdieu, 1984). Nonetheless, there is an economic imperative behind Lucas's concerns, to live comfortably he has to find a way out of surfing through low pay work. The economic imperative to achieve a modest living is enmeshed with the desire for a career -and the class position that represents- equal to his peers.

Lucas is trying to find an exit, but does not see one, and so the trajectory laid in front of him is to just move from one menial precarious job to another. Perspective is important here, there are clearly aspects about the present affecting Lucas. The weight of Covid-19 and maybe some 'post-graduation blues', operating here too, but these emotions are framed and manifest against trajectory. Lucas has moved through the contingent landscape extensively, but with negligible progress towards his goal. The achievements that do make him feel progress -references, degrees, work experience- seem to be almost meaningless to him because they seem to only help him surf more effectively. Lucas acknowledges these things make him comfortable, secure even, but they are only contributing to a more stable surf through the contingent landscape rather than moving down a trajectory he wants - moving towards 'finding a career', being a manager or moving up the career ladder.

Lucas was just at the beginning of his post-study job search. Other precarious workers who had been surfing for far longer expressed a general inability to get on the right trajectory towards increasing security. Attaf, a masters graduate, expressed,

> **Attaf**: I'm really stuck on how I can get a professional job in a reputable company that is invested in developing their staff, something that I've been very unlucky at -I mean yes I've got two degrees, yes I'd got a diploma in management, and accounts technician. But I can't get, I have not been to able, you know get a return on that time.

Like Lucas, while Attaf has found some certainty in surfing precarious work, he sees very little opportunity for securing a better job. Part of lacking a pathway out is that precarious work may not contribute much to finding better work. A consequence of always filling in is that one gains very limited transferable skills, and sometimes no references. This is part of the limitations that Attaf had,

> **Attaf**: The problem that I have is that it's difficult for me to break out of this cycle, and progression is a major problem with what I do. Because there isn't an organisation structure, where you would start off as a temporary, on zero contract, and then become a senior in that capacity, it just doesn't exist.

So Attaf is clearly evoking the process of filling in here. There of course do exist organisational structures of promotion from a temporary contract to a permanent one in firms, even those employers that appear to be the most exploitative, such as Sidewalk, hire their permanent staff from the zero hour staff brought in by Velocity Recruitment. Attaf is probably the most experienced at surfing, and had shown an incredible mastery of EasyHire, stacking multiple shifts and working consistently upwards of sixty hours a week. Attaining a trajectory of improving security, however always eluded Attaf. Lucas and Attaf describe rapidly moving through the contingent landscape, having a clear and in/secure trajectory of precariousness, but no trajectory towards actual security.

Moving through the contingent landscape rapidly but not towards where one wants to go, in particular in relation to permanent jobs is highlighted by other interviewees. Thomas explains after failing to get promoted into a permanent job at JMSYS,

> **Krzysztof**: How immediate or dire is it to find a good job that will last?
>
> **Thomas**: I'm not having much luck there with permanent positions, I mean I couldn't even get one at JMSYS when I'd been working there for eighteen months. So, I'm starting to wonder, you know, if or when I ever actually will or if I'm just going to have to keep on doing like temporary, part-time stuff forever. Or unless I decide to become like a teacher or something, which has a kind of guaranteed job at the end of it.

So Thomas is wondering, will he forever be moving across the contingent landscape with no direction? At the same time, he recognises that professions have greater job security. Jason, who had recently moved to the UK from India with his wife who did get a permanent job, felt unsure if he can get a better job or will be stuck on the terrain forever,

> **Jason**: If I can tell you I've worked in at least 17 companies so far, and, ten to 15 multinational companies [laugh] so the thing is that, presently I lost confidence that I cannot work in big company, in good position, but, that sense of thing should not come in my mind, but, I'm not, sometime I get down that it's not possible.

Ultimately, Brice feels like he can only find temporary work and will never exit,

> **Brice**: To answer your question now about London, it's very hard to get in London permanent work, I can tell you, I don't know which experience you have made, yes?
>
> **Krzysztof**: Yeah, I was looking around just at warehouse jobs and stuff. But I was looking for temp work specifically for my research.
>
> **Brice**: Yeah, but I tell you honestly, temporary work you get, permanent is sore topic here, so it's my experience, yes?
>
> I apply very much, yes, and you don't get here anything that is permanent nature, this is honest, yes. I have not seen anything what is hiring permanently, only temporary.

Brice works in a part of the contingent landscape that appears to have better working conditions. His law degree and experience grants him access to a kind of work that might be very attractive to warehouse and factory operatives. Yet, he has his goal set on permanent work, and finds that he cannot move towards that.

Finally, Attaf overall sees his position as systemically excluded from the middle-class,

> **Attaf**: You have the privileged people that can earn £27,000 just from a nine to five job, and you have people like myself, and migrants that cannot, that do not have access to this. I don't have a criminal record, I'm articulate, good numeracy, I went to a good university, but I don't have access to that.
>
> So the only, option open to me, is to do zero hour contracts. Work for agencies, and, put in the hours, I'm not going to be able to negotiate a pay rise, the only thing I can do, to better my situation, or to cope is to work more, it's an unnecessary, an unnecessary ah approach to take, but, I'm not the only person that has to take this approach.

Attaf ultimately sees himself as having no access to middle-income work on the scale of his whole life and being. Surfing is all he has, and it has become accustomed to its hardships. Precarious workers may be constantly thinking and attempting to break the chain of precarious work that they are in, but be left with doubts if it is possible. They have achieved an equilibrium of

precarious work that keeps them afloat in terms of income and working conditions, but they cannot find a way to finally secure themselves once and for all with a good job that will set them on the path to a progressively improving career.

It has to be restated that this is not a universal case, but is a matter of setting one's biography different from where one is moving. These people have an eye to leaving the contingent landscape, but cannot see a way out. They have set their trajectory to leaving precarious work, but every movement they take is just around the contingent landscape. In their study of hotel room attendants, Knox et al. (2015) found a mixture of desires to leave or stay in the job. Here though, the desire to move is not limited to just the current job, it is the location in the landscape. These workers have already moved from job to job, and found that there is very little to improve, they are always working within the same bounds of possibility. They remain attached to the idea of leaving the area of the contingent landscape they live in for something better.

9.2.3 Summary: Meandering Precarious Work Trajectories

In this section I have described in many ways, the state of precariousness that precarious workers are living in: an ability to surf, and a security predicated on that ability, and a dearth of options about ending that process. These workers appear to be caught in a situation similar to the most radical readings of neoliberal theory, a risk regime where all work is insecure (Beck, 2000). There are modifiers to either point. Firstly, the intensity of insecurity felt, the detriment to well-being and the pain of being precarious are all dependent on the area of the contingent landscape being surfed. The realities of surfing clerical work, like Brice or Thomas are doing, compared to menial labouring in factories and warehouses as Jason and Aarav are, or hospitality work as Raymond was surfing, are all going to present different pains of labouring, wages and insecurities of work and self. Second, the idea of having no pathway out is a factor of both 'objective' conditions and a perception. Workers are conditioned by the surfing, their failures in job searching and their expectation of what a permanent job would look like, to see no exit and to see the relative security of surfing. This shows a much more developed idea of worker-centred precariousness, one that is not exclusively built on what one is lacking (certainty of employment, higher wages, promotion), but also includes the resources that the worker has -fast work, precarious work infrastructure and the skills to surf- as contributing to precariousness. In using those resources, the precariousness is not about having hit 'the bottom' of the labour market, but is about holding one up above the worst quality permanent contracts that do exist. In this regard, the risk regime of neoliberal work (Beck, 2000) has this 'height' to it. This adds another dimension to surfing, to crash out means to sink to the bottom and work in the worse pay, conditions and existential security of the worst permanent contract jobs.

If all work is precarious or insecure (Beck, 2000), precarious workers are floating between something better and something worse. The best work they can find is precarious, creating the perverse reality that surfing, not permanent work, is the best choice of job and individual security. Meanwhile, they have no clear pathway out. They describe struggling to find a permanent or good quality job altogether, and do not see anything that they could do that would change that. Some are already qualified yet still struggle to find acceptable permanent work, keeping them surfing. As such, they are left in precarious work indefinitely, moving around the contingent landscape by the logic of the market and where empty places happen to open and for how long. All the while though, is some type of effort to keep surfing, to remain out of the worst quality permanent work in order to keep moving and keep the possibility and hope alive of getting out.

In the final section of the analysis chapters, I turn to what an exit might look like and how people achieve that.

9.3 Exits and Recursions to Surfing: The Importance of Having a Future

Does anyone make it out of surfing? Do people ever find a stable job, or an uncertain job they love? These are ends to surfing and exits from the contingent landscape. Yet at the same time, by taking insecure work with better wages or conditions, it can seem like people are just achieving a new and higher equilibrium, rather than truly becoming secure. The ambiguity of ever 'leaving' precarious work, and the ease at which one may return, speaks to a larger aspect of labour market insecurity being the true nature of precarious work, rather than any particular job.

9.3.1 Futures Outside of Precarious Work

Futures outside of precarious work represent an overall position of ongoing security, effectively attaining the position to make oneself secure indefinitely. This means to no longer be held by the logic of fast work or surfing, and instead come to live by a logic of being independently secure. That is, in addition to getting a job that meets typical expectations of security (wages, working conditions, tenure), that job would also be the first in a string secure jobs. In other words, one can only stop surfing if there is a future in the job one is in. In these cases, workers describe such a job as being one that might fit their 'calling' and so they largely conform to the idea of the capitalist work ethic (Weeks, 2011). The discussion in this section examines two groups. I first describe those expecting to pursue a pre-existing career and then those who are still trying to establish themselves outside of the contingent landscape.

For those workers who have come to the contingent landscape from a previous non-precarious career, then they are much more confident in taking a pathway out following that. In many cases this is a matter of remaining attached to that sector of work, and just waiting for the right time to go back into it, rather than following the logic of fast work. For example, migrants may have much better work in their home country that they can return to. The security of these represent an exit from surfing. Jason moved to London as a trailing spouse, and while he felt he could not pursue his profession as a computer programmer in London, the family business is always there,

> **Krzysztof**: So in five or six years you need to help with the business?
>
> **Jason**: Yeah, so I usually every time I used call and ask him [father] that 'do you need my support?' in factory or in some office ? He still needs to tell me that 'I have enough energy I can go to office and I can take my decision'. So, anyway, he used to ask me to come to India to join the business I'm still going to go back, but right now he's saying that, you better pursue your dream, and if you can get a better life you better stay there for some time, then come back to India.

For Jason, there are two paths in front of him. Either to get a good job in London, or eventually return to the family business in India. Both represent a state of ongoing security, either having achieved his 'dream' -presumably economic security and good well-being- or returning to the family factory in India. Both of these lie far into the future, but they also give Jason a lot of confidence, because he knows that one way or another he is not 'stuck' surfing menial work as was currently undertaking at Sidewalk as a picker.

UK-born people may also have a similar exit waiting for them in the form of a career. Covid-19 meant that those with otherwise stable careers came to the contingent landscape to wait out the hiring freeze that occurred. These workers may be confident about their job prospects once things return to normal. For example, when Arral thinks about starting his job as a Covid-19 tester, he frames it in relation to his future job search in the corporate sector,

> **Arral**: Yeah as long as it's a nice group of guys you know or people, should be alright. I thought to myself, it's a Covid test centre, I could spin that in my next job interview, say I

> did something you know, I fought the war. Ah, on coronavirus. I thought yeah there's some spin on it.

Arral's attitude shows that he is attached to his corporate career, sees a definite future in it and can take a light hearted approach to his surfing. He is adamant that another corporate job will come along for him once Covid-19 recedes. Meanwhile Priscilla, who had previously worked as an account manager for a multi-national corporation, was also thinking seriously about exiting precarious work and was even aiming to realign her skills into a new industry of event management,

> **Krzysztof**: Are you very confident in getting into that?
>
> **Priscilla**: Not super confident because it's been really tough, but I think events as well at the moment is just a tough industry to get into. With so many events being cancelled, it does seem a lot to do with contacts and who you know.
>
> **Krzysztof**: And so, how do you balance, have you got a backup plan?
>
> **Priscilla**: At the moment I guess I don't have much of a backup plan. But, yeah I don't really have much of a backup plan I'm pretty much going for this and, in the past I've done jobs that I didn't enjoy so much, so it's just really important for me now that I find the right thing even if it takes me a bit longer.

Before working temporary contracts during Covid-19, Priscilla had a series of good-quality corporate jobs that, while requiring a high work intensity, were jobs that she felt good about doing. Some of these jobs ended in redundancy as the companies she worked for restructured, but she was always able to find another good job and never had to resort to fast work. In many cases, her uncertainty about changing sectors comes out of a high amount of confidence, that she at least has a chance in this completely new sector.

Compared to the previous section of workers who saw 'no pathway out', many precarious workers see a solid future in certain professions or family businesses. They either have a past of consistently being able to find good quality work that makes them confident, or have a concrete job opportunity waiting for them if they should want it. Their need for fast work is genuinely temporary, being a trailing spouse to the UK or being made redundant during Covid-19. The assuredness of their futures in good work represents a firm exit. For the so-called corporates, they have adopted a firm adherence to the capitalist work ethic and the bargain that hard work shall be paid back (Weber, 2013; Weeks, 2011).

Meanwhile, are hypothetical visions of an exit held by workers who would be starting fresh in a secure career. Their vision is largely having what Arral and Priscilla have, the ability to find good quality work. For example is Fiona, who identifies what she is striving for, and would be materially different from her current 'precarious' work as a kitchen hand in a high school canteen,

> **Fiona**: I want to back to, do the things that I like to do, like, try something in the events, marketing, this is why I want to do, even if inside the office, but this is what I like to do, I can see myself doing that, in this kind of environment. Give me this opportunity because, I hope I'm doing the right thing, I got feeling, I'm, how to say? Right way? No, right direction!

Fiona describes how working in an office environment again would represent to her that she is moving in the 'right direction' . It is not a permanent contract, or any other aspect, but a matter of does the job have the attributes that Fiona can identify as her moving up in the world. Fiona had worked in a 'stable' precarious job for years as a canteen kitchen hand in a high school, but she saw no future in it. The idea of 'direction' implies not just having one good job, but about moving

to a new area of plentiful secure work that Fiona can pursue a career in. An exit does not mean achieving a secure job, but about achieving a secure way of being that is not bound by the logic of fast work and surfing. In this manner, there is a normative adherence to a type of entrepreneurial self that is not grounded in risk (Kelly, 2006), but the security of success.

Moving in the right direction spills out into whether a permanent contract is attractive or not when compared to surfing. For example is Alice, who after taking on a job at a housing association, completed some temporary roles in the sector and is now set on pursuing more work in housing. After trying work in many different sectors, such as retail, makeup artistry, interior decoration, Alice seems to now feel like she is also heading in the 'right direction' by working in housing. The key to this is seeing a future in housing that is not just stable, but also has the possibility to progress,

> **Alice**: Yeah I think with housing there are so many different directions to go, like I say, in my organisation have like, so many different departments, like housing, law, go to like regeneration side. Yeah for me it's like, where do I -even like accounts, I mean I don't really know about housing and finances, financial stuff, but I mean there are so many different directions to go in terms of that alone, that.

Alice frames housing almost like an employment agency, with a lot of different possible jobs that she can take. Security is not in Fordist entanglement, but in post-Fordist diversity. More importantly, Alice foresees that attaching her future to housing will not be a dead-end, but instead an *opening* to even more career possibilities. Agencies or other low-quality work seemed to be tolerable to do in the present, but do not offer much for the future. Alice seems confident however in housing associations for not just providing stable work, but also, advancement, or at the least the ability to do new things in a professional manner.

Alice's perspective is almost like she is foreseeing the ability to 'surf' roles inside the housing association. At the time of our interview, Alice was finishing a term contract, and was looking at staying with the same employer, but not in the same role,

> **Krzysztof**: Have you spoken to your manager about staying at the association?
>
> **Alice**: Yes…. I've spoken to my manager, but I've also spoken to a few different colleagues. My manager said she would like to keep me, but obviously, as I said, I don't want to stay in that role, so I have colleagues that do fire safety, legal.. so I mean, they have also offered me opportunities, if I want to go over to their team. So I don't know where I'm going to go next, I still trying to decide.

Alice is adamant about wanting a permanent job, but not in the same role. In many ways it appears she is already 'surfing' again, only beginning her job search inside the confines of the housing association. This is of course, an 'internal labour market' indicative of the Fordist corporate firm (Burawoy, 1982) but interpreted in a more entrepreneurial manner. Despite finding promising permanent work with tolerable working conditions in a sector she likes, Alice wants to keep exploring, and hopes to combine that with permanent work at one employer. Without that opportunity of having s future, Alice might forgo this opportunity that has material stability.

For Attaf, who at the time of interviewing was surviving the through the pandemic by surfing EasyHire's internal job board, the *definition* of a 'permanent' job is one with a future that involves his education in micro-biology,

> **Attaf**: For me to move away from this, it would probably take, for example a lab technician job, with a pay salary of £23,000? With training involved, that's the kind of job that I'd be happy to compromise some of my income to do this, because then I can work

> towards something, that is developmental, I think that's what I'm getting at with regards to permanent jobs, I want to be in a place that I can develop, but not be, not going into financial difficulties.

For Attaf to feel comfortable about leaving surfing, he describes needing a future even it means earning less in the short-to-medium term. In surfing, Attaf is always just filling in and he felt like he was going nowhere. His idea of a job is not just salary or working conditions, he has that in surfing, a permanent job cleaning would give Attaf nothing he wants either. What he wants is a job that will give him something to work towards, a future that will be more secure than the present. Using the way Fiona put it, a permanent job for Attaf would mean being on the 'right direction'.

This section has examined the affective dimension of job security, that of having a future. In a capitalist society like the UK's, where work dominates, many people tend to try to find meaning, self-worth and security in their work (Weeks, 2011). In this case, precarious work, with its empty places that confer nothing to the individual but a wage, has no possibility of self-worth to achieve. It is almost as if there is no work ethic associated with precarious work. Thus, workers come to see their future in salaried work, in the idea of a career, an employer that shall invest in them and a sense of self-respect about their position in society. At the same time is an entrepreneurial selfhood {Sennett, 1998 #139;Kelly, 2006 #777;Howie, 2017 #746} of a need to avoid settling too much. Guided by the work ethic, individuals see security in being able to move through permanent, standard employment.

This discussion requires a careful interrogation of what 'security' really is. Having a job in the present does not necessarily make one feel secure, that individual needs to feel like they can get another good job after the present (precarious or secure) one. I analysed two groups in this section, those sure they can get a secure job and those unsure. The first group show that an individual can possess a 'secure' social and financial position overall even though their job is precarious. This is a point made by other researchers in regards to adolescents (Antonucci, 2018; Campbell & Price, 2016). However, the discussion here adds clarity by noting the individuals are still exposed to the insecurities of their jobs (such as filling in) which are distinct from the insecurities of the worker. The second group, who are unsure about their future, still define security as heading in the 'right direction'. This means achieving what the first group had, the relatively certainty of finding good quality work for the foreseeable future. However it appears to enmeshed in the highly individualised discourse of post-Fordist economies {Beck, 2002 #71} and represents a kind of 'saferoom self' that is fortified to be impervious from external risk. The significance of this is that remedying precarity may be less about fixing the job people have, but about improving the overall labour market position of the individual. Critically though, this would involve improving their entrepreneurial and individualistic tendencies. Those seeking security do not define that they just by a single job, but long-term security through *work*. This is a job that begets security, which will help one find a life-time of secure work.

9.3.2 Upgrading the Work

Achieving long-term security does not always mean a permanent job resembling the SER, but can take the form of 'upgrading' the type of work the individual is surfing. By upgrading, I mean establishing the means to consistently find precarious work with better wages, working conditions and fulfilment. This represents an extension of the aforementioned 'successful' entrepreneurial self {Kelly, 2006 #777} that is no longer governed by risk, but by security. The interviewees that achieved this never found adequate permanent work and so surfed for years, and have come to eventually retrain into a better form of precarious work or have professionalised the precarious work they are doing. They foresee continuing surfing, but now on a much smaller area of work that is similar to having an occupation, and they see a future in their work.

Raymond's situation is indicative of upgrading his precarious work. When we spoke Raymond was twenty-eight, and had never had a permanent contract. He graduated from a prestigious London university, but never found a job that could use that degree. Instead he surfed around hospitality and other miscellaneous jobs until he got fed up and took greater charge of his movements. It appeared at the time of speaking that Raymond was looking to settle into being a handyman and bicycle safety coach, a position he had trained for before Covid-19 affected the job market. Raymond feels like he has had to 'calibrate' his viewpoint about his degree and worth in the economy,

> **Krzysztof**: When you say calibrate, what did you realise that you have?
>
> **Raymond**: I don't know but I knew that I had to stop thinking of myself as this entity with a degree, and that was the only thing that I could point to, in terms of my worth, in employability terms, and, recalibrate in the sense that, maybe follow my nose a little bit better and allow myself to listen to my interests and let that maybe have more of a role in pointing me in a particular direction.

Raymond is describing 'detaching' identified by Schilling et al. (2019), whereby workers detach from some linear, historical pathway, such the civil service, or in Raymond's case, a degree into a middle-income clerical job. This has led to him taking a more purposeful approach to his surfing, trying to find a future. Raymond invokes the metaphor of direction that Fiona did, describing how he should use his interests to change where he is going. This has changed his outlook on work,

> **Krzysztof**: Jumping ahead, it's been two years since then? Do you think you've achieved some of that?
>
> **Raymond**: I think so yeah, I'm like, haven't worked in hospitality for several years, which is like, tick one. I now no longer feel guilty about not using my degree, I have, realised, well actually realised, but remembered that I have a real interest in making things with my hands, which is something I did as a child but then forgot about entirely.

While Raymond was still in precarious work, he feels like he was no longer beholden to it. In many ways he had simply managed to upgrade the quality of his work from bar work with bad hours, to handyman work and training as a bicycle coach which he hoped to pursue soon. There is a sense that since Raymond has left hospitality and moved into handyman and bicycle work, that he is now heading in the 'right direction'. Compared to the time balancing and jumping between the pub, nightclub, salad delivery, band and other temping, he seems far more content now. However, he may also have simply become accustomed to the realities of in/security, changing his expectations and making it the new norm for him.

For some graduates who are in precarious work, their trajectory has always been towards some higher type of precarious work. When I spoke to Tommaso, he was surfing within the boundary of EasyHire full-time, having graduated nearly a year ago at the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdowns, which likely extended his time in temporary work. Looking to the future, he sees a clear trajectory into music, which he studied at university, but is unsure whether to freelance or train as a teacher,

> **Krzysztof**: Do you wanna find a, music job that pays everything? Or is that impossible? Or you do you find a marketing job somewhere or work in a café and part-time, what happens?
>
> **Tommaso**: That's the plan because, it's kind of impossible for me to start straight away and do, music jobs that will pay me as much every month as the agency work would, but it's a transition. I used to give some lessons before covid, I will try to start again with

> lessons and, and just again, you know, networks so that my, some… studio work, or things like that, paid, might come again.
>
> Because the thing is you might be paid £200 for a session, for the job of one day, it happened to me, £150, £200, it's not for sure you'll get that every week or every month, so that's the thing.
>
> I was thinking about doing a course at UCL as well, to get the PGCE certification I think it's called. It's certification that allow you to go and work as a teacher in primary, secondary school private institutions, colleges.

Tommaso has a clear direction to follow, that leads into precarious work, if he takes the freelance route. Freelancing is altogether more accessible because it does not involve more training. Being a freelance musician, which involves many different kinds of labour such as lessons or studio work, is still surfing, but in a more personally and financially rewarding area of the contingent landscape.

Typically being a musician is boxed into a job of passion, that is almost made out to be an irrational pursuit (Adler, 2020), however when compared to cleaning an office building or manufacturing goods at Dream Print, being a musician is no different from an analyst or a teacher -it is better wages, more fulfilling and maybe better conditions. While one could say the career of a creative is a privilege, and is a decision of passion, there is also the reality that the working conditions and wages are likely better than being a cleaner or a factory worker. When all work is precarious, then an itinerant musician is all of a sudden as secure as anything else. Tommaso therefore appears to be making a decision of not just passion, but also to a degree a pragmatic decision about what work is best, and deciding to invest time into pursuing that. Interestingly, that music career is unlikely to be permanent work, such as being a session musician. So Tommaso is describing here to 'upgrade' the work from that of factory, cleaning and hospitality work he can find easily through EasyHire and into the area of being a full-time musician. In any regard, there is for the moment a refusal to completely stop from the movement of surfing by settling into a 'stable' precarious job.

In summary, precarious workers may be looking to 'upgrade' the type of precarious work they are operating on. In doing so, these workers would achieve an end to the logic of surfing, no longer choosing work based on economic need, working conditions or getting fed up. Instead they would choose work under no duress of earnings or working conditions, and aiming for what is most fulfilling out of choices that all appear attractive. This appears to be an idealisation, but may be possible in a prosperous enough society. While this means to still be in non-standard roles and exposed to insecurity, it would not control the choices of the individual. This shows how moving through precarious work can be more about different intensities of insecurity than being in precarious work or not. Nonetheless, the opportunity to exit 'dead end' surfing and go into better quality work that the individual sees a future in represents an exit.

9.3.3 False Exits

This final analysis section of the dissertation turns to losing or leaving permanent work and returning back to fast work, and then surfing. Amongst the efforts to get out of precarious work, there is always the threat of recursion. While many people take a step-down in employment, namely non-UK residents coming for the first time, recursion is differentiated for being a return to precarious work. In her study of 'feeling precarious' Worth (2016) discusses the fear of returning to past precarity. I extend this analysis here by examining actual returns to past precarity and precarious work. Returning to past precarity is a risk of permanent work not 'sticking' to the individual in the form of a career. That the improvement in work that one had attained was a one-

off that does not lead to better things afterwards. In this sense, people are, in a manner, at risk of being downgraded in their quality of work or need to return to the logic of fast work.

Fiona exemplifies recursion. She had spent years working in cleaning and high school canteen roles, which she was willing to do in order to be able to live in London rather than her home country of Brazil. Eventually she managed to get an administrator job for two restaurants, which made her feel much better about herself and her future. However this work in administration did not stick, and when that job ended after two years, she struggled to find another comparable job,

> **Fiona**: In the restaurant as a PA [personal assistant], I was so into the thing, I see myself be more, up, you know, and I put too much there, and then after two years, someone say, 'oh no', and this is why, put me really really down. And they say, I'm not capable to do things -I used to work before, no, because, someone, my friends give me a hand, but they don't want me anymore, and I say, where can I do, go and work some place like that again?
>
> **Krzysztof**: like the restaurant?
>
> **Fiona**: Yeah restaurant or some kind type of, to do, like PA or something like that, and this is why, *shook* put me down, and ah-
>
> **Krzysztof**: going backwards or something?
>
> **Fiona**: yeah, and here I am, it was a big lesson.

Fiona made it out, and saw her life on the up, but then one day that ended, and she was shaken. From here she said she was unemployed for nearly six months before getting work with Crowd, an app-based agency, taking shifts at events like football games. The filling in nature of working for Crowd means there is no future in it. By this point in the discussion, it is clear that precarious work is a matter of degree, and so what makes Fiona's case so explicit is that she had moved from a permanent clerical job she liked, to the erratic circumstance of surfing inside of a labour pool, in this case Crowd. There is a repetitiveness and a sense that Fiona has 'been there before' in this type of work. Just like with 'upgrading' being a material and affective upgrade, recursion is too. Recursion is going downwards in terms of wages, working conditions and quality of duties, and the affective or subjective aspect, perceiving moving in the 'wrong direction', in Fiona's case here, backwards into the most general 'take anyone' type of work that Crowd is a part of.

The next example is from Attaf. Nearly ten years ago Attaf moved to London from Northern Ireland hoping to finally find a job he was comfortable in and that would put him on the right direction,

> **Attaf**: The only permanent job that I got was for the NHS, since I've been here in London. So, the NHS I was as a receptionist. And my hope was that I'd be able to progress, it's a very big organisation, you would expect that I'd be able to be accepted for an internal vacancy. Apply for an internal vacancy, do something else, and then develop from that point on.
>
> I was very unlucky, I got harassed by the staff, and I was moving from one department to the next, not really getting anywhere, I ended up resigning. Because management expected me to be responsible for staff shortages, when a patient committed suicide, I didn't feel like it was, you know -first of all it wasn't my remit, and also, I didn't like that responsibility for what I was getting paid, you know, this is someone's life, so from that point on I went back to agency.

As Attaf says, he went back to the agency, first taking court clerical work combined with cleaning in the evenings, and then moving to the apps Crowd and EasyHire full-time. The nature of the NHS

job for Attaf was difficult, in some ways appears to have even soured his feeling about permanent work altogether. For Attaf, who has spent years working through agencies, going back was very easy and appears to large be his career.

Fiona and Attaf are the oldest interviewees, and having been working the longest, they have had the most time to move through many different forms of precarious work and phases of surfing. Recursion is by no means inevitable, and it is possibly even uncommon. Where other interviewees, such as the 'corporates' Arral and Priscilla, were able to shrug off a dismissal or resignation from a permanent job by quickly finding another one, the permanent work Fiona and Attaf found did not 'stick'. In some ways then they never really left the contingent landscape, and were always really in a precarious position, but they did not know it. They were always precarious workers, even in permanent work that they felt confident about, and when that ended, they too were put back in their place, to the contingent landscape.

This recursion, and in some ways never really having a real chance in the permanent job market, muddies the distinction between permanent work and surfing. It reveals the interconnections between the two, and reformulates it as one big space which could be thought of as the risk regime described by Beck (2000). It is unclear if Fiona and Attaf were ever really 'out' of precarious work considering how difficult it was to find something else when their first permanent job in London ended. This exemplifies how precarious work is a matter of degree, and the 'precarization' of work applies as much to the labour market as to the individual jobs. While many workers do make genuine exits or upgrades, it seems like for Fiona and Attaf their exit was only temporary, and therefore never really occurred. The permanent and meaningful job that they did get had no trajectory of further security in front of it. They remained precarious and insecure the whole time they were working permanently as they lacked a real purchase in the permanent job market.

9.3.4 Summary: Beware the False Exits

In this final section I have closed the boundary of precarious work by examining perceptions and achievements of exiting precarious work, and falling back into it. For those workers who see a permanent job as a real change in their lives, as a genuine exit from the surfing they had been doing before, they need to not only identify financial stability, tolerable working conditions, but also a future in the job. This appears to be analogous to becoming a 'successful' entrepreneurial subject of neoliberalism {Kelly, 2006 #777} who lives by security, not risk. Without such a future, it often makes sense, or is more comfortable, to keep surfing until one does the right direction to go down. In other cases an 'exit' from precarious work can be on a non-standard contract, whereby people stay largely insecure, but manage to 'upgrade' the work they are in to have better remuneration, working conditions, and importantly, moving in the right direction. Finally, some workers get out only temporarily, they find a job that seems to be the right direction, but they lose momentum and come back to the drift of surfing.

As these close the loop on precarious work as found in this study, these sections help the most to clearly delineate precarious work. Most important is securing one's future. A secure job, that is a job that makes one feel secure and which signals to the worker that their fortunes and career are changing, is one that can be built on in the long-term for ongoing, indefinite security. In this regard, the material aspects and the contract of the job are less important. What is important is, can the worker take that job and then use it to find more security, to keep going in a positive loop, getting more and more secure each time round? This means that an 'exit' is a job that helps one stay out of surfing for good, and enables them to continually move in the 'right direction' in the sense of a highly secure, autonomous and individualised subject. This helps one identify the 'false exits' that appear to be beneficial in helping one move in the right direction, but when they are lost, the worker finds they had never left the contingent landscape.

9.4 Conclusion: Living by the Surf

This chapter has examined surfing itself as an object of perception and analysis. This includes what workers think of their surfing in the long-term and their views upon ending it. It turns attention to the possibility of ending the state of precariousness that arises from surfing and interrogates the ambiguity of what it means to not be precarious. While precarious workers generally may have non-work measures of stability, such as family (Knox et al., 2015), volunteering or fulfilling a calling, this chapter has focused on just the role of work in this and the aspect of having continuing job security in the future.

The first section examined indefinitely surfing through precarious work. Through their expertise in precarious work and their exclusion from better quality permanent work, workers are held in surfing. In contrast to the logic of fast work, whereby precarious work is attractive for its relative speed and ease, in the long-term, precarious work can be attractive for its relative quality. The permanent jobs that long-term precarious working interviewees were offered were unattractive to them due to the wages, working conditions and greater responsibility. This means that workers are at times kept in precarious work through simple pragmatic comparison. Nonetheless, these workers recognise the poor quality of their precarious jobs. However, workers in this position may be at a loss as to how they could break the cycle of surfing, there appears to be no option. So, all they can do is continue searching, applying for jobs and conduct 'gathering' (Schilling et al., 2019) of opportunities hoping their fortunes will change. These workers are unable to ever find something that is 'worthy' of giving up precarious work for. As such, they are set to meander through the contingent landscape avoiding the worst of work while never finding a way to significantly alter their chances.

Exiting and ending precarious work is therefore not just a matter of finding a job that is 'permanent', well-paid or with improved working conditions, it is a matter of finding something that changes the workers' direction altogether. It is a signal that security shall beget security. In the literature I discussed the worker-centred insecurity of social and economic position (Worth, 2016) and this section helps to contextualise that insecurity while showing the significance of work to it. Specific jobs can represent entry into a class by virtue of the status and cultural capital it bestows on the worker (Bourdieu, 1984; Weber, 2010). Weeks (2011: 9) illustrates this well in the post-Fordist era: 'becoming a member of the working class rather than the underclass, a middle-class rather than a working-class person, a salaried versus an hourly worker, a professional with a career as opposed to a working stiff and job holder'. This is continued in this chapter as workers seem to be seeking a marker of becoming a 'successful' entrepreneurial subject. That is, someone who reliably moves from 'good' job to 'good' job. The transitions in this chapter are a mixture of that desire to enter into a greater position of status, particularly among European university graduates. However, it is also a pragmatic response to acquire greater and ongoing security.

A desirable job is one that allows the individual to 'lift' themselves out of surfing and embed themselves into not just the logic of a career that has a future, but also in the post-Fordist work ethic of continual improvement and dedication to the job as if it were a 'calling' (Weeks, 2011). In this regard, workers seem to believe that those who are 'successful' are so because they have a job that absorbs their being. Therefore, workers can be said to be trying to claim the benefits of the work ethic, to find a security not just of income, but also of self-worth, in work. In other words, the only 'exit' from precarious work is to submit to the capitalist work ethic; of which the opportunity to do so is itself dependent on class, gender and ethnicity. Therefore the worker-centred insecurities of social and economic position, typically referred to 'feeling precarious' or subjective insecurities, have an 'objective' base in the individuals' long-term chances in the job

market. his suggests a hitherto unexplored class dimension to security, one's fate. In a translated publication of his manuscript, Weber (2010: 139) states,

> The concept of class, however, is always organized around one common principle: it is the kind of chances in the market that determines the common conditions of the individual's fate.

While one can make good chances for one's fate inside the contingent landscape through upgrading the terrain, the most common method remains a mastery of good quality, permanent work. Weber's (2010) quote and the interviewee efforts to find an exit show a dimension of similar fate being worked against and for. Therefore, the precariat (Standing, 2011) would not be defined by their employment type, their sense of uncertainty, or capital (Savage, 2015), but the fate their work condemns them to. Such endeavours for the future are orientated towards a job that has training and advancement potential that will help the individual avoid needing to take fast work in subsequent periods of job searching. A job with a trajectory towards a good fate. This is made all the more real by the reality of false exits, permanent work that is on the right path but fails to lead to another permanent or good quality job.

This chapter is the most reliant on interview data and worker-centred perspectives of precarious work and precarity, and interestingly, the line between precarious work and non-precarious work almost completely disappears and the 'risk regime' of work {Beck, 2000 #173} comes into view. Instead, the distinction of what constitutes security and insecurity continues on from last chapter, becoming even more firmly established in the difference between surfing and moving more autonomously. Where surfing can be identified for always moving through unsatisfactory jobs in a horizontal manner that does not sediment over time as a career might do, the examples in this chapter can move between permanent and non-permanent work without much distinction. More importantly, is the distinction of future and ongoing security. Most of the precarious workers discussed here had achieved an equilibrium in non-permanent work that made them more comfortable than any available permanent job. Their distinction of security is not the job, but is about being on the right path towards becoming a secure and growing individual. This is the labour market as a whole, and shows how precarity, precariousness and precarious work are not matters of any discrete thing like a job, pay cheque or dismissal, but is of one's overall ability to create security out of where they are in society and what they have to use. That is, their relationship to in/security, their ability to counterweight insecurity with security enough that they may finally rest.

10

Conclusion: The Nature of Work In/security

10.1 Endtroducing.....

To make the album *Endtroducing.....* Joshua Davis, also known as DJ Shadow, recorded extremely short pieces of different songs -a drum snare, a guitar riff, etc.- and then rearranged those sounds into compositions that make up a song, and arranged those songs into an album. This is what I have done too, recorded these tiny pieces of people's lives, and rearranged them into this dissertation. The role of the ethnographer is to use their skills as master of this process, finding harmony in the sounds to overlap them into something greater, and the songs that one makes into a dissertation or book. However, the original songs I sampled from still exist out there in the world, still being played by those who are writing them, and this dissertation represents a different type of song, one that is not arranged by life itself, but the principles of sociology. It is an artificial song, nothing in it actually exists, but this abstract quality is precisely its value.

Concluding an ethnography is such an emotional exercise. Doing ethnography is to very carefully document a period of your life, to analyse it deeply, and to formally interview many of the people that were part of that time. What this study is then is very confusing to me, and I am hesitant to abstract mine and other's lives. The most personally meaningful part of this ethnography, ironically, has the least data value. It is the periods of loneliness. Such as walking around London Fields park during the partial lockdown, it was not warm, it was wet and cloudy. I was walking with my earbuds in enjoying the simplicity of taking a break from job searching. Also, is taking the train to North London, to somewhere I have never been for work. I remember when crossing the rail bridge, looking South are the lights of London and looking North is pure blackness. There is a simple peace at these times, in the loneliness and stillness of being on the move. There is a directedness at these times, I knew what I was doing and did not need to worry. I wonder if this is the real *essence* of in/security, finding relief in times of complete desolation. Being so lonely, but taking solace in the certainty of that. I hope that this dissertation, by opening a window into that life, helps break that loneliness.

The value of this dissertation is that the story it describes, this process of turning to fast work, the dehumanization of filling in, surfing, and contemplating an exit is being repeated every day by people around the world. There are studies of precarious work, there are ethnographic dissertations of precarious work very much like this one (Bundy, 2019; Galic, 2019), but I believe that a focus on movement and people's autonomy has revealed a much more complex picture, and one that attempts to remain grounded in the battle between what one is forced to do and what one can do. It is therefore hopefully faithful to what people are worried about, working against and that they are hoping for.

In what follows I make some final notes, return to the research questions, discuss contributions, and reflect on what this dissertation means broadly.

10.2 A Powerful, Mobile Group

The first point I want to discuss are the limitations of the study, so as to understand what the analysis means for the overall research of precarity and so that I can discuss the analysis in the context of its limitations. While the limitations of the interviewee recruitment and fieldwork were discussed in Chapter Four, after the analysis it is worth reflecting again on what group of people were encountered. The analysis frequently delved into issues of being comfortable, not meeting one's full expectations and feeling uneasy with one's position. At the same time, classic precarity issues of homelessness, financial ruin and crippling anxiety indicative of precariousness were peripheral. Therefore, this appears to be a powerful group of precarious workers.

This group and the analysis has a 'London' feeling to it as well, Ackroyd (2001) describes how for centuries London has been a city where people go to make it. This study reflects this aspect of London, but in the terms of precarious work, of young adults coming to London to make their way. This appears to emphasise the nature of surfing and trajectories in particular, while minimising the 'restriction' of fast work and filling in. In other words, in another setting, such as a small to medium-sized town, the emphases might be reversed, with more restriction and less surfing. It is indicative that even the worst-off appear to still be in a position of surfing the landscape and seeking ways to head into the right direction. This however masks another population that does exist in London but I struggled to access: those who have settled into a 'stable' precarious job.

Without a clear understanding of the nature of the contingent landscape, the methodology was structured around researching non-standard contracts. This was done for a number of reasons, mainly it was a strategy to 'shrink' down the phenomenon under study when some authors are arguing all work is precarious (Alberti et al., 2018; Kalleberg, 2018). It was believed that non-standard contracts were the 'concentrated' form of precarious work which would make work-induced precarity and precariousness the clearest. Second, non-standard contracts are the 'industry standard' in the social sciences for identifying precarious work statistically and conceptually. This leads to one of the weakest points of the literature, that the definitions simply do not line up with the empirical discussion that follows. Nonetheless, this study needed somewhere to begin. The first workplace I went to, on a zero hour contract, I was unsure if it was appropriate due to there only being three or four temporary staff amongst a workforce of thirty. It is clear now, that non-standard and standard contracts, in terms of offering work stability, are more similar than they seem on paper. More importantly, is the action by the worker to cease surfing and settle into something that is tolerable in the meantime. Such instances are discussed in section 8.4, 'In and Out of Stable Precarious Work' but I do not feel I got the entire picture of those who had taken permanent roles at workplaces that hire many temporary staff, such as Big Delivery, Allied Meats, Dream Print and Sidewalk. There was a certain commitment to surfing among those I interviewed that I am not sure existed among the permanently, precariously hired. Therefore, one has to wonder if there is a doxa of either state of being.

In workplaces I met many of these settled people, but was never able to interview any of them due to my own hesitation about recruiting 'permanent' employees and, looking back, the status of myself as a temporary staff member approaching a 'senior' permanent staff. While many of the interviewees had settled in a precarious job for years, nearly a decade in some cases, at a time, none were doing so when we spoke. At all the large workplaces I visited, there was a large workforce in permanent roles where the employer appeared to largely be trying to hold on to these workers. There seems to be an entire parallel reality to the one of this study, where the individual starts in fast work, gets into somewhere big like Sidewalk and then converts their zero hour contract into a permanent one and stays on. This might be the best they can find, and as

Knox et al. (2015) demonstrated, for those with few other prospects they are likely to accept a 'bad job' and make do. To feed this into the framework of this dissertation, the individual who is inclined towards 'stable' precarious work will inevitably change jobs at some point. In doing so, if they do surf, it is likely to be a short period. Nonetheless, they still achieve some type of existence in the manner of surfing and achieved equilibrium. They would be living by the risks and benefits of precarious work, eking out an existence in the cracks outside of the SER and possibly secure overall in the notion they can always turn back to fast work even if they do not regularly exercise that ability. This group, preferring the 'stable' forms of precarious work, would move much slower through the contingent landscape. However, speed does not move lock-step with privilege. The least privileged, I observed, were relegated to the least stable work and so had to surf the most energetically.

In this study, such states of 'settling' into precarious job are the aberration. In some instances this is the result of interviewing, there was less to say about these kinds of jobs. Yet for many people it is logical that surfing is the aberration and the 'normal' state of precarious work is to be in one, reliable job in the long term. In other words, the study cannot elaborate on the dynamic between surfing and stable precarious work, and this is likely to be the key inequality: the nature of one's surfing.

10.3 In/Security Thesis: Living in a Labour Market that Does Not Provide

It seems like much of this dissertation is just trying to come to terms with what is under research. This is the product of what edges can be found in the literature, fieldwork and interviews, trying to identify what was encountered and how to operationalise it for the use of other sociologists, geographers and anthropologists. Every chapter is presenting not just some content or discussion of that thing, but is also contributing to hardening the edges in an effort to delineate it. Where precarious work, precarity and precariousness is 'everywhere', this study has found consistency in a contingent landscape, and so has tried to ossify that consistency as much as possible. The notion of in/security, seeing the enabling factors of risk, is crucial to achieving this by overturning the radical focus on risk inherent to precarity theory. While mentioned briefly as a tool during the analysis, I want to return to this notion in light of the knowledge gained.

The consistency honed in on is of struggling with work, and when one struggles with work, people tend to go into what sociologists call precarious work. Precarious work, I argue, is not the product or state of being 'insecure' but entails a number of significant facilities that support and maintain it, in/security. This in/secure struggle to find work can continue indefinitely throughout people's lives as they seem to never find a job that contributes a secure future. This means people either have to live with no future, or find one outside of work. As such, they are set to surf the labour market indefinitely. Yet, they are materially surviving day-to-day, but not living with a sense of rootedness, purpose or moving in the 'right direction' of work. Overall, this is a labour market that does not provide what people want, but provides enough to keep them going. The logic of in/security engenders a labour market of struggle where every job seems to be insufficient and lacking a future. Through the efforts of workers and alterations to their expectations of security, precariousness is not a position of risk, but a holding-pattern of 'just enough'. Meanwhile, the jobs that do seem to have everything remain unfound.

Altogether, this resonates with the theoretical points that were raised in the 1990s about the nature of post-Fordism made by authors like Richard Sennett in the *Corrosion of Character* or Ulrich Beck in *The Brave New World of Work*. The workers in Sennett's study and the present thesis lack a future, Beck replaces Fordism with a *risk regime* that renders the middle-class as

working poor. However, the realities of precarious work -low wages, poor working conditions, general uncertainty- alter the equation. Workers are choosing fast work for lack of any better option, electing to work under the rules of 'no long term' (Sennett, 1998) so as to survive and at least have a chance of escaping the struggle. In other words, the worker's Sennett spoke to appeared to be privileged, but fast work is almost always entered into from a position of duress. Thus, while it is correct to say that precarious work is now everywhere in the UK, as Kalleberg (2018) or Beck (2000) would assert, that precarious work is not in the form that Kalleberg, or any other precarious work scholar, seems to appreciate. These authors agree precarious work is heterogeneous and affects people differently, but ignore both the pragmatism of taking precarious work -it is the best work available- and the rapid assimilation of the conditions by the workers: surfing is already normal and common in the UK, workers achieve an equilibrium and in many ways, the UK economy welfare state is banking on that. In this manner, risk recedes in its universality. Thus, the precarious work construction as an aberration, or even as it being unstable and uncertain, fails to hold except for in the 'concentrated' form.

This makes one wonder what 'precarious work' actually is, what are these jobs that one goes into when they struggle. There is a certain circular logic coming out. If precarity and precarious work are historical, then they are anything that is not Fordism or socialism. If it is a feeling or a condition, that a precarious job is anything deemed unsatisfactory, this would make it highly susceptible to the culture of the day. 'Precarious work' is always going to be a cognitive judgement, a naming of some objective condition or state of affairs that has been encircled. The work of struggle is less stable, with worse wages and working conditions, but it is also imbricated in a far larger labour market and manner of economic functioning. The work that people go into when they 'struggle' with work then is not some consistent and distinct unit of precarious work, it is more just the field of what is out there and available as 'fast work'. One can certainly identify the core, the concentrated precarious work, where people cannot live in the manner that we find acceptable or fair (Smith & McBride, 2021), but beyond that kernel, there are only relative degrees of difference all the way through the labour market. It would appear then that instead of focusing on precarious work, which is evidently the symptom or consequence, it would make sense to focus on the cause or nature of this field, this risk regime (Beck, 2000) -this is what the introduction of in/security is aiming to achieve.

This means that the 'struggle' of work, the precarity that ensues, and the precariousness of today's political and economic climate, are not unusual or extraordinary, but are inherent to the nature of the economic system that generates it. The in/security thesis is attempting to argue the historical contemporaneousness of precariousness, that it is not immanent or an artifact of neoliberal governmentality (or both: Lorey (2015)), but is an original outcome of today's state of affairs. By this I do not mean the Butler-esque framework: of precarity being the 'social and political arrangements that differentially distribute precariousness', precariousness being, 'the vulnerability of embodied existence' (Han, 2018: 358). In/security alters this equation by asking what insecurities come out of the securities that are achieved and are strived for? What securities support the insecurity that one has to endure?

I posit that precarity is not just the social distribution of vulnerability, but represents the social creation of vulnerabilities (such as precariousness). The mechanisms of the contingent landscape do not distribute vulnerability, but create possible equilibriums that workers need to achieve and appropriate in order to survive. This is the 'struggle' of work as identified in this dissertation, but if it were not conducted through the political-economic system of precarious work, then the struggle would originate in another form with a new fundamental category of risk to replace precariousness. The prior economic era had the Fordist 'organization man' (Whyte, 2002 [1956]) and the existential catastrophe of ultimate certainty and integration. These are constructions of

in/securities that have, to some degree and in some repeated configuration, a risk of failure, their insecurity. This means that what we call *precarity* is the manner that developed, neo-liberal, economically deregulated societies have come to structure in/security. By this I mean, precariousness is a lack created out of a growth. In the same way that the invention of employment concomitantly created unemployment, the invention of post-Fordist, deregulated and de-integrated work has created the precarious worker in both the secure and insecure forms indicative of successfully or unsuccessfully achieving equilibrium.

10.4 Research Questions and Main Findings

I shall now reflect on the research questions and how the analysis answers them.

1. How do adults experience precarious employment?

Answering this question can be divided into three points: hiring, working and labour market.

A key observation from the literature are the mixed responses and existences in precarious work that go beyond a straight-forward heterogeneity and into completely opposite experiences (Knox et al., 2015). In terms of hiring, precarious work should be seen as an opportunity in itself, one that is in a way a 'poison chalice' for appearing good but in practice being undesirable. Precarious work exists as the most accessible or the only work that people can find. For those who are struggling or need work fast, this makes it extremely attractive. This is identified in the 'fast' nature of such work. Such experiences of 'fast' work are differentiated by where in the landscape one is. Those with the least capital are operating amongst the most general 'take anyone' employers that is most problematic for well-being. However, workers may operate in a niche of the landscape that is not necessarily any more stable, but is superior in terms of the quality of the work, such as wages, working conditions and nature of duties.

Secondly is being in the job, which is examined through 'filling in'. Workers are contending with a lot more than just insecurity or bad working conditions, but are relegated to the circumstances of their being hired into an empty place. They are made into a 'conscious tool' that is fit into the automatic factory (Marx, 1990) to perform a certain task and nothing else. Filling in is followed by stepping up, breaching the empty place and finally being put back in one's (empty) place. These movements exemplify precarious work and are indicative of the deregulatory trends (Beck, 2000) that are argued to have created precarious work. Filling in goes beyond just the examination of uncertainty to illustrate the substance of being in a precarious job.

Thirdly is the labour market. Precarious workers are not just in a precarious job, but are in precarious *work*. They are moving job-to-job seeking out some kind of security to keep them going. The unstable nature of precarious jobs mean that the workers are much more in the throws of the entire market. This means precarious workers are 'surfing' job-to-job, and in doing so, acehvie an equilbirium whereby unstable, intolerable and dead-end jobs can be managed in aggregate. The overall experience of precarious work is to be surfing job-to-job, never really getting anywhere, while spending extended periods of time in stable precarious jobs that are 'good enough' for the time being.

2. What are the implications of precarious work for one's personal vulnerability in terms of work, well-being and self-narrative?

As an option of last resort, being in precarious work is more a consequence of vulnerability. People who go into precarious do so for having no other option or needing something quick and easy to meet short-term needs. Therefore, precarious wrok is more of a symptom than a cause of vulnerability. Those who are outsiders to the labour market and city, those without valuable capital, go into the worst-quality of precarious work where they struggle with tenure, pay and conditons. Others are able to go into more selective work where they experience less risk. The ability to manage the risks of precarious work are deeply linked to the overall position of the individual in discourses of work (Weeks, 2011).

In the long-term, vulnerability can be analysed through surfing. On the one hand, for those who can surf successfully, that is manage an income in tolerable work, then they are not so much vulnerable, but are in a form of stasis. The less vulnerble can surf adeptly and keep their heads above the water indefinietly. However, they come to face an issue of drift (Ferrell, 2015) and never moving in the right direction towards greater security. In parallel, is a group light-touched in this disseration, those who cannot surf adeptly, these workers struggle to ever achieve an equilibirum and persist in a highly vulnerable state, working in intolerable conditons or too-low pay.

3. What are the lines of stratification of the impacts of precarious work?

The lines of stratification are a function of where in the contingent landscape one is in and the manner in which one can surf the labour market. The largest disadvantage in the UK is English ability. The nature of fast lanes is subtle, and English-language skills help tremendously in navigating them. Those with the worst English have to move further and further down the quality of work to the most accessible forms, reaching the work that everyone else has 'surfed' away from. Secondly is insider or outsider status. Being new to London and not knowing anyone means that a worker has to lean on the employment agencies to find work, this inevitably leads to the worst quality work. For those who are insiders to either London or the UK, they can tap social capital to find better quality work.

At the same time, young British university graduates, who are in their working prime and should be hireable, are still common in precarious work. These workers are able to surf adeptly, or have roots in London that minimise their financial vulnerability. These workers are susceptible to feeling precarious in relation to their social position -of moving in the wrong direction. In many ways though, this is what keeps them in precarious work, because they are unwilling to 'settle' into a job that has no future. This leaves them adrift in the labour market, surviving in their achieved equilibrium but not moving in the right direction. Their unwillingness to settle seems to mean they never are able to reap the benefits of a Fordist job and internal labour markets, they are stuck filling in again and again in a loop.

4. What are the short-term versus long-term consequences of precarious work, and what structural and personal factors alter these outcomes?

Covid-19 really exaggerated the short-term nature of precarious work. Many workers were facing a much greater struggle to find work and once Covid-19 passed they struggled much less and managed to find good quality work. In the short-term, the consequences are minimal, people are able to either surf to a better precarious job, or exit the contingent landscape fairly quickly and without any negative effects. To do so, however, requires capital relevant to the permanent job market, and it appears that some people are 'unlucky' and never manage to find a way out.

Those who cannot exit precarious work are in a truly poor position, but are split into two groups. First are those who have elected to 'settle' into a 'stable' precarious job. That is either a zero hour contract with ongoing work, or even a permanent contract, although this dissertation examined these 'permanent' employees very lightly. Those who have settled are likely to have done so after surfing through a few jobs, and so have found a job that is the best they can get. These workers may be in tolerable work, but not feel they are moving in the 'right direction' to future and greater security. Second are those who are having a more turbulent existence, surfing frequently from non-standard contract to non-standard contract or within a single labour pool such as EasyHire's internal job board. Depending on the workers' location in the contingent landscape this can be a tolerable life, although workers tend to get tired of the constant job switching. As mentioned, these workers are liable to feeling adrift about their position and so are seeking an exit.

This leads to a focus on the long-term and the position in the labour market indicative of surfing and exits. The most important factors relate to exiting precarious work and in a manner that their exit 'sticks' -that is, being able to find another permanent job after the current one ends and never needing fast work ever again. Achieving this requires marketable skills and experience that workers either need to have already, or be in a position advantageous and stable enough that they can develop that capital. Those unable to exit are the most vulnerable, who are forced to live in precarious work long-term, causing damage to well-being and contributing very little to their future security.

Finally is the grey area of 'upgrading' the terrain, whereby the worker improves the quality of their precarious work and manages to 'surf' in a preferential part of the contingent landscape where work resembles middle-income permanent work. This requires specialist knowledge, such as in home handywork that can be marketed freelance or on a gig-platform, for example. These workers are in a good position financially, and due to their improving fortunes, may feel they are moving in the 'right' direction. However the long term consequences of this require further study.

10.5 Select Contributions to the Literature

The methods, framework and findings of this study lend to targeted interventions in the understanding and literature of precarious work. Some of these are discussed below.

10.5.1 The Practical Nature of Precarious Work: Hiring, Working and Multiple Jobs

The most foundational contributions stem from the ethnographic description of being a precarious worker and neoliberalism. In real terms, these are the observations that precarious work is generally the easiest and fastest work to get, that the nature of precarious work lends itself to (initially) giving workers very specific duties and that precarious workers are likely to take a string of jobs, rather than just one. Conceptually, these are the fast nature of precarious work, filling in and surfing. These are fairly straightforward observations about precarious work that, while I am sure researchers have been aware of, have infrequently entered into the analysis or the academic of image of what precarious work is. However, they change significantly how one should think about precarious work.

Typically, precarious work is defined as that which is uncertain and insecure (Kalleberg, 2018), or that which contributes to making the worker be or feel precarious (Worth, 2016). This has more or less remained unquestioned and has not been developed. For example Lewchuk (2017)

develops an index of dimensions of job security to measure the intensity of precarious work. Or critical theorists questioned the significance of, for example, part-time contracts to the construction of precarious work (Doogan, 2015). There is an overwhelming focus on the same dimensions of the job, and even fellow ethnographers (Galic, 2019) focus on the power imbalance between employee and employer. This thesis has overcome that by emphasising the embodied and contextualised experience of precarious work. This raises the question, what does this practical nature add beyond more description?

In the first instance this overturns some common sense notions about precarious work or neoliberalism. In practice, precarious work can be the saviour to the worker, helping them overcome financial difficulties. Precarious work has become so normal to workers that many do not feel insecure, they just see a variety of work that they are free to leave if need be. This is not to say that precarious work is good, but it is to say that the insecurity experienced by precarious workers is as much, if not more, located in the *absence* of permanent work than in the presence of precarious work. Following this, inequalities of precarity are manifest in hiring or access to work. The overwhelming focus of precarity and precarious work has understandably been on precarious jobs, but the labour market position of the worker, which drives their action towards precarious work, has to be accommodated.

Approaching precarious work practically means that it is the object of worker action that produces precariousness. Where a precarious job is typically something imposed on the worker, an injustice the worker has to accept, fast work is something that is used and conducted. This is in itself not original, others have shown workers using precarious work to attain security or autonomy (Schilling et al., 2019; Wong & Au-Yeung, 2019). I extend this analysis by demonstrating that precarious workers use precarious work to achieve some equilibrium (and speculate if this is ultimately a better position than the alternatives). Fast work has a utility in its availability, but in the end, the individual will become vulnerable to the dimensions of work insecurity to some extent depending on the job. Fast work can be so *fast* because it is attached to empty places in which workers can be very quickly interchanged. However, this engenders poor working conditions due to the dehumanising aspects. Workers manage these insecurities by surfing from job to job, but then they struggle to ever find an exit. One way to think of all of this at once is that social and economic processes create 'pockets' of in/security -gig work, ZHCs, employment agencies- that are then the best option for workers to take, and so workers act to appropriate these pockets. In this manner, the practical nature of precarious work overcomes the single-minded nature of the job-centre or worker-centre in precarity theory to locate precarity in all its richness.

10.5.2 Empty Places, Filling In and Surfing

The previous contributions were 'foundational' -they work upon and extend existing concepts- the second level of contributions are parallel concepts. Filling in and surfing have a further level of understanding that relates directly to precarity itself that could sit alongside existing understanding. I mean this in the sense that one could now analyse, for example gig work, through the insecurity of precarious work or through the dehumanization of filling in. Similarly, the gig worker through precariousness or surfing.

In this dissertation I largely distinguish precarious and non-precarious jobs by filling in. In doing so, I argue there are two factors to look at. Firstly, the contingency of the position. All work is contingent on something else, but only while filling in is that contingency self-evident in day-to-day life. As per in/security, this does not immediately mean being insecure, contingent ZHCs can continue indefinitely, such as at a supermarket. However, filling in does lead to recognising that one's ongoing employment has no recourse (such as it being illegal to be suddenly dismissed) that

a 'permanent' job does. Second, is the extent the worker is filling in an empty place. For example, the extent that the worker is divorced from the workplace, the work practice, their colleagues, the products, and just standing in the right place manipulating items correctly for eight hours a day. Can the worker get out of that empty place and work outside of it, being autonomous, what happens when they do, is it a contingent matter of necessity, or a more durable factor of being in a job? Mollona (2009) makes a similar point by arguing precarious work is a reorganization of capitalism back to nineteenth century liberalism. The extension is to examine filling in as a dehumanised state of being and the attractiveness of stepping up.

Empty places provide significant conceptual clarity to the experience of precarious work. This is by delineating the personal insecurities and the detachment of such jobs. Contingency and empty places shift the analysis into language that speaks about the experience of work rather than contractual obligations. Insecurity has been found wanting for being decoupled from changes in work in terms of what can be measured statistically (Doogan, 2009). Insecurity is a matter of social position, an intersectional coincidence of any factor that happens to have an impact. To go from insecure work to insecure life was always an overextension. Empty places on the other hand are structural realities, social forces in themselves that affect work and that workers must contend with. They can make workers feel precarious, but also a multitude of other feelings and responses.

Precarious work is that which is '*uncertain*, *unstable*, and *insecure*' (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017: 1), but what to make of that beyond it is bad for well-being is unclear. Many of those on insecure contracts also report the job to be permanent in national UK surveys (Koumenta & Williams, 2019) and qualitative data reports how people make lives out of them (Mrozowicki & Trappmann, 2020). Furthermore, the phenomenon of precarious lives that are supported by stable yet poor quality work is not compatible, despite this being one of the key aspects of this type of work (Knox et al., 2015; Weil, 2014). Empty places bridge these by not assuming insecurity, and instead focusing on two key qualities of the work: being *contingent* and *empty* positions. Contingency and emptiness represents the desaturation of employment. Where insecurity is a difficult trend to pin down, declining job quality is not (Gallie et al., 2017), and so much research has turned to focus on job quality instead. Empty places are the final destination of declining job quality: the pure exchange of labour for wages.

The study of worker-centred insecurities have tended to be paired with circumstances that are the wrong scale: a single job. This is the wrong scale because workers are perceiving and measuring their security by entire trajectory over multiple jobs. The correct scale of analysis is in multiple jobs or the career. Other researchers have looked at multiple jobs, such as Worth (2016) who describes a fear of returning to past precarities or Armano and Murgia (2013) describe uncertainty about one's next job among project-based knowledge workers. The extension of surfing is to formally establish an 'objective' set of circumstances that is more developed than saying the individuals' 'next job' and locating that in the orthodoxy of precarious work. Surfing establishes that workers are pressured by the need for work, conditions and avoiding feeling 'fed up'. At the same time, these anxieties are imbricated in the precarious work trajectory that one is on. That is, what is the individual's work history and therefore reasonable expectation of their future. The insecurities of social and financial position that workers may feel are a product of their precarious work trajectories and lacking an exit from the contingent landscape.

Surfing also provides firmer ground for the analysis of differential vulnerability by looking at what helps or hinders surfing. Typically differential vulnerability is centred on the individual (Campbell & Price, 2016), what protections and exposures against mortality, or feeling precarious (Worth, 2016), does that individual have. This creates problems of placing everyone on one spectrum of precariousness leading to difficult comparisons between very different workers. It also fails to

acknowledge the potential advantages that one may reap from precarious work due to their securities. I argue to reposition differential vulnerability upon the ability to surf. Thus, instead of family financial support neutering the work-induced precarity of a precarious job, that family support changes how one can surf. The same could be said for having family members one has to care for, while it does put more financial stress on the worker, it also reduces the ability one has to find a better job through surfing. Meanwhile, support allows greater risk-taking and less pressure to take what fast work there is. Similarly, other categories of sociological importance, gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability etc. are all better placed in discussion with surfing than with the workers' precariousness.

10.5.3 The Nature of Precarious Work in the Global North

Finally is the highest level contribution that interrogates the macro-level of analysis. A key, and awkward, question in precarious literature is the distinctiveness of precarity. Much of what is called precarious work in the Global North is simply called work in the Global South. As Han (2018) points out, precarious work is very similar to 'informal work'. Without a clear answer as to the distinction of precarious work in the Global North, there will always be the question of whether precarity is the outcome of culture -that people in the Global North expect something different- rather than some economic change. The analysis in this dissertation can provide some pieces to answering this question.

I believe what we see is a stratification by separation from precarious work. The population that this dissertation has encountered appear to largely be 'floating' in precarious work. They are unable to punch up into the echelons of 'real' work, if that does actually exist or not. They feel like they are excluded from, or have not found yet, what permanence other people appear to have. At the same time they are certainly using precarious work, however not to pursue autonomy (Wong & Au-Yeung, 2019) or urban tactics (Schilling et al., 2019) as others have said, but to 'float' above the absolutely worst work that is available to them -that is the truly dead-end, trapped and low-pay employment that apparently exists. However, this is not a homogenous experience of floating, as all the interviewees in this study who have substantial working history had periods of a one or more years in single precarious job. Yet, it appears that generally when people decide to stay in a job they are still 'floating' above the bottom -as in, that job is better than the worst possible. They are always in a trade-off, taking what is better (and often 'uncertain') because there is something truly worse they are avoiding.

This phenomenon of floating above the 'floor' of the worst work, but unable to 'fly' out of the ocean into some idea of real work, that may or may not exist, suggests there are people that have sunk to the bottom and cannot even float -this is individuals so bad off they are not even 'precarious' -just destitute. I do not know if this exists, it seems it would be Mike Savage's version of the precariat, which is just a Bourdieusian 'underclass' that has all the same issues as the original underclass concepts. Some of my participants did seem to 'sink' to the bottom at times but were nonetheless floating in that they got out of it. In qualitative studies, such as that by Smith and McBride (2021), they give good evidence of how these people live, and while certainly 'sunk' to the bottom and trapped, they are still being pushed around by the currents of contingency, with erratic work hours, poor management and low pay. So the analogy is being dragged along the ocean floor, you're still being pushed by the same currents as those floating on the surface, but in a worse way and 'glued' to the seafloor.

The key to understanding this though is to remember that while people are homogenously floating, what work they are floating in differs a great deal by pay, conditions, social recognition and the dehumanization of empty places. So some participants are surfing between warehouse and factory work, others relatively better hospitality work (easier commute, more social, less

supervision) and others are in clerical work (higher pay, good conditions, even less supervision), and there are those that are in such high quality work it begs the question if precarity is relevant, such as those in middle-pay freelance positions. Everyone is similarly floating, divorced from stability, but are facing very different job qualities, and there comes a point the job is such good quality that precariousness becomes an improper lens to read it through. This is where the relationship of floating to precarity or precariousness gets strained, and it also makes one ask what that floating even is then.

The question then is what is the nature of precarious work in the Global North, in developed economies and in large global cities like London. Precarious work is a space of general uncertainty about one's future, it melds together working conditions and aspiration, but only in the sense that one does not see themselves as living in those working conditions forever. At the same time, precarious work is an achievement that is above the worst, therefore it is to a large extent normal. It is a state that is elected to be in over and above being on the floor. The precarious are advantaged in many ways and are finding the best way to live with what they have.

10.6 Implications for Further Research

The dissertation suggests several areas and implications for further research. I will discuss first specific follow-on projects and then move to more general points of precarious work and in/security.

There are several empirical gaps, or light areas that may warrant closer study or could be better studied in the context of the framework of this study. First is to examine more closely those in stable, yet low-quality, precarious work with a specific focus on permanent contracts. This is the permanent staff at Dream Print, Sidewalk, Big Delivery and National Grocers that I met but never got to interview. Many of these staff are recruited through the contingent landscape, beginning as agency staff and then being converted into directly employed staff. In many ways this was the original intent of this study, but events took a turn for surfing. This group however is only clearly delineated in relation to the research of this dissertation. The contingent landscape makes changing job very easy for a lot of people, so this group are distinguished for deciding to remain in a low quality precarious job. Building on this dissertation, a follow-up study would be significant and successful for being able to confidently identify and go into low-income UK society across different employers without facing doubts as to the composition and nature of the sample.

The second group that could form the centre of a follow-up study are those who do not achieve an equilibrium. These are those who struggle to find adequate wages, tolerable working conditions or avoid a sense of feeling 'fed up'. These would be the truly precarious. Smith and McBride (2021) note this group are far less visible, and the insights of this project could help identify and find them. In concrete terms there are different manifestations this could take, first would be those of the previous group who are 'trapped' in an intolerable permanent contract. Second would be those who never find a 'stable' precarious job and need to continue surfing from job to job, but not in the manner of an equilibrium, in an intolerable and forced manner of being 'trapped' in surfing. Such a study of those who are in the worst position, never achieving equilibrium, would help to delineate the stratifications of precarious workers and surfing, therefore setting the boundaries and nature of the contingent landscape.

The clarity that these under-represented groups can be identified with is a strength of the theoretical framework built up through the analysis in this dissertation, suggesting implications for broader study of precarious work. Firstly is the clear need to situate workers not in their jobs,

but in the labour market, against the workers' opportunities and aspirations. This point has been laboured throughout the analysis, but it is worth noting some of the more direct implications. The study of 'precarious work' by labour sociologists needs to expand off jobs and into work, and trajectories through work. This is a point being made through selfhood and subjectivity (Farrugia et al., 2018), and I suggest coming at it from the other side by labour markets would be a fruitful act of triangulation. Quantitatively, this means more attention on transitions between contracts, of which data does exist in the UK's state national labour data set, the labour force survey (Farina et al., 2020). Qualitatively, this means to examine what it is about precarious jobs that allow or stop exiting the contingent landscape. Overall, this means to cease examining precarious work or differential vulnerability of the individual as the ultimate unit of analysis, and instead examine the larger structural circumstance in greater definition.

This all leads to the in/security thesis and the implications for further research. In/security suggests a movement away from Fordism and the standard employment relationship as the yardstick for all employment and economic systems to be compared against in the liberal social sciences. Where precarity, neoliberal governmentality and differential vulnerability all focus on the loss, and therefore restoration, of Fordist security (or introduction of Socialism), in/security provides a new foil for the discussion of political-economic change and the provision of care in society. Through examining the social systems that enable people to live insecurely, the essentialism to either pole, security or insecurity can be overcome.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Sample participant memo

Alice. 26, F, London

Personal Background

Alice has had a lot of many different jobs and opportunities in her life. She lives at home with her caregiver.

Thoughts on Career

She never really minded temping, and generally values the options and varied experiences that temping has given her. Interestingly she had a two-year stint on a zero-hour contract at an amusement facility, which was her most stable employment I think. This compares to a stint at Morrison's that was not satisfactory and so she left. Other stints at workplaces were temporary, and so Alice had to leave.

She also had a number of 'stubs' -where she worked somewhere only a day, or only for the training. There were many of these, and they were really in the background as part of the way things are but have completely receded from the stuff of Alice's life.

She has since settled on the idea of being a housing administrator, and finds this to be a good career. However, she currently has trepidations about working long-term and 'settling' (she is currently ending a maternity cover term). She is almost torn, at least at the time that we spoke, between finding something she can do long-term, and having to give up the freedom and choice of not having a career and temping. She felt that staying on in a similar role was not for her, and that she wanted a more sophisticated role to keep developing. She felt that being in a term contract gave her a good reason to leave and advance her career after only nine months, but on a permanent role this would not be possible as there would be an expectation to stay in the role for longer.

She seems like someone who has had a lot of different things in her life, and really has been 'surfing' the job opportunities available. Show now wants to focus on housing, rather than 'start again' in something new.

Impression of Who She Is

Temping is completely normal to Alice, and it is also something that is often a fall back. However, that is just temping. Other jobs appear to be just as transitory. It seems part and parcel to move between lots of different jobs, sectors, and workplaces, and just ordinary, although maybe uncommon. Alice has been able to dodge poor employers and take up better ones. And this seems like another theme, like swerving bad places to work, and staying in good places to work.

Age (26 Currently) / Year	Job Change	Thinking
16	Finish School Work at McDonald's	
18	Quit Job at McDonald's Full-time Education Agency Part-time Work in beauty	Didn't want to work nightshift at McDonald's when 18
	Work at Morrison's (1.5 years)	Dislike beauty
21-22	Work as CS at an attraction	
23-24	Administrator in housing Agency work Study briefly Second housing job	Change of direction
26 / 2021	Looking for next housing job	Depth of experience

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Consent Form - Interview

Title of Project: Non-Permanent Work and Adulthood in the United Kingdom

Name of Researcher: Krzysztof Z. Jankowski

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw and stop the interview at any time, without giving any reason.

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

- All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research.
- The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.
- The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research
- I understand that other authenticated researchers may have access to this data in collaboration with Krzysztof, and only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

I consent / do not consent (delete as applicable) to interviews being audio-recorded.

Name of Participant ..... Signature .....

Date .....

Appendix 3: Participant (Worker) Information Sheet

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Participant Information Sheet - Interviewee
Essential information indicated in **bold.**

Project Title: Non-Permanent Work and Adulthood in the United Kingdom

Researcher details:
Krzysztof Z. Jankowski

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

The purpose of the study is to investigate how young people live with and feel about non-permanent work (term contract, zero-hour, fixed term, agency work, etc.). Participation is voluntary, you can stop the interview at any time, and you have the right to withdraw your interview from the project for up to twelve months from the interview date. For this interview, I expect the duration to be 60-120 minutes. The topics covered through conversation will be your work and education history, feelings and choices about work, and questions about making and achieving plans. If you agree, I would prefer to audio-record the interview.

The interview will contribute to my analysis of work and adulthood in the UK. **The information you provide will be used as part of my research dissertation and research publications, both of which will be publicly available. A pseudonym for your name, workplace, and employer will always be used in any publications.**

Your personal details will be kept confidential, and a pseudonym used in all the publicly available materials, such as my PhD dissertation and academic journal articles. Furthermore, things like your workplace or education institution will be changed too, to lower the chance that someone really close to you would be able to identify you.

Confidentiality will be respected unless there are compelling and legitimate reasons for this to be breached. If this was the case, I would inform you of any decisions that might limit your confidentiality.

The interview recording will be stored in the University of Glasgow network, until I transcribe the interview. The transcription will also be securely retained by me for up to ten years. Your pseudonym will be used in the transcription, so after the recording is deleted there will be no record of the interview belonging to you. As per university guidelines, the transcription will be kept for ten years in a private repository. No one will have access unless there is a formal investigation into research misconduct. I may share the research data you provide with colleagues that I work with in the future, in these circumstances I will remain fully involved with the data to ensure it is handled respectfully.

This project has been considered and approved by the University of Glasgow College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.
Further information and complaints can be directed to The College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk or my lead supervisor Alistair Fraser, email: Alistair.Fraser@glasgow.ac.uk